

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

No. 221

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

N^o 221

1st Session
42nd Parliament
Tuesday
16 February 2021

1^{re} session
42^e législature
Mardi
16 février 2021

Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott
Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
Greffier : Todd Decker

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House Publications and Language Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 1180-2987

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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Tuesday 16 February 2021

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Mardi 16 février 2021

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Good morning and welcome back.

Prayers.

ROYAL ASSENT

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to certain bills in her office.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Wong): The following are the titles of the bills to which Her Honour did assent:

An Act respecting Hot Docs.

An Act to revive Cherry Hill Orchards Pelham Limited.

An Act to revive 2404907 Ontario Ltd.

An Act to revive Tapir Corporation.

An Act to revive 2585303 Ontario Inc.

An Act to revive Group Seven Construction Limited.

An Act respecting Huron University College.

An Act to revive Quadrant Consulting Services Inc.

An Act to revive 2372830 Ontario Inc.

An Act to revive 1040062 Ontario Incorporated.

An Act to revive Skypride Travel & Tours Ltd.

An Act to revive 704176 Ontario Limited.

An Act to revive 2257248 Ontario Inc.

An Act to revive Castleform Holdings Inc.

An Act respecting 62 Grimsby Phantom Squadron Sponsoring Committee.

TABLING OF SESSIONAL PAPERS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next, I need to inform that House that during the adjournment, the following documents have been tabled:

—the 2019-20 annual report of the French Language Services Commissioner, from the Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario;

—a report entitled Ontario Municipal Finances: An Overview of Municipal Budgets and an Estimate of the Financial Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario;

—the 2018-19 annual report, from the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario; and

—a report entitled Economic and Budget Outlook: Assessing Ontario's Medium-Term Budget Plan and the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario.

COVID-19 PROTOCOLS AT THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Point of order. Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding COVID-19 protocols in the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): On a point of order, the government House leader is seeking unanimous consent of the House to move a motion with respect to COVID-19 protocols in the Legislature. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that, notwithstanding any standing order or special order of the House, for the duration of the 42nd Parliament or until such earlier date as indicated by the government House leader, members be permitted to speak and vote from any member's desk in the chamber in order to observe recommended physical distancing; and

That, in addition to any Speaker's directives for the rest of the legislative precinct, except when recognized by the Speaker to speak, every member shall wear a tightly woven fabric mask that completely covers the mouth and nose and fits snugly against the sides of the face without gaps while in the chamber or either of the members' lobbies; and

This House acknowledges that every person seeking to enter the legislative precinct, including members of the assembly, are subject to the Speaker's COVID-19 screening and masking protocols, and further acknowledges that application of these protocols may result in a member of the assembly being refused entry to the legislative precinct, or any part thereof; and

This House acknowledges that in such instances, the Speaker will personally make this decision, and do so in the interest of the health, safety and well-being of everyone in the legislative precinct, and that in doing so

the Speaker is acting on behalf of this House and this House authorizes the Speaker to act on its behalf.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Calandra has moved that, notwithstanding any standing order—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Dispense? Dispense.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

COVID-19 PROTOCOLS AT THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the government House leader once again.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to move a motion without notice respecting COVID-19 protocols in the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is again seeking unanimous consent of the House to move a motion with respect to COVID-19 protocols in the Legislature. Agreed? Agreed.

Government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that, notwithstanding any standing order or special order of the House, for the duration of the spring 2020 meeting period, and any extension thereof, during any time that the House is adjourned, the government House leader, the official opposition House leader, the member for Ottawa South, and the member for Guelph may jointly:

(a)(i) provide written notice to the Speaker that the assembly shall not meet at its next scheduled time and the Speaker shall thereupon cause the assembly to remain adjourned accordingly for a period of up to 30 calendar days; and

(ii) provide written notice to the Speaker that the assembly shall remain adjourned for a further period of up to 30 calendar days each; and

(b) provide written notice to the Speaker that the adjournment is no longer required and the Speaker shall thereupon cause the assembly to be convened and returned to its regular schedule.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I would ask the government House leader—I think he misspoke. I think he meant to say “2021.”

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): He did say “2021”?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Well, I definitely meant to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): All right. Thank you for the clarification.

Mr. Calandra has moved that, notwithstanding any special order or standing order of the House—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Dispense? Dispense.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL

Mr. McNaughton moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 238, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 238, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I look to the minister to lead off the debate.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Good morning to all MPPs from across the province, who have come back to Queen's Park to represent the people in their ridings. I'm sure it's going to be a lively session, but I know we're all here to continue protecting the health and safety of everybody here in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to rise today to speak on the second reading of Bill 238, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2021. Today I'm going to be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member for Burlington. We look forward to kicking off the debate at second reading. My colleague will discuss the details of our proposed legislation shortly.

First, Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you how this proposal fits within the larger context of our government efforts to stand with workers and employers during these obviously very, very challenging times, and within my ministry's mandate to support and protect workers and employers.

0910

Mr. Speaker, all of us in Ontario have felt the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has impacted everyone's daily activities, the way we work and the way we interact with others. Above all, my heart goes out to those who have lost loved ones.

The pandemic has also had a significant negative effect on those who work on the ground floor—roles like sales associates in retail, servers and wait staff in hospitality, and housekeepers in tourism.

Small businesses, which are the backbones of our local communities, have really felt these impacts. Many of them have had to shut down, lay off some of their team or reduce hours. Most who have been able to remain open are working hard to restructure how they run their businesses in order to follow health and safety requirements to keep every single person safe.

My ministry has recently held consultations with small business groups, as I know many other ministries have, and we are hearing that these businesses are really struggling. Personally, I have spoken to many shopkeepers and merchants, both in my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex

and across every community in the province of Ontario: hair salon owners who came up with creative ways to keep their team on the payroll, restaurant owners who have moved to selling online, and others who have transitioned to curbside pickup.

The stressors this pandemic has put on workers and businesses is truly unprecedented, and this is, of course, of special concern to me as Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development. A key part of my ministry's mandate is to work with both business and labour to lead safe and fair workplaces that the hard-working people across Ontario are eager to go to every single day. That is why, since first taking on this new mission, I have now met with over 200 labour leaders, hundreds of business owners and countless workers.

My ministry has been hard at work in these very challenging times putting into action initiatives to help protect the safety and well-being of workers and the public at large, supporting businesses in following health and safety requirements to stop the spread of this deadly virus, and finding ways to ease some of the unexpected financial and operational burdens that businesses have encountered while they do their part to keep their customers and workers safe.

We have also been strengthening our efforts to help workers learn the skills they need to fill new in-demand roles in their own communities. We are doing this by investing more in training programs and employment services. We know that ordinary people across Ontario will be the ones to lay the foundation of our recovery and a better tomorrow.

At a time when many have been left without jobs, our efforts will help them connect with the new careers they need to thrive, and, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to telling you about these actions in more detail this morning.

The proposed legislation I'm here to present is an important part of our actions to support employers at a very critical time. If passed, the legislation will help protect businesses from unexpected increases in their Workplace Safety and Insurance Board premiums. At the same time, it would not affect the annual increase in the maximum earnings cap for workers' benefits. Simply put, this is a win for workers and a win for employers. The 7.8% increase to the earnings cap for worker benefits will still take effect this year, but, for businesses, the relief we're providing will make a world of difference. We are limiting the impact that an unexpected rise in the average industrial wage would have on premiums to 2%. This is why I firmly believe that this legislation is good for everyone.

As many of you know, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, or WSIB, is an arm's-length agency of the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development. It plays a key role in protecting Ontario's workers, families and employers. The WSIB provides wage-loss benefits, medical coverage and support to help people get back to work after a work-related injury or occupational disease. The agency provides no-fault collective liability insurance and access to industry-specific health and safety

information. Benefits and services are also available to families of the workers covered who are fatally injured as a result of work.

Let me be clear: As minister, my mission is for no one to get injured on the job. Every worker should come home safe to their family after a hard day's work. I know, and the Auditor General agrees, that Ontario's workplaces are among the safest in the country. We're making progress towards our goal of improving workplace safety every single year, but we've still got work to do. Until then, the WSIB will be there to support injured workers.

The WSIB covers over five million workers and more than 300,000 workplaces across Ontario. It is Canada's largest insurer for workplace safety. At my ministry, we work very closely with the WSIB to ensure Ontario is one of the healthiest and safest places to work. It has been a great partnership over the years, and this pandemic has made us work even more collaboratively.

Speaker, the WSIB is funded by premiums paid by employers. As I mentioned, many of these employers are feeling the brunt of this pandemic. That is why, in March 2020, our government announced a financial relief package by which WSIB premium payments were deferred for a period of six months. This provided employers with \$2 billion in financial aid. The average business saved \$1,760. All employers covered by the WSIB's workplace insurance were automatically eligible for this relief package. Businesses that chose to participate in the board's financial relief plan now have until June 30, 2021, to repay these deferred premium amounts interest-free and without any penalties. For those who need longer, the WSIB will work with them.

In October of last year, I was pleased to share that the WSIB also announced that premium rates for 2021 would be held at the same levels paid in 2020. This will help many employers this year as they grapple with the financial impacts of this global pandemic. Incidentally, Speaker, that announcement came after four years of significant decreases that cut the average WSIB premium rate almost in half. And, similar to what we are proposing today, benefits for injured workers and their families were not impacted by this freeze.

In January of last year, the WSIB eliminated its charge for unfunded liability. After it eliminated its unfunded liability, the WSIB ensured that over 220,000 businesses across the province saw premiums reduced, leading to a \$607-million reduction in costs to businesses. This money will be available for investments in jobs, technology, and health and safety programs.

We also stepped in to protect nearly 2,700 non-profits from premium increases to help daycares, Legions, women's shelters and others continue supporting our communities. These organizations are run by dedicated people and serve Ontario's most vulnerable citizens. That's why we worked with the WSIB to make sure their premiums didn't go up. Overall, the savings realized through the elimination of the unfunded liability will add \$2 billion to Ontario's economy. In short, our government has ensured that costs to employers are falling while

benefits to injured workers are maintained. Helping employers survive this challenging period was an essential part of our government's response to COVID-19.

Speaker, as part of our government's many actions to protect workers and businesses, my ministry has rolled out a number of other important initiatives. All of these contribute in one way or another to the goals that are reflected in our proposed legislation to help deal with the unprecedented circumstances in a way that prioritizes the well-being and safety of workers and employers. I am proud of the work that we have done together with other ministries and levels of government to protect workers and stop the spread of COVID-19. Many of you have seen the news coverage of our recent inspection blitzes. Ontario's provincial offences officers have now visited more than 2,300 big box stores and other essential retail businesses across the province in 2021. These inspections focus on essential businesses, both big box stores and local shops, where families go to buy groceries, soap, toothpaste and other essentials.

0920

Since January, we've visited retailers from Windsor to Niagara to Toronto, up to Muskoka and over to Ottawa, and I'm happy to say we're making a difference. During three weeks of blitzes, with visits to almost 1,500 businesses, the compliance rate among big box stores increased by almost 19%, and compliance among other retailers, such as convenience stores, dollar stores and gas stations, increased by 7%. That means we saw more people in masks, more screening of workers and customers and more businesses with COVID-19 safety plans in place. Taking these steps helped to stop the spread of this virus among both front-line workers and shoppers, but the work doesn't stop there. Officers will be doing similar inspections in Peterborough this week and in the Guelph area, too.

Mr. Speaker, we have also taken measures to protect workers in the farming sector. Ministry inspectors have ramped up inspections on farms, with a focus on those employing temporary foreign workers. These inspections have the power to save lives. Our farm workers keep our food supply chain running. We rely on them to keep grocery store shelves stocked and to put food on our dinner tables. This is incredibly vital work that I can't thank them enough for doing. When you're in Ontario with a job to do, whether you were born here or come from overseas, your safety is my business. Nothing is more important to me than every worker's safety—period.

Last week, I also launched a new inspection campaign focused on distribution centres in the Peel region. Inspectors are visiting approximately 100 of these warehouses to ensure that health and safety measures are being followed. Prior to launching this blitz, we had already carried out more than 430 visits in this sector. And after seeing our success in keeping the workers and customers safe in other industries, we're paying special attention to this next challenge. We know these warehouse workers have been especially hard hit and that these businesses employ a high percentage of temporary workers. So, we want to make

sure the virus isn't travelling with them back home to their loved ones and families.

These proactive measures are just one piece of our government's plan to safely transition our province as soon as possible, but it clearly is a critical piece. Ministry inspectors are working hard to enforce the rules. We are making sure we have lots of boots on the ground to do this vital work. Just last September, we launched a recruitment campaign to increase our team of front-line health and safety inspectors, looking to add new recruits. Now, we have hired and trained 100 new people who can help us ensure workplaces across Ontario are doing their part to stop the spread of COVID-19. Mr. Speaker, this will create the largest force of inspectors in provincial history.

I want to emphasize that our inspectors are not just enforcing the rules. It is important and critical that we identify bad actors, but it is also important that we support businesses in understanding the latest requirements. Most businesses want to do their part, but some are having trouble fully understanding what to do. That is why inspectors are also focusing on educating owners—especially small businesses—and workers on how to operate safely and comply with public health measures.

On that front, my ministry has worked closely with our health and safety partners. We have developed more than 200 sector-specific resources to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. This includes guidelines, posters and multilingual tip sheets for supervisors and employers. We know that there is a lot of new information out there, and we are working on making it easier for businesses to understand what they need to do on their own end so we can work together to stop this terrible virus, while keeping our economy going.

Speaker, I invite the members of this House to visit ontario.ca/covidsafety for more information. These resources and our inspections will be especially important in the next few weeks as small businesses in parts of the province begin to open. Getting everyone on board with the rules helps to ensure our case counts continue to decline, and that brings us closer and closer every day to reopening our province, which I know everyone is looking forward to.

In addition to the health and safety enforcement activities my ministry has undertaken, we also acted swiftly to protect employees' jobs during this pandemic. In March, the very first piece of legislation our government tabled, which passed with unanimous support from all parties, was an amendment to the Employment Standards Act. Our government created a new unlimited job-protected leave, the infectious disease emergency leave, that is available retroactive to January 25, 2020, the day the first presumptive case of COVID-19 was confirmed here in Ontario. This leave ensures that workers' jobs are protected as they follow the advice of our public health professionals in combatting the spread of COVID-19. It also ensures that those who stay home to self-isolate or care for loved ones will not be fired. It will remain in place as long as necessary and includes protection for those who need it.

For example, it protects the jobs of those who may be isolating or in quarantine, those who need to take time off

to care for their kids due to school or daycare closures, or care for a sick relative. There is no specified limit to the number of days an employee can be on infectious disease emergency leave. The legislation also makes it clear that employees cannot be required to provide a medical note if they take the leave.

I want to remind everyone, Mr. Speaker, that there is financial help for workers who need to stay home. Thanks to an agreement between Prime Minister Trudeau, Premier Ford and the other premiers, there is over \$1 billion available for workers to access two weeks of paid sick days. To date, more than 110,000 workers in Ontario have accessed this funding.

We know that this program needs to work better. There's \$800 million still in the bank, and workers need the support. I spoke with my federal counterpart about what needs to be done to improve the federal paid sick leave program. I raised with her the need to pay workers faster, make it easier to access, and raise awareness about the benefit. We all agreed to continue working together to ensure workers get the support they need. Combined with the provincial job-protected leave we introduced as a first action last year, people's jobs and incomes are protected.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, my ministry is also responsible for training and skills development. This includes supporting the skilled trades, apprenticeships, industry training and employment services. Some on the left think government should do it all, and there are some on the right who think government should do nothing. We believe in giving people a hand up. It is our job to spread opportunity more widely and fairly in this province. Ultimately, our role is to connect people to good, secure jobs within their own communities.

Right across Ontario, neighbours are helping neighbours, and they've already begun the building, the research, the work and the giving that will make our province excellent again. I believe this because we believe in them. This part of my ministry's mandate is linked with our mandate to protect workers and employers. We're helping to build a stronger, more productive workforce that can be all the more productive in safe and fair workplaces.

Just earlier this month, I was proud to launch an important new \$115-million initiative called the Skills Development Fund. This fund, which will support workers and apprentices, is specifically designed to support people getting back to work quickly. Basically, we put out a call for applications for fresh and creative ideas to help people get back on the job and kick-start growth in their communities. Our goal is to help reduce obstacles to hiring, training and retraining while preparing workers for the province's economic recovery.

Even in today's circumstances, there's demand for skilled workers. Ontario's skilled workers are the backbone of our economy, and they have proven that since the early days of COVID-19. Many of them put themselves in harm's way to keep Ontario running, like the construction workers who continued to build hospitals or the automotive workers who kept our factories running. Make no

mistake: Without these workers, Ontario could not function.

The Skills Development Fund will accept applications from a wide range of employment and training organizations in Ontario.

0930

Our search is on for new ways to get workers back on the job, and we know that great ideas are out there. Some examples might include purchasing virtual reality welders and the latest industry equipment to help train the next generation of tradespeople; enhancing the recruitment and training of personal support workers to care for Ontario's most vulnerable citizens; empowering those from disadvantaged communities through mentorship or trades programming; providing learning and work experience in in-demand tech careers like coding and computer programming for hospitality and service workers who have lost their jobs; and supporting local manufacturers in their efforts to retool by training their workers on how to make PPE. Speaker, we're faced with truly unprecedented challenges. That's why we developed the new Skills Development Fund. Our message to workers is clear: There's hope and opportunity around the corner.

The Skills Development Fund is just one example of the many initiatives we have launched to help people get connected to in-demand careers. Our government is also investing an additional \$478 million in skilled trades training over four years, for a historic total of well over \$1 billion.

Speaker, my mission is to attract more young people into the trades. Becoming an ironworker or a sprinkler fitter should be as obvious as becoming a firefighter or a lawyer. Young people and their parents need to recognize careers in the skilled trades as exciting, fulfilling and well-paying. As the Premier says, "When you've got a trade, you've got a job for life." How true is that?

Ontario is facing a series of labour shortages in this sector, and we're expecting it to get progressively worse. These shortages also mean that good jobs are going unfilled, that workers are missing out on opportunities that could improve their lives and help them support their families. Part of the solution involves helping erase the stigma around blue-collar jobs. We are doing this by investing to increase awareness of careers in the skilled trades through various initiatives, such as providing \$17 million to the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program, or OYAP, which gives high school students opportunities to learn about work in the trades while completing their Ontario secondary school diploma; and investing a record \$21 million in Ontario's Pre-apprenticeship Training Program, giving hard-working people exposure to a variety of good jobs in the skilled trades. The program is free for participants and includes a critical work placement.

We are also working on simplifying the apprenticeship system so it's easier for people to access and navigate our programs. This includes actions like providing funds to launch the new non-repayable Tools Grant, which provides up to \$1,000 to apprentices to help with the cost of buying trade-specific tools and equipment, and investing nearly \$6 million in the Grant for Apprentice Learning

to support those attending in-class training with basic living costs, including a boost of \$1.3 million this year and next year. It also includes appointing a five-member skilled trades panel to provide recommendations on ways to modernize the skilled trades and apprenticeship system.

And, Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to encourage employer participation in apprenticeships, with the Skills Development Fund being a recent example of our other investments. These include supporting business participation by investing \$20 million in 2020-21 for a new group sponsorship grant to encourage small to medium-sized employers to come together to provide a full scope of training and on-the-job mentorship for apprentices; and working with industry on workforce planning for major infrastructure projects to ensure that Ontario is playing a leadership role in efforts to increase apprenticeships. Together, these changes will ensure that skilled trades in our province grow and meet future demands by connecting employers with the talent that they need. They will ensure that opportunities for good jobs don't go to waste.

Speaker, I'm also pleased to share that just recently our government launched a \$77-million redesigned Second Career program to help workers retrain and upgrade their skills. This program will prioritize laid-off workers and train them for in-demand jobs within their own local community. It will help more than 2,750 workers with up to \$2,800 for tuition, training materials and living expenses. Our updated and improved Second Career program will also help people get back on their feet, learn new skills, and provide hope for them and their families.

In the coming weeks, Mr. Speaker, I will also be announcing how we are further supporting the apprenticeship system and helping more people train and upskill for in-demand careers such as personal support workers. This last profession, as we all know, is especially in demand. These are people who care for our loved ones and our family members, often in long-term-care homes, where the pandemic has had a devastating impact. Last fall, we invested half a million dollars to help train nearly 100 new personal support workers in the Niagara region. This training is helping people from all walks of life gain the skills they need to pursue careers providing care and comfort for those who are most vulnerable.

As you can see, we're thinking broadly and acting now to ensure our economy and the health of our society are supported by a skilled workforce. Mr. Speaker, we need this more today than at any point in provincial history.

I will conclude by calling for all in this House to support Bill 238, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2021. I hope I have shown how this bill is part of our broad, comprehensive plan to support businesses and workers during this challenging time. If passed, it will help protect businesses from unexpected increases in their WSIB premiums. At the same time, it will allow for an increase in the maximum WSIB benefit for workers.

Our government has been steadfast in our support for workers and employers throughout this pandemic. This proposed legislation is one more step to help Ontario come

through and recover from an unprecedented fight against an invisible, deadly enemy. As challenging as it has been, Mr. Speaker, this pandemic has shown that we can work together with our partners and other levels of government, as well as with each other, and come up with swift, effective and innovative actions. With the vaccine efforts rolling out, the light at the end of the tunnel is becoming increasingly visible. I believe that when we reach it, we will emerge stronger, more resilient and more united.

Now I yield my time to my parliamentary assistant, the amazing MPP from Burlington.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The minister did say he would be sharing his time, so we turn to the member from Burlington.

Ms. Jane McKenna: Thank you very much and good morning, Speaker. I want to say that I have an amazing minister who I look up to every day, and I enjoy being his parliamentary assistant.

Interjections.

Ms. Jane McKenna: He is.

I first want to do a shout-out to Vivi at my Tim Hortons in Burlington. She says that the Tim Hortons people never get recognition on how hard they have stayed out and worked in the pandemic. Every day, I go there in the morning and she has always got my large, steeped tea with milk and a sleeve. She is a phenomenal hard worker, and I just want to do a shout-out for her before I start speaking today.

Speaker, I'm happy to rise today to speak on the second reading of Bill 238, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2021. Thank you to my colleague the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development for highlighting some of the important actions our government is taking to support workers and businesses as we fight this global pandemic.

I would like to discuss the details of our proposed legislation. Speaker, Bill 238 proposes new, additional measures to lessen the unprecedented economic impact of COVID-19 on businesses. Our legislative proposal focuses on an unanticipated rise in the earnings ceiling under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.

Let me explain: During the last year, COVID-related job losses, mainly among lower-wage workers, including those in the retail, hospitality and service sectors, have resulted in an increase in Ontario's average industrial wage. An average industrial wage is the mean hourly rate of pay for workforce members in a geographic area—in this case, Ontario.

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How could a loss of jobs result in a rise in the average salary, you ask? If a greater number of lower-wage workers than high earners lose their job, the average industrial wage of people in a workforce rises. This does not reflect an actual increase in overall earnings in Ontario. In this case, it is actually as a result of a challenging, unexpected situation that has impacted our economy very negatively.

To give you some more perspective, usually, the yearly increase of the average wage is between 2% and 3%,

Speaker. This year, the average wage increased by 7.8%. That's a significant spike, and it has significant implications for some small businesses who pay premiums to the WSIB and whose workers' earnings are at the ceiling. In short, the consequences of the spike will be an unexpected rise in the total WSIB premiums payable for some employers.

An earnings ceiling, also known as maximum insurable earnings, is a figure used by the WSIB to determine the premiums employers pay. The earnings ceiling is a cap, a maximum annual wage that premiums are, in part, based on. Based on a formula that the WSIB uses, which is set out in the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, the earnings ceiling is 175% of the average industrial wage in Ontario as of July 1 of each year, as reported by Statistics Canada. In short, if the average industrial wage for Ontario is higher, so are the premiums for some employers.

As I mentioned, to ease the strain on businesses during the pandemic, the WSIB has frozen premium rates for Ontario employers for 2021 to the same levels paid in 2020. However, this freeze would not protect businesses affected by an increase in the maximum insurable earnings, or earnings ceiling. This is because the increase in the maximum insurable earnings affects the total premiums that employers pay and is separate from the premium rate that they are assessed at by the WSIB.

Employers of higher-wage workers, especially those in the construction sector and the skilled trades, face a potential, yet substantial, increase to their total WSIB premium payments this year. That increase isn't related to how well the employers are doing or to the safety of their workplaces. Again, that's because premium calculations are subjected to the earnings ceiling.

The earnings ceiling is going up because of the highly unusual circumstances we face during this pandemic. If the earnings ceiling increases, premiums can still go up for some employers, despite the freeze on individual rates.

To address the situation and to protect businesses, we are proposing to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act by inserting a specific and lower maximum insurable earnings figure. To provide you with some additional context, the WSIB maximum insurable earnings ceiling for 2020 was \$95,400. The WSIB has estimated that about 200,000 workers had earnings above the 2020 maximum. Speaker, we are proposing a ceiling cap for 2021 of \$97,308. These proposed legislative amendments would set a 2% increase to the 2021 maximum insurable earnings ceiling, rather than the 7.8% increase it would otherwise rise to. The 2% increase reflects the typical year-over-year increase in the average industrial wage, instead of the much higher climb we've seen this past July, Speaker.

Bill 238, if passed, would protect employers who have workers at or above the earnings ceiling cap from a significant cost increase as a result of higher WSIB premiums. That's important at this critical time.

Bill 238, if passed, would be retroactive to January 1, 2021.

I want to emphasize that our proposed approach would have no impact on the benefits payable to injured workers,

as only the earnings ceiling calculation for premiums is affected, not the ceiling for workers' benefits. Our new amendment would not affect the 7.8% increase in the earnings cap for the calculation of workers' benefits.

Many workers whose income is at the maximum earnings level are people on the front lines. They are firefighters, skilled trades construction workers and automotive workers. These people have provided invaluable service to Ontario's economy and society throughout the pandemic. They will continue to be fairly compensated for work-related injuries and occupational diseases during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under Bill 238, we are also seeking regulation-making authority to amend the insurable earnings ceilings in 2022, should the average industrial wage rise again unexpectedly.

The past year has certainly taught us to plan for the unexpected. Employers need and deserve the financial relief our proposed adjustments will bring in 2021. By helping them remain solvent, we will also help them retain workers and protect jobs, and the modest increase in the maximum insurable earnings will ensure the continued financial sustainability of our workplace compensation system.

Speaker, the proposed legislation is a good example of how my ministry continues to work alongside the WSIB to provide support for businesses who need it most and to ensure workers are protected during these uncertain times. I urge all members of the House to support this proposed legislation.

Public health measures have been in place for almost a year now. Many employers have temporarily laid off or reduced hours for their employees. This is why our government made a regulatory change to the Employment Standards Act so that non-unionized employees who have had their hours temporarily reduced or eliminated because of the pandemic will be deemed to be on infectious disease emergency leave instead of laid off.

This is beneficial for businesses too. In fact, it is a lifeline for them to help them stay afloat. It helps to ensure that businesses affected by COVID-19 aren't forced to terminate employees after their temporary layoff period has expired. Terminations are generally triggered when temporary layoffs exceed the permitted length under the Employment Standards Act. This can result in costly payouts, which for many businesses could be the difference between survival and closure. For example, a restaurant with 30 staff could be liable for termination payments as high as \$100,000. We knew that businesses were suffering, so we acted swiftly to ensure termination and severance obligations were not creating an added financial burden.

This regulatory change also helps to ensure workers remain employed with legal protection, and that they are eligible for federal emergency income support programs. In short, this change protects thousands of jobs while helping local Ontario businesses remain solvent.

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I'm proud to say that the government has extended these regulatory changes brought forward under the

Employment Standards Act to July 3, 2021. Again, the goal is to prevent temporary layoffs from becoming permanent.

The regulatory measures I've just mentioned apply only to non-unionized employees. We made this decision as employer and trade unions are able to negotiate solutions that work best for them. As a result, the regular rules regarding layoffs have continued to apply to unionized employees.

But late last year, one requirement in the Employment Standards Act proved to be a challenge for certain industries, including the hotel industry. Specifically, the legislation requires that termination and severance entitlements be placed in a trust 35 weeks after a temporary layoff where an employee has a right to be recalled. To address temporary layoffs that began in March that may have been close to reaching this 35-week mark, we took immediate—and I mean immediate—action, Speaker.

The hospitality, tourism and convention and trade show industries are among the hardest hit by this pandemic, and this trust obligation could have impacted them greatly. Paying termination and severance monies into trust could drain financial reserves for these businesses and contribute to permanent closures. That's why we created a temporary rule for these critical industries.

Given the unique challenges that many employers in the tourism and hospitality industries are facing as a result of COVID-19, the government is providing employers and unions the option to agree to use those funds to help keep businesses' doors open. The special industry regulation gives employers and unions in these industries the flexibility to negotiate alternative arrangements when it comes to recall rights and paying monies into trust. For instance, they could agree that the employer pay only 50% of termination and severance into trust.

The new special rule is optional. If the employer and union do not come to an agreement, the regular rules would apply. The regulatory amendment applies effective December 17, 2020, and will expire on December 17, 2021. These actions will help us lay the groundwork for a robust long-term economic recovery in this province. These changes reflect concerns we've heard from some of the industries most affected by COVID-19.

As you can see, our government has acted fast and effectively to help relieve some of the pressures and challenges faced by businesses during this pandemic. But the work is far from over, Speaker. We know that even with these changes, some businesses will struggle to survive. That's why we will continue doing everything we can to help businesses stay afloat and ensure that workers have jobs to go back to—which takes me to the last action I want to highlight for the House today, and that's something we did well before the start of the pandemic to reward safe employers.

In November 2019, our government announced a new voluntary program that is now rewarding employers who are champions of health and safety. The program is called Supporting Ontario's Safe Employers. It is the first of its

kind in Canada. It's giving our best, safest employers an estimated \$140 million. This is being done through WSIB premium rebates over a three-year period that started in January 2020. This program is open to any Ontario employer, regardless of size or sector. We have unveiled this program because it promotes a safety culture in our workplace, it encourages organizations to go even further in their safety measures, and most importantly, it helps reduce workplace injuries.

Good health and safety practices save lives. Research has shown that organized, systemic approaches to health and safety increase worker participation in health and safety practices, encourage ongoing improvement and help reduce workplace injuries and illnesses. Similar programs in Europe and Japan have resulted in a decline in workplace accidents.

This program is being led by Ontario's Chief Prevention Officer, Ron Kelusky. There's a quote from him that I think summarizes the value of this program best. He says, "This is a big step for Ontario's health and safety community as we continue to move forward in protecting workers. We're adopting innovative approaches to become a modern regulator. Industry has long asked for rewards for employers who successfully promote health and safety in their workplace."

Good policy like this doesn't happen without support from labour, employers and other stakeholders, which is why I am pleased to share some of what others said when this program was launched.

Ian Cunningham, president, Council of Ontario Construction Associations, said, "We have supported the concept of accreditation and recognizing good employers for the past 10 years and are pleased that the current government is moving forward with this important health and safety initiative." To underline Mr. Cunningham's quote, this is an opportunity that industry has been flagging for over a decade, and our government acted.

T.E. Baker, human resources adviser, the Bayview Group of Companies, said, "Development and implementation of this program is to be lauded and will certainly contribute to the success of this program and to the overall strategy of the ministry in providing a prevention lens to employee engagement and empowerment and a safer workplace." I am highlighting this quote because it emphasizes the point that this program is good for workers, and it recognizes the important role workers play in ensuring everyone goes home safe after a hard day's work.

It's not enough to reward safe employers, though; we have to ensure that there is a clear path for employers who want to do better and up their safety practices. That's why our government launched our program at the same time that the WSIB launched their new Health and Safety Excellence program. Their new program promotes continual health and safety improvement in Ontario workplaces. While our provincial program recognizes employers who have already implemented a health and safety management system, the WSIB's program encourages employers without an existing program to develop one.

The WSIB Health and Safety Excellence program rewards safe employers through reduced premiums. Businesses with less ability to impact their rates receive a 2% rebate per safety topic completed. Businesses with more ability to impact their rates will receive a 1.4% rebate per safety topic. This is because these businesses will see greater reduction in their premium rates as their health and safety experience improves.

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Understanding the challenges that small businesses face, the WSIB also offers them a minimum rebate of \$1,000 per completed safety topic.

Aside from the financial rebate, businesses can also receive recognition badges to use on their website, email signature and advertisements to show others their commitment to workplace health and safety. These badges also show up on their business profile on the WSIB's website when people search for safety stats.

Understanding the unique challenges that COVID-19 has brought on businesses, the WSIB has modified their program to meet the new realities of today. The 12-month timeline to complete safety topics and submit validation evidence has been extended to 15 months to help businesses juggle multiple priorities, and program members can switch to topics that address the impacts of COVID-19. These initiatives are part of the government's commitment to encouraging a culture of health and safety to protect workers on the job and build a prosperous province.

Speaker, to conclude, I will repeat my call for all of this House to support Bill 238, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2021. As the minister said, this bill is part of our broad, comprehensive plan to support businesses and workers during this challenging time. If passed, it will help protect businesses from unexpected increases in their Workplace Safety and Insurance Board premiums. At the same time, it will allow for an increase in the maximum WSIB benefits for workers.

Just before I close, I want to quickly talk about the skilled trades. I've spoken to this numerous times with the minister. I have four girls and one son. The girls all wanted to go to university and my son said—it was a hard no, a stop for him. He wanted to go up to Georgian College and become a marine mechanic and get his welding. He threw me in the back of the car; I went and got myself a steeped tea with milk. We drove up. He signed himself up. It was me who struggled with that—and I've said this to the minister numerous times, right? It was amazing to watch his eyes light up. I didn't have to phone him one time to get him up in the morning to go to school. He was up and ready to go.

He is now 25 years old and he owns his own company up north, Mac Barging. He is as happy as I've ever seen anybody in my entire life. He loves working with his hands. He is extremely proud. He has a huge service for the people up there in Muskoka. He's done a phenomenal job. I'm doing a shout-out to him. I always told my daughters that he's my favourite son, but he's my only son, so I can say that.

I just want to reiterate, I think the average age is 57 for skilled workers. We need to get people back into using their hands. I know my son had a couple of buddies who just dropped out in high school because there wasn't the opportunity at that time to see if they could be plumbers, for them to see something else besides what they were learning in school. When I went to school a hundred years ago, there was home ec, there was shop, and I took both of those opportunities.

We have to recognize that this minister has done a phenomenal job by bringing the skilled trades back to the table with colleges and universities, because they have not been at the table at all. Every time I tell my son that I'm going out with the minister, he says to me, "Mom, tell him thank you very much, because you changed your attitude around because of all the hard work he's done in getting kids to see that there are other opportunities in life," not just opportunities—university and college: great to go. My daughters loved it. But my son excelled doing what he's doing right now.

More kids want that opportunity. I know my son's one friend dropped out of school and then eventually went back to school and became a plumber and is extremely happy at the skill that he offers to people in our community of Burlington.

Thank you so much for having this time. Thank you again to the minister for letting me have this opportunity to speak today. I look forward to passing Bill 238. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time now for questions.

Ms. Jessica Bell: It's an honour to rise today after the break. It's fitting that the first issue that we're debating is workplace safety. It is very clear this government has abdicated its responsibility to properly protect workers during COVID-19. I'm hearing stories of people getting COVID at work who cannot get WSIB because they can't prove it. I am hearing stories about how there are workplaces that have COVID outbreaks and are still not being publicized even though this government should be doing it.

This enforcement program is about 10 months too late, and this government is refusing to accept its responsibility to introduce paid sick leave into the province of Ontario. My question is: Are you going to support our MPP for London's bill to bring in paid sick leave into the province of Ontario today?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I want to thank the member for that question. I actually think the timing is great, because this warms us up for the question period that's coming very soon, so thank you for that.

Look, Mr. Speaker: The health and safety of every single worker in this province is our government's top priority. We have spared no expense. In fact, we have hired more inspectors—over a hundred—who have been trained and hired now. That's more inspectors than at any point in Ontario's history, and, Mr. Speaker, guess what? The NDP voted against that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I wanted to ask the minister how this bill really builds on all the things that he's doing to make sure that workers have the foundation of support they need to get through COVID.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I want to thank the member from Barrie–Innisfil, who has done a great job standing up for her residents. I have to mention that she is a real champion of getting more young people into the skilled trades. In fact, Mr. Speaker, our plan to get more young people into the skilled trades is built around three pillars. One is ending the stigma. For far too long, there has not been a government here in this province that has really worked to end the stigma around the skilled trades.

Secondly, we're reforming the apprenticeship system to make it simpler for training providers, for young people and for educators to ensure that more young people get into the trades.

Thirdly, we are ensuring that more employers bring on apprentices. It's one of the biggest challenges we have. I'm told that only 6% of employers in the province bring on apprentices. The national average is about 20%. That's why we are ensuring that we're investing in employers.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, I really, truly believe that workers in the skilled trades are going to lead the recovery in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Ms. Suze Morrison: My question is for the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development. Speaker, every day workers in Ontario are forced to make an impossible decision: Do they go to work sick and risk spreading COVID-19 throughout our community, or do they stay home and lose their wages that they need to keep their rent paid and put food on the table for their families? These workers are the lowest-waged workers in our communities, often making minimum wage, doing essential work in our communities: everything from grocery store clerks to the personal support workers working at the front lines of our long-term-care homes. Speaker, we need paid sick days for all Ontarians.

What I heard from the minister in his remarks is that he thinks it's okay to pass the buck to the federal government's temporary, substandard program and abandon his responsibility to the workers of this province. Speaker, we need real leadership here, not a political game of hot potato over jurisdictional issues. Will the minister commit today to supporting the NDP bill for permanent paid sick days in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Mr. Speaker, clearly people should not be going to work sick. That's why the very first initiative our government brought in—and I will mention to the members opposite that it was the very first piece of legislation in North America to protect jobs during COVID-19. If any worker is in self-isolation, if they're in quarantine, if you are a mom or a dad who has to stay home and look after a son or daughter because the schools are closed, you can't be fired for that in Ontario. Furthermore, we moved quickly to eliminate the need for sick notes for workers from their physician.

We're going to continue standing up for workers every day. I'm proud of the partnership between Premier Ford, all the other Premiers and the Prime Minister to provide \$1.1 billion worth of paid sick days to workers in the province. But I have to ask the member opposite: Why are you not telling people in your own community that two weeks of paid sick days are available? That's a disservice and that's bad for workers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Kitchener–Conestoga.

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Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and it's great to be back here in the Ontario Legislature.

To the minister: This is a really important bill. In Waterloo region, we lost over 12,000 good-paying manufacturing jobs over the 15 years of the last government—12,000 jobs, Mr. Speaker. So I'm hoping that the minister can explain what this is going to do for the people of Waterloo region and how it's going to help them.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Great. Well, thank you. And I have to say to my honourable colleague, thank you for your leadership in standing up for the Kitchener–Waterloo region, in particular those men and women who have continued to work during this pandemic. Mr. Speaker, this is all about protecting jobs. We want to ensure that the men and women of this province have a job to go to. This legislation, if passed, will actually ensure that the doors remain open to businesses.

But one of the things I have to raise: The party opposite, the so-called party of the working-class families, wants us, and has wanted us, to shut down, for example, the entire construction industry. I want to remind the members opposite that there are over a half a million people who have been able to work during this pandemic. And guess what? Sixty-five thousand of the half a million people in construction are women. So let's start standing up for women in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): New questions? The member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you, Speaker. It's great to be back.

When I saw the title of this, amending WSIB, I was excited for a second, because I talk to injured workers, and injured workers have a lot of problems with WSIB. They're being thrown into poverty largely because of deeming, because fantasy jobs that don't exist, especially in times of COVID—they are told that their benefits are being clawed back. I hear those heartbreaking stories every day across this province. We have a call every Tuesday with injured workers, and they have a Zoom call with workers from across the province, who all say the same thing: End deeming now. So will the minister commit to ending deeming for WSIB?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the WSIB system that we have here in the province of Ontario. It wasn't that long ago that we didn't know if this system was going to be around for employers and for workers of this province. But thanks to the leadership of the WSIB, Chair Witmer and former president Tom

Teahen—in this government, in fact, Mr. Speaker, I want to pay credit to the former Minister of Labour, Laurie Scott, who brought in and has built a sustainable WSIB system. I can promise every single worker in this province that the WSIB system is going to be there for them today, but for decades to come.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Question?

Ms. Jane McKenna: I just wanted to ask a question—because I've just heard a comment across the aisle—about how this is not only benefiting employers, but how is it also benefiting workers as well?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Every decision we make is guided on standing up for workers in this province. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we continue to invest heavily in health and safety. That's why I'm proud to report, as of this morning, the Ministry of Labour inspectors have visited 38,000 workplaces and have done more than 38,000 investigations related to COVID-19. We've now shut down 67 unsafe workplaces, many of those since January 1. Mr. Speaker, we're continuing to stand up for those men and women who are going to work every single day, who are caring for our loved ones, protecting the health and safety of our loved ones, and we'll continue to do that every single day.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. I've been reminded that the member from Burlington was out of order in asking the question because she spoke on the main debate—my mistake—so we will have a little bit of extra time for the final question, which is to the member from Brampton East.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Brampton is one of the worst-hit cities in the province on COVID-19. When we talk to public health officials, they are clear: Workplaces are one of the greatest areas of spread for COVID-19 in our community. Yet workers still have to make this very dreadful decision between paying the bills or going to work sick, because they do not have paid sick days. So my question to the minister is clear: Will he support the NDP's bill to bring in paid sick days so workers don't have to go to work sick?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Well, Mr. Speaker, we brought in job-protected leave. We were the first in North America to do that. Furthermore, as the member opposite should know, the Premier of this province led the charge to ensure that there are two weeks of paid sick days available through the federal government—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I'm sorry to cut you off, but as you know the standing orders say at 10:15 we move on to members' statements.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Jill Andrew: Let's talk salaries. The Premier of Ontario makes \$280,974 a year. His cabinet ministers

make roughly \$166,000 a year. The base salary for MPPs here in Ontario is \$116,550 a year. And while some MPPs are single parents caring for children with disabilities, essential caregivers, sole wage earners or what have you, there is no shortage of MPPs here who are independently wealthy.

Not one of us in this Legislature loses a single day of pay when we are away sick or tending to a sick child or family member. We do not have to fear homelessness, job loss or evictions because we need time off to heal. Why should any worker in Toronto–St. Paul's or across Ontario not have the same access to health and healing that their own Premier and every MPP in Ontario has?

COVID-19 is an unprecedented public health infectious disease emergency. I reckon if there was ever a time for this government to demonstrate a real commitment to workers' health and safety, the time is now. Will the Conservative government immediately pass Bill 239, MPP Sattler's Stay Home If You Are Sick Act, and ensure that all Ontario workers can get access to paid sick days and paid sick leave today so we can help save lives, yes or no?

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Mr. Parm Gill: I was proud to host a virtual community meeting last Friday to discuss the issues and concerns the community has raised to do with Reid Road quarry in Milton.

Previously, the residents had filed well over 1,000 objections and requested that a proposed quarry site be made subject to an environmental assessment, with environmental concerns ranging from issues resulting from blasting below the water table, flyrock and potential damage to the local ecosystem.

Mr. Speaker, these efforts have resulted in a commencement of the process for an environmental assessment, a big step forward to examining the potential environmental impacts a quarry could have in our community in Milton. Our government is now seeking comments through the Environmental Registry of Ontario, and I'm encouraging all Miltonians to submit their technical comments. It's an opportunity for us to provide feedback and comments online.

Mr. Speaker, as always, I remain committed to being a strong voice for Milton and am proud to be back at Queen's Park today to ensure Miltonians continue to be heard.

KARIMA MEHRAB

Ms. Jessica Bell: Today I recognize Karima Mehrab in the Ontario Legislature. Karima was a leader in the struggle for the independence of Baluchistan from Pakistan. Facing terrorism charges and death threats for her activist work, Karima came to Canada and was granted political asylum.

While abroad, Karima continued to advocate for the Baluchistan people. She spoke at rallies and attended

international conferences, and was named in BBC's top 100 most influential and inspirational women.

On December 20, Karima went missing. Her body was pulled from Lake Ontario the following day. This is a tragedy. Karima is the second Pakistani dissident to be found dead abroad in the last year. Activists living in exile say there has been an increase in threats, including Karima, who received threats leading up to her death. Human rights groups are calling for a full and independent investigation into Karima's death, and so am I.

We must also recognize Karima as the celebrated human rights activist that she was. Her work will live on. Thank you.

MIKE AND JENNIFER RICHARDSON

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I would like to tell the House about Keeping Up With the Richardson's. As you know, Mike and Jennifer Richardson in Innisfil are always going above and beyond to build resiliency in our community, strengthening the fabric of our youth in our community and, of course, supporting our local businesses. It is Keeping Up With the Richardson's that started the Light It Up Innisfil competition, where over 100 houses participated, decorating their homes in various holiday lights, and they raised over \$2,000 for the Innisfil Food Bank and Christmas for Kids.

1020

But that's not all, Mr. Speaker. When families were looking for something to do in Innisfil, the Keeping up with the Richardson's clan put together a Discover Innisfil Car Rally and Scavenger Hunt so that parents have something that is safe and productive to do with their children, showing them the landscapes of Innisfil and all the hidden gems.

Now, her last venture has been Innis-Full. Yes, Mr. Speaker, that is "full," because we all want to make sure that our tummies are full supporting our local businesses. It is a campaign to support our restaurants from February 9 to March 15. It's an online Facebook page that provides local residents with an opportunity to order food from their local restaurants with different prizes and discounts and whatnot.

I want to give a few shout-outs to local businesses that are participating and that have supported our community, like the Harbour House Grill, the Last Shot Bar and Grill, the Parlour ice cream shop, and of course, the Stone Grille. We've got Davidson's Country Dining, Johnny Burger, and of course, we've got Stacked and we've got the Fork and Plate—all businesses that are standing up and showing the Ontario spirit.

ONTARIO FIRE COLLEGE

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Firefighters are yet another breed of people throughout this whole pandemic who are out there on the front line, putting their lives in danger as they rush into fires, but also dealing with medical calls and others. Imagine their surprise when they found out in January that

the government unilaterally decided to shut down the fire college.

The fire college is an essential part of what we need to do in order to give the firefighters the tools they need to be able to do their job safely and to be up to date with the latest technologies when it comes to being able to fight fires and do the other work that they do.

The government says, "Don't worry. We're going to put it online. You can go on a computer and you can do this training," and in some cases they might be able to. But there's a whole bunch of training that happens at the Gravenhurst fire college that you can't move to a campus somewhere outside of Gravenhurst because of the actual physical plant that they have in place that allows them to replicate fires, to crawl through burning buildings, to deal with smoke inhalation, to deal with what happens when a train derails. All of those things are done at the fire college.

Why would we now, in the middle of a pandemic, decide to shut down a fire college that gives our firefighters across this province the tools that they need to keep us safe and to make their jobs a little bit safer? I call on this government to rethink what they're doing, because much of what's going on at the fire college cannot be replicated somewhere else, and this is a very short-sighted decision.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Lindsey Park: I rise today to share about a recent announcement I made—and don't worry, Speaker, I respected public health measures and did the announcement via Facebook Live from my home in Oshawa. On January 11, I announced, on behalf of the Minister of Health, that our government is investing \$2.5 million in the Bowmanville Hospital to go towards planning its redevelopment and expansion.

While we've invested over the last year in urgently expanding hospital capacity as quickly as possible in the fight against COVID-19, recently announcing in December 64 new beds across the Lakeridge Health hospital network, we also must continue longer-term capacity planning in our region.

Since 1996, over a span of 25 years, Clarington's population has grown by almost 50%, but it has been over 30 years since the Bowmanville Hospital had its last expansion. The funding announced will be used to offset the costs of planning the renewal and expansion of the hospital's infrastructure.

In addition to the redevelopment project, our government is also supporting the development of an interim helipad for the Bowmanville Hospital. This interim helipad will improve how Lakeridge Health safely transfers critical patients to and from the Bowmanville Hospital while the redevelopment project is completed.

Planning for the redevelopment of a hospital is a lengthy process, and I am committed to working with Lakeridge Health and the Bowmanville Hospital Foundation to advocate for this project through to its completion.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Catherine Fife: This government's resistance to a made-in-Ontario sick leave program defies all logic. Public health experts, mayors and small businesses all have described paid sick days as essential to slowing the spread of COVID-19. The Premier claims everything is on the table, except for this one measure that would keep workers safe and businesses open. This PC government stands alone in their refusal to embrace this public health measure.

Small business leaders are the latest to try to get this government to understand why paid sick leave is actually good for business. Helmi Ansari of Cambridge says, "If one of my staff members ends up feeling unwell, and potentially has something that's transmissible, I really don't want them to bring it to work. That would be disastrous for my business."

The Better Way Alliance argue that paid sick leave needs to be provincially mandated to ensure that all businesses, especially the giants like Amazon and Loblaws, are required to comply. We now know that 67% of COVID-19 outbreaks happen in workplaces. In areas like Peel, where essential workers are part of a major manufacturing and distribution network, one in four workers reported that they went to work with COVID-19 symptoms because they had no choice.

The well-being of workers directly impacts our economic recovery. We cannot afford another shutdown. Today, pass Bill 239, as proposed by our London West colleague; put paid sick days on the table; and show some leadership and courage for the essential workers in this great province.

PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Speaker, I've found the best ideas do not come from Queen's Park; they come from the people I represent. That was again the case last week in the pre-budget consultations that I organized in Perth-Wellington. I believe it's essential that the government hears our local priorities and concerns.

We heard from municipal officials, businesses and organizations throughout our riding. Their presentations covered a lot of ground. We heard about the ongoing challenges in health care and long-term care. We heard about slow Internet speeds and connectivity. We heard about the need for more affordable housing in our communities. We heard about the ongoing challenges due to COVID-19. The arts, tourism and culture industries, accommodations, food and beverage, and retail have all been especially hit hard.

We heard about the need for local processing capacity and good rural infrastructure. We also heard about the need to supply family and social services, and the importance of access to child care. Finally, we heard about mental health and the toll the pandemic is taking. Timely and accessible mental health support for every person, business and organization in every corner of our riding is absolutely essential.

I know our government is aware of these issues and is working hard to address them, but these hearings tell me we need to do even more. I want to thank the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance and the MPP for Mississauga-Lakeshore for joining us and hearing us, and I want to thank everyone who took time to participate in the consultations. I am proud to represent you and to support your good work.

TAMMIE STAPLES

Mr. David Piccini: It's great to be back here in the Legislature, Mr. Speaker.

Throughout the global pandemic, we've witnessed so many stand tall in their local communities, exhibiting the true Ontario spirit. I'd like to take a moment to highlight a local hero, Port Hope police officer Tammie Staples, who has shone bright in our community for decades.

Port Hope Police Constable Tammie Staples has been a police officer since 2007, and last week was nominated for the 2021 Police Services Hero of the Year Award. Constable Staples has gone above and beyond in her years of service, and is known throughout our community for her warm smile, her huge heart and specifically for her willingness to go above and beyond to help others.

For the past six years, she has served as community services officer for Port Hope and was nominated for the hero of the year award for her work delivering school programs to children in our community. She has worked with a number of great causes, like Rebound Children and Youth Services, the Special Olympics, Coldest Night of the Year, seniors' programs and Tammie's Jammies. Her pyjama drive raised over 400 pairs of pyjamas for children in need this holiday season.

I'd like to thank Constable Staples for her work. It's often the quiet work that goes unnoticed that is truly the most impactful work in our community. For that, I'd like to thank Constable Tammie Staples for all she does for the community of Port Hope and beyond.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our members' statements for this morning.

DÉCORUM EN CHAMBRE

DECORUM IN THE CHAMBER

Le Président (L'hon. Ted Arnott): Avant de commencer, j'aimerais saisir cette occasion pour rappeler aux députées et députés la déclaration que j'ai faite l'automne dernier concernant les masques que portent les députées et députés dans la Chambre.

1030

Les députées et députés savent qu'il y a une norme stipulant que les vêtements ne doivent pas afficher de logos, de slogans, de publicité ou tout autre élément qui peut servir de modalités d'expression.

Les masques font toujours partie de nos habits quotidiens et, je répète, que comme tout autre article de vêtements que portent les députées et députés, les masques

ne doivent pas afficher d'éléments commerciaux ou politiques, de logos ou de symboles, ni être associés à des campagnes, à des causes, à des institutions ou à des organismes.

Nous avons eu très peu de problèmes auparavant, donc je sais que les députées et députés ont une bonne idée d'où se trouve la limite. Celle-ci n'a pas changé. Si l'article en question n'était pas approprié avant le port du masque, ne le portez pas maintenant.

Je veux également appeler l'attention de l'Assemblée sur la nomination de notre nouvelle greffière permanente à la table, Meghan Stenson. Meghan est la chef de service du bureau des recherches pour la table et est responsable d'une grande partie des recherches sur la procédure effectuées au bureau de l'Assemblée. Joignez-vous à moi pour souhaiter la bienvenue à Meghan et pour la féliciter pour sa nomination à la table.

Before we begin, I would like to take this opportunity to remind members of the statement that I made last fall regarding the face masks members wear in the chamber.

Members will know that we have a convention that items of apparel should not contain logos, slogans, advertising or other devices that convert them from clothing into vehicles of expression.

Face masks continue to be part of our daily wear and, I reiterate, as with any item of apparel, members' masks should not contain commercial, political or brand logos or emblems, or be associated with other campaigns, causes, institutions or organizations.

We rarely had issues before, so I know members had a pretty good idea of where the line was; that line hasn't moved. If you couldn't wear it in the pre-mask days, please don't wear it now.

I would also like to bring to the attention of the House the appointment of Meghan Stenson as our newest permanent table officer. Meghan is the manager of the table research office, which is responsible for much of the procedural research conducted at the Office of the Assembly. Please join me in welcoming Meghan to the House and congratulating her on her appointment to the table.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Congratulations.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition has a point of order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I seek unanimous consent for the House to ask that the Speaker consider the flying of flags at half-mast for the remainder of the week to honour those who have succumbed to COVID-19 during the adjournment.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition is seeking unanimous consent of the House to allow the Speaker to lower the flags outside the building to half-mast in recognition of people who have lost their lives to COVID-19. Agreed? I heard a no.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for London West has a point of order.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to move a motion regarding the immediate passage of Bill 239, the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act, to help in the fight against COVID-19.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member from London West is seeking unanimous consent of the House to allow the immediate passage of Bill 239. Agreed? I heard a no.

The member for London–Fanshawe, I think, has a point of order.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you, Speaker. I seek unanimous consent to move a motion regarding the immediate passage of Bill 13, the Time to Care Act, to help protect seniors in long-term care from COVID-19.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for London–Fanshawe is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion to allow for the immediate passage of Bill 13. Agreed? I heard a no.

The member for Windsor West appears to have a point of order.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. I seek unanimous consent to move a motion regarding the immediate passage of Bill 203, More Than a Visitor Act, to better protect Ontarians in congregate care from the harmful effects of isolation during this pandemic.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Windsor West is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion for the immediate passage of Bill 203. Agreed? I heard a no.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for Guelph.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, I'm seeking unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding Bill 239, Stay Home If You Are Sick Act, and move that the House vote on third reading immediately.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Guelph is seeking unanimous consent of the House to move a motion to provide for the immediate passage of Bill 239. Agreed? I heard a no.

It is now time for oral questions.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question this morning is to the Premier. The Premier is risking the spread of the COVID-19 virus, more deaths, more business closures and further lockdowns because he is refusing to listen to the advice of experts and he is reopening too quickly. In fact, health experts are almost unanimous in condemning the Premier's decision here.

Dr. Brown, the head of Ontario's COVID advisory table, said on Thursday, "If public health measures are lifted, cases could rise dramatically." Dr. Peter Jüni says

we're heading for another lockdown. Dr. Michael Warner asks, "Are we trying to fail?"

My question to the Premier is, considering what his advisers are recommending, why is he deciding to reopen this province?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker: We aren't reopening the province yet; we're transitioning. We're transitioning into the framework that was laid out by the health team, and we're following the guidance from the Chief Medical Officer of Health, which we will always follow.

Just to remind everyone, we have the most stringent protocols anywhere in the entire country and the most stringent restrictions anywhere in the country. We're going to continue doing that, making sure that we keep the public safe, making sure that we keep the people in long-term care safe and education workers safe, along with the students. That's what we're going to continue doing.

Just keep in mind, when it comes to Peel, Toronto and York, it's going to be up to the chief medical officer and the local medical officers if they want to open up and go into the grey lockdown scenario on February 22. But we won't hesitate to pull on the brakes at any given time, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It seems pretty clear that what this is all about is transitioning into a disaster. In fact, the Ontario Hospital Association head, Anthony Dale, said that the warning last week from Dr. Steini Brown, the head of the science table, could not be clearer: Do not open up. He says "an exhausted, over-extended hospital sector" will "have to deal with a 3rd pandemic wave."

So my question is, when the Premier is receiving warnings from the Ontario Hospital Association and from health experts that are crystal clear, that they oppose this reopening, why is the Premier ignoring them?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker: Right from day one we've always listened to the chief medical officer and the health team. We're going to continue to listen to the health and science experts.

Mr. Speaker, we're doing more rapid tests for prevention than anyone in the entire country. We're doing 58% of all the rapid tests in the country, even though we're about 38% of the population. We're well over two million rapid tests. We're going to be deploying upwards to a million rapid tests every single week, going into businesses, going into long-term-care homes and going into schools. I know the Minister of Education has allocated 50,000 rapid tests, making sure that we're testing 40 schools this week alone. We're going to continue focusing on the rapid tests. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's really clear that ignoring the advice of experts will put lives at risk in our province. The science table has warned very clearly that the third wave could bring up to 16,000 daily cases of COVID-19 if the Premier prematurely opens up this province. In fact,

it could put ICUs in a position where they're working at triple their capacity, literally unable to meet the demand put upon them by this Premier's decision.

1040

The fact of the matter is, the Premier has not learned from his mistakes. He is repeating mistakes of the past. He's not listening to the advice of experts, and opening too soon. My question is, why would he do such a thing?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker: We aren't transitioning without approval of the chief medical officer—which we always have, because I won't waiver from the advice that he gives us—and the health team.

But we have to thank the people of Ontario, because unlike what the Leader of the Opposition said, with the collaboration of everyone except the NDP and the Liberals, we were able to bring the numbers down. ICU units are actually going down, the capacity that is there right now. The numbers are going down.

We have to make sure that we continue following the protocols and the guidelines of the chief medical officer, but we will never take our eye off the ball. We will always be working 24/7, which we have been for the last year, every single day: Saturday, Sunday—even on the holidays we work, unlike some other folks, Mr. Speaker. We're going to continue being very vigilant when it comes to this.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. Essential workers in this province, front-line workers in this province, have to make each and every day a decision about going to work, oftentimes when they are sick. People should never have to choose between going to work and bringing illness into the workplace or losing a paycheque and not being able to meet the bills. In fact, people should be able to take time off because they have paid sick days.

The government's own experts have said that paid sick days are the right thing to do here in Ontario. It was recommended by the head of the science table that the Premier apparently listens to, Dr. Brown. Even Dr. Williams, whose advice the Premier has told us a couple of times already this morning he always takes, supports paid sick days. The Premier said he always listens to Dr. Williams. Will he listen this time and provide paid sick days for the people of this province?

Hon. Doug Ford: I'm going to respectfully ask the Leader of the Opposition to stop getting people confused. There are sick days. Even when they were being interviewed—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Order.

Hon. Doug Ford: Either the Leader of the Opposition doesn't know the program or doesn't understand it or something. There's over a billion dollars that I fought for and the other Premiers fought for and John Horgan, her fellow NDP counterpart, fought for. We all collaborated. We ended up getting over a billion—\$1.1 billion.

Mr. Speaker, this goes back all the way to September. Only \$319 million has been spent, and because the Leader of the Opposition is out there confusing people—even when she was interviewed with a nurse, the nurse said, “No, I didn’t even look into the federal program.” So the Leader of the Opposition is very confused when it comes to this.

We have a great system. We aren’t going to duplicate it and continue to double-dip into the taxpayers’ pockets when there’s \$1.1 billion sitting there. We need to make sure we—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. The Premier will take his seat.

The supplementary question?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It’s this Premier that needs to get with the program. He knows darn well that he got rid of the only two paid sick days—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. The member for Northumberland–Peterborough South will come to order and withdraw.

Mr. David Piccini: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier needs to stop passing the buck, Speaker. It’s really clear that paid sick days are a provincial responsibility. They always have been, they always will be, and they are being recommended by virtually everyone except the Premier. Government public health experts say we need paid sick days. Mayors and city councils say we need paid sick days. Health experts, business leaders, labour leaders—heck, the past two leaders of the provincial PC Party—all say we need paid sick days. So why is the Premier stubbornly refusing to implement paid sick days for the benefit of stopping the spread of COVID-19 and keeping people safe?

Hon. Doug Ford: Mr. Speaker, right from the get-go of when we hit this pandemic, we’ve had a very clear agreement—all the Premiers, along with the federal government—that we aren’t going to duplicate programs, and we’re being very prudent with the taxpayers’ money.

Anyone that I’ve ever talked to that I’ve said, “Oh, there’s already a program,” the first thing they say is, “Well, the Leader of the Opposition must be confused because she’s making it out that there are no sick days.” Again, it’s very disappointing that the Leader of the Opposition would be out there and confusing people.

To folks listening at home: There are paid sick days. There are 10 paid sick days—\$1.1 billion.

What we have to do is continue, which we are, working with the federal government to shorten up the time and to increase it from \$500 possibly up to \$1,000. But no one expects us to double-dip into their pockets. That’s the practice of the NDP, not ourselves.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I can assure the Premier, Speaker, that the people of Ontario know very well who to

be disappointed in. I can tell you this: Experts have been predicting a third wave and more lockdowns, more illness and more pressure on the hospitals because the government has decided to not take action on a few key initiatives.

The Premier is simply refusing to listen to the advice of experts, even though he claims the opposite. If the Premier truly wanted to stop the spread of COVID-19, he would not be opening this province too quickly, and he would be providing paid sick days for every worker in this province.

Why will this government, why will this Premier, continue to refuse to act? Why is he not taking action on the very advice that his experts are giving him? Why?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker: We’ve been acting from day one. We haven’t stopped acting and making sure that we put the protocols in place, making sure that we’re taking care of small business owners, with the grants of up to \$20,000, which is now up over \$900 million, to help the small business folks.

But, Mr. Speaker, this is a very large province. What is good for the folks up in Kenora may not always be good for the people in the Leader of the Opposition’s riding in Hamilton, or it may not be as good for the people in Toronto and Peel. That’s why we’re opening the economy up extremely, extremely cautiously.

When it comes to Toronto, when it comes to Peel, and when it comes to York, it’s very simple: They’re going into the grey lockdown zones on February 22. In saying that, if the local medical officers want to put a section 22 in and continue down with the lockdown, by all means, they have the power to do that and we’ll support them.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Sara Singh: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. During the first wave of COVID-19, the people of Ontario were shocked by the appalling conditions and the failure of this government to protect our seniors in our long-term-care homes. In the first wave, we saw 1,848 people lose their lives. Last June, the Premier pledged, “We’re going to make sure that this doesn’t happen again.” But as of last week, our long-term-care homes have now seen more loss of life due to COVID-19 in the second wave than they did in the first.

How can the Premier justify the failure to keep this promise and keep our seniors safe?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Long-Term Care to respond.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Indeed, long-term-care homes have been on the front lines of this global pandemic, not only in Ontario but across Canada and across the world, and our government has used every option at our disposal to prevent and contain the spread of this virus.

We implemented surveillance testing in wave 1 for residents and staff, and we have one of the most sensitive thresholds for outbreak definition anywhere across the country. We have slowed outbreaks and caught cases early, and the Premier personally pushed for surveillance

testing in wave 1, as did I, and every resident and staff member was tested in wave 1 as part of our testing strategy.

Despite the reluctance of some, we pushed for the implementation of rapid testing. These tests have added an extra layer on top of the IPAC, on top of the integration across our system, on top of using all the expert advice. We will continue to do this.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question?

Ms. Sara Singh: Speaker, despite what the minister is claiming here today, they failed to take action—the necessary action needed to protect seniors in long-term care. The Premier said that this would never happen again. But they could have actually taken steps like a recruitment drive, like the one in Quebec that brought 10,000 PSWs into Quebec's long-term-care homes; or emergency shelters to ensure that residents would be moved out of those crowded homes and not suffer when those outbreaks were happening. Instead, this Premier changed the law to ensure that private, for-profit long-term-care homes wouldn't be sued.

Will the Premier admit that this government broke their promise to seniors and take the urgent action needed today, now, to ensure that we protect our seniors before this impending third wave hits those homes?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Once again, thank you to the member opposite.

We acted quickly and decisively throughout this pandemic. It is a worldwide, global pandemic, and we have used every measure and every tool available to us to fight this virus and to stop the spread—as I mentioned, the testing and now the staffing, looking at this across the board from day one, using the rapid response teams deployed from our hospitals, the infection prevention and control teams, the Ontario Workforce Reserve for Senior Support and our residence support aides; making sure that we took regulatory amendments and emergency orders to make sure we could provide flexible staffing into our homes. We have continued, unrelentingly, to make sure that our homes have the support that they needed.

The community spread in wave 2 is different from wave 1. We continue to take every measure possible, looking at the up to \$1.9 billion for our monumental staffing plan, 27,000 new—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

The next question.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: My question is to the Premier. Since we last met in December, we have seen good news as it relates to the transmission of COVID in the province. Daily case numbers are down. Transmission rates are down. Less people are being hospitalized.

The measures are working. Staying home is saving lives. Together, we are bending the curve, we are protecting our hospitals, and we are looking out for the most vulnerable.

But we are not clear of the storm yet. This is a critical time. We can find a way forward, but we need a plan that continues to protect the health and safety of each and every person in this province. We have seen in other countries what is happening with these new variants, and it is a reminder of what can happen here.

Premier, can you please share with my constituents what other enhanced measures our government has put in place to counter the spread of new variants?

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville; I want to thank you for your great leadership in Peel.

The member is 100% correct: The risk of these new variants is of great concern. My friends, I sounded the alarm bells before. I stood on the podium and said it's not a matter of if, it's when these new variants come into place here. On Boxing Day, we confirmed the first case of the UK variant of COVID-19 in Ontario. Now, we have confirmed cases of the Brazilian and South African variants.

But our government took action immediately. We delivered a six-point plan to help stop the spread of these variants throughout the province. We brought in mandatory testing at Pearson airport, which was critical and well overdue. I was jumping up and down for months about getting testing at Pearson. Now, we have finally ended up getting it. We have caught numerous variants coming through—well over 200 that would be in the public. Thank goodness, we stood up and we did the testing at Pearson airport.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question?

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to the Premier. My supplemental question is back to the Premier. Premier, as you have said, the spread of any new COVID-19 variant is a significant threat to the province's response to COVID-19. My region of Peel is one of the hot spot regions, and I know that many of my constituents are concerned about what these new variants will mean for them.

Premier, our government has worked diligently to put stronger measures in place to counter the alarming public health trends and fight the new variants. We issued the stay-at-home order. We launched several workplace inspection blitzes, including a safety blitz at all big box stores. And we have accelerated vaccinations for our most vulnerable seniors.

Can the Premier please share with the Legislature more about our government's six-point plan to prevent and stop the spread of COVID-19 variants in my riding?

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank the member for the question. As I always say, we can't let our guard down now; we can't let our guard down ever. If we see the numbers spike again, we're prepared to take further action, and that's what we call the brake. We'll put on the brake quicker than you can shake your stick, because nothing is

more important than protecting the people right now. That's why our government implemented strong measures as a part of our six-point plan.

Mandatory testing in travellers at our borders—this is the most important thing we can do to stop the spread of these deadly variants coming into our communities. That's the first one. The second is enhanced screening to identify all positive COVID-19 tests in Ontario for known variants within two to three days of the initial processing. Number three, maintaining enhanced public health measures; number four, strengthening our case and contact management efforts for all COVID-19 cases; number five, protecting the most vulnerable by accelerating vaccinations of residents in long-term care, retirement homes and First Nation elder residents; and six, leveraging new data, science and techniques and integrate data—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Next question.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. Speaker, one of the first things the Conservatives did when they were elected was immediately take away paid sick days from Ontario workers. Now, in the middle of the biggest health crisis our province has ever seen, this decision isn't just making life worse, it's literally putting people's lives at risk.

No worker should have to risk exposure to deadly infection on the job or spread it to their co-workers. No worker should have to watch their family fall ill because their own government refused to act. By voting today against the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act, that is exactly what this government is telling Ontarians.

Speaker, through you, I ask the Premier: Is that the legacy he really wants?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader to reply.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Just to note, Mr. Speaker, that the House leaders have met three times—February 3, 5 and 11—and at no time did the new opposition House leader ever mention that this bill would be a priority that the NDP would bring to the floor of the Legislative Assembly.

We expect to be working together, as we have constantly done in this Legislature. When this government started with the new protocols back in March, we went to the opposition and we told them the bills that we were introducing. We allowed them to make amendments to those bills. We worked together. I would hope, going forward, that if the opposition wants to work cooperatively, they use the forums that we have set to do that. It's one thing to play stunts on the floor of the Legislative Assembly; it's another thing to work together to move this province forward, like this Premier has done and like I'm sure the Minister of Labour will outline in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Municipal leaders, councils from across the province, physicians, nurses, public health experts, local boards of health, workers and business owners all agree that without paid sick days, the Conservatives aren't just causing the third wave to hit faster, they are ensuring it will hit harder and hurt more than ever.

The Premier had a chance to do the right thing this morning, but his government voted against giving people the paid sick days they need now.

My question is: What is it going to take? How high will cases have to get? How many more deaths before this government finally does the right thing and passes our bill?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond, the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Well, the member opposite must not have heard earlier on when the Premier answered, but to every worker in the province of Ontario, there are two weeks of paid sick days available to them. Thanks to the Premier of Ontario and the other Premiers across the country, working together with the Prime Minister of Canada, they've delivered \$1.1 billion worth of paid sick days to workers in this province and right across the country.

It's up to every elected official to not play games—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Opposition, come to order.

1100

Hon. Monte McNaughton: When the members opposite don't tell workers that this program is available to them, that's a disservice.

Mr. Speaker, we've worked closely with the federal government to raise awareness of this program, to ensure that monies get paid more quickly into people's bank accounts. I'm proud to say, Mr. Speaker, that over 110,000 workers in Ontario are now receiving paid sick days—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. The next question.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier. Premier, last Sunday, the government announced that it finally offered the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine to all the 70,000 residents in long-term care. It has been more than two months since vaccines have arrived here in Ontario, and we are weeks behind other provinces. British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Quebec and Prince Edward Island all finished in January. Vaccines didn't make it in time to Roberta Place or to Timiskaming and too many other places in Ontario.

Two weeks is the time that it takes for vaccines to become effective. We've had enough vaccines since the end of December to get the job done. Speaker, through you: Can the Premier explain to families how we fell so far behind and failed to prioritize residents in long-term care during this phase 1?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government side will come to order. I'll start calling you out by names. I can hear your voices.

Hon. John Yakubuski: The NDP must be writing your questions, John.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry will come to order.

Premier?

Hon. Doug Ford: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't want to use a certain word, but again, it's not—can I use the word “accurate”? They're not being accurate, because the gentleman there hasn't looked at the numbers. We're actually leading the entire country—bar none; no one even coming close—with 59% of all second doses in Canada, in the entire country. I'm not too sure where you're getting your numbers from, but again, we're at 38%. We're at 38% of the population and 59% of all second doses.

We have an incredible team. We have a great team out there, headed up by General Hillier, making sure that we're vaccinating more people than anywhere else in the country. That's the reason, Mr. Speaker, we have the lowest case count out of anyone per 100,000—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. The supplementary question.

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, we've almost given 500,000 doses, except not got to the 70,000 residents of long-term care until last Sunday. So supply wasn't the issue, right?

Here's what happened: The government failed to take the advice of Pfizer from December 18, and then when Quebec and BC were vaccinating residents in long-term care, what did Ontario do over Christmas? We took a holiday. It put us weeks behind, and the best answer we got was, “We got spanked.” Well, I don't think that's good for families. It might be good in the locker room after a beer-league hockey game, but that's not a good answer.

As a result, the virus got ahead of us in long-term care. When the virus gets ahead of us, it doesn't just go ahead of us; it accelerates. The slower we go, the faster it goes, and what that means is more disease, more suffering, more deaths. So, Speaker, through you: Can the Premier explain the rationale for this lack of a sense of urgency, for these delayed decisions and the failure to act that put residents in long-term care in a vulnerable situation? Families need to know.

Hon. Doug Ford: Mr. Speaker, that information is just not accurate. We're leading the country, bar none, over anyone, even per capita. I would be more than happy to sit down and inform the member that 59% of all second doses in Canada were here in Ontario and 65% of all long-term-care patients have received their second dose. As we move forward, we will be at 100% of all long-term-care patients very, very shortly, because we have an incredible team.

The only thing we're missing—we're missing one thing, Mr. Speaker: We're missing the vaccines. Give us the vaccines and we will get them into people's arms. We have the most efficient, the most organized team in the entire—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa South will come to order.

Next question?

EDUCATION

Ms. Donna Skelly: As cases have come down from the spike around Christmas, students from around the province have safely returned to in-person learning, and this is welcome news for parents and students in my riding. We have had a safe return to school in September. Although, with cases of variants appearing around the province, it's clear that we must remain vigilant. Can the Minister of Education please share with this Legislature the new efforts this government has taken to ensure schools remain a safe place to learn and to work?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I appreciate the question from the member. Obviously, members on this side of the House are quite pleased that all students of this province are now able to return to school this week. That is vital for the mental health and development of all children and critical as we move forward with ensuring we can combat COVID-19 by keeping these kids safe.

What we have done over the past weeks is stepped up our program with a plan to expand asymptomatic testing, up to 50,000 tests every week. As the Premier just noted in the Legislature, in the city of Toronto alone, this week alone, 40 schools will be tested for asymptomatic testing, working with the local public health unit to deliver that layer of protection that is critical as we move forward with these new variants. We've also enhanced the screening protocol of children and staff before they enter school, and likewise a better quality mask, a three-ply mask, according to the Public Health Agency of Canada.

In each and every realm, we have improved the investment, enhanced the requirement, and we'll continue to invest to make sure that these kids and all staff are safe in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Back to the minister. School boards have done great work in moving quickly to promote learning during the province-wide shutdown and at other times throughout the school year. However, we know that a consequence of separation from classmates is an impact on mental health. This is especially true for younger children or children who require more specialized care. Though the return to in-person learning is a huge factor in maintaining mental health for students, families and staff, we know that continued supports are needed. Would the Minister of Education please share with us what efforts are being done to help support the mental health of our students?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I appreciate the opportunity to just really—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Member for York Centre, come to order.

Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you, Speaker. It is really important that we continue to stay focused on the mental health of children, which is why, as noted, we are pleased that all children are able to return to class this week—so consequential for their mental health.

But in addition to that and realizing that there are some children that are struggling, we have enhanced our investment, over \$52 million during the pandemic alone in net new dollars, to hire over 200 more mental health workers and ensure that our kids and the staff have access to the supports that they need and they deserve; \$52 million, of which \$10 million was just provided to Kids Help Phone, as well as to provide, working with School Mental Health Ontario, a mental health action kit where all classes are able to talk about the importance of mental health and really improve the resilience of our kids. We will continue to invest in them and follow the medical advice to keep them safe.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Premier. Throughout this crisis, New Democrats have put forward solutions to improve long-term care. At every turn, the Conservatives put up roadblocks, dragged their feet and sat on billions of dollars that would have saved lives. They did it again this morning. They're voting against a rapid passage of a bill that would ensure that every single nursing home resident in Ontario is guaranteed, in law, a minimum of four hours of hands-on care. Why is this Ford government so afraid of making it law that long-term-care homes meet minimum standards of care for the seniors who live in them?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Long-Term Care to respond.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Our Conservative government is going to be the first government to address the ongoing crises in long-term care, the long-standing crises, whether it was the capacity issues that the previous Liberal government neglected over its time in office; or whether when the NDP held the balance of power between 2011 and 2014 and failed to address the staffing issues, failed to address the very important sector which is long-term care.

1110

We are putting forward a staffing plan. We are committed to making sure that we modernize and repair and advance long-term care—\$1.9 billion through our staffing plan, 27,000 PSWs, RNs and RPNs. We are well on our way to addressing the long-standing crisis that was left behind by the previous government.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: We often hear from this minister how her heart goes out to the loved ones who have lost their vulnerable in long-term care. Well, I hope today you have a change of heart and you force your cabinet ministers to pass this bill.

One of the Conservatives' biggest failures during this crisis has been in long-term care. Thousands of loved ones are no longer with us because this government failed to invest in long-term care.

The government said they'd do anything they could. "Everything is on the table," said the Premier. But when it came time to vote on concrete steps that would and could have passed today, improvements that would have made life better for thousands of families, this government said no.

Why won't the Premier do the right thing and pass Bill 13 today?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

When the NDP, when the previous government had an opportunity to put the measures in place to make sure we had a solid, resident-centred long-term-care system, they did not.

Unlike what the member opposite is putting forward, we have a plan for staffing, we have a plan to modernize long-term care: up to \$1.9 billion annually by 2024-25 to create 27,000 new positions for PSWs, RNs and RPNs.

The promises by previous governments, propped up by the NDP, are—we have a littered landscape of reports that have landed in the shredder, and not a shred of improvement was done in long-term care.

A Conservative government will be the one to repair, rebuild and advance long-term care, unlike the member opposite's plan—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. The next question.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, my question is for the Premier.

The federal sick leave benefit falls far short of what is needed to keep workplaces safe. That's why we're seeing so many outbreaks in essential workplaces. That's why communities with essential workers are three times more likely to have COVID-19 cases than communities without essential workers. That is why paid sick leave is good for business and essential to keeping our economy and schools open.

Will the Premier admit that the federal sick leave benefit falls far short of what is needed and actually work with us to pass a paid sick leave bill that works for Ontarians?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Labour to respond.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I thank the member opposite for this question.

Mr. Speaker, the very first piece of legislation that we passed when COVID-19 hit Ontario was for job-protected leave, so any worker who's in isolation, in quarantine, if you're a mom or a dad who had to stay home because you're looking after a son or a daughter because of the disruptions in the education system—you couldn't be fired

for that. And we went even further. We eliminated the need for sick notes.

Back in the summer, thanks to the leadership of Premier Ford and other provincial and territorial leaders, they signed an agreement with the Prime Minister—two weeks of paid sick days are available to the working people here in Ontario. I'm proud to report to the House today that over 110,000 workers here in Ontario are now receiving sick day pay through the federal government. We worked with the federal government to raise awareness of this program and to ensure that people get paid more quickly. In fact, 80% of the payouts are being done within three days.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, in the same way that the government is dragging its feet on delivering paid sick leave that actually works, they've also been dragging their feet on deploying rapid testing. After months of asking for rapid testing and reports revealing that the government wasn't rolling them out, they finally announced last Friday that we would start seeing the deployment of rapid testing. But this is cold comfort for long-term-care homes that do not have the staffing needed to administer rapid tests.

Speaker, will the Premier provide the funding that long-term-care homes need to administer rapid testing to keep our workplaces safe and our loved ones safe?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Long-Term Care.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. The rapid tests are another layer. In fact, in wave 1, our government was pushing for rapid tests, but we could not get them because they were not available through Health Canada yet. We were well ahead. In wave 2, the Premier pushed, and so did I, to make sure we could get those rapid tests out to our long-term-care homes as another measure.

At this point, we have over a million rapid tests that have gone out to our long-term-care homes—1,213,140 to over 500 homes. We were required to do a pilot, which we did, to be cautious of what impact these might have. We made sure to understand the implications and the use of rapid tests.

So this has been ongoing. We are making sure we support our homes. Over \$1.38 billion has gone to our homes to support them in prevention and containment, including other measures for staffing. This is unprecedented, the support that these homes are receiving. The rapid tests—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

The next question.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Ms. Donna Skelly: Students attend post-secondary institutions to create a better and brighter future for themselves. They should be focused on their grades and maturing, not worrying about acts of sexual violence

happening to them. But sadly, they continue to experience sexual violence, harassment and other forms of violence on campus. What's even worse: Many students feel that their allegations won't be taken seriously. This allows predators to continue what they are doing without any fear of discipline.

Speaker, I know our government has made a commitment to help keep our communities in Ontario healthy and safe. Can the Minister of Children and Women's Issues explain to the members of the Legislature how the government is keeping that commitment and making Ontario's campuses a safer place for students?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook for that important question. Our government has zero tolerance for acts of sexual violence or other forms of violence in our communities. We believe that students should never be afraid to come forward if they are unfortunately victim to one of these horrific incidents.

It was in 2019 that our government required every publicly assisted college or university to report to its board of governors about the number of reports of sexual violence by students and supports provided to the survivors of these heinous acts. In addition, we've doubled our investment to \$6 million for the Campus Safety Grant.

In January, I was pleased to announce with the Minister of Colleges and Universities that we are proposing changes to the sexual violence policies on campus. These changes will keep institutions focused on the issue of sexual assault and finding the perpetrator instead of on irrelevant questioning, like sexual history or whether any school policies were broken by the individual coming forward. Our hope is that, through these proposed changes, students will feel confident coming forward so that they are able to heal and the perpetrators are held accountable.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. I know students and families will be pleased to hear that we are continuing to fulfil our commitment of creating safe learning environments for all students. I'm especially pleased to see the additional funding to support the prevention of sexual violence, especially against young women, as they are the most common victims; and I'm glad this includes institutions in the city of Hamilton as well, such as McMaster University.

Speaker, these are significant changes to sexual violence and harassment policies at our post-secondary institutions. I'm happy to see that the government is prioritizing the health and safety of all students. I also believe it is imperative that we get more people's—especially students'—perspectives on this issue to ensure we are making a lasting, positive change.

Can the minister please expand on how these regulations will support survivors and how Ontarians can share their thoughts on the proposed regulation?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The response? The parliamentary assistant, the member for Northumberland–Peterborough South.

Mr. David Piccini: As of now, these proposed changes would make Ontario one of the only Canadian jurisdictions with these protections specifically outlined in legislation or in regulation. It's also important to note that there are policies in place to let those affected know that they can come forward without fear of reprisal, as my colleague mentioned.

1120

Mr. Speaker, we hope these amendments will help encourage those who want to come forward, to come forward, and reduce retraumatization and encourage those survivors to come forward, as we've said. These changes are a direct result of real consultations that we've had with students, and I'd like to highlight and thank a recent conversation I had with the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, and specifically their president, Julia Pereira. Thank you for coming forward. Thank you for bringing the voices forward for those who are voiceless.

We're going to continue to consult with student groups, Mr. Speaker, and we would welcome anyone to provide their feedback on these consultations, which will occur until March—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. The next question.

SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Premier. On Saturday, I hosted a virtual town hall with families, essential caregivers and experts from all over Ontario. I heard first-hand stories about the emotional, physical and mental impact that many individuals have suffered from forced isolation during this pandemic. But sadly, some residents in long-term care, group homes, retirement homes, hospitals and others still continue to be denied meaningful, consistent access to their essential caregivers.

Speaker, it is well known that denying residents in congregate care their right to meaningful access to their essential caregivers is incredibly harmful, so I ask the Premier this: Why did his government block passage of my bill, the More Than a Visitor Act, just moments ago and stop it from becoming law quickly?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services to respond.

Hon. Todd Smith: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to respond to the question from the member opposite here this morning. I want to remind the member that our government took immediate action to ensure that we were protecting the province's most vulnerable people, and that includes in the settings that she described, and we did that very quickly. In the developmental services sector that I'm responsible for, we brought in the COVID-19 Action Plan for Vulnerable People. That was intended to stop COVID-19 at the door.

I want to give a big shout-out, actually, to those working in the developmental services sector for the great work that they've been doing throughout the pandemic. It's been almost a year now, and they've done impeccable

work in these facilities, ensuring that there's enhanced screening so that we're stopping COVID-19 at the door, proper PPE usage, and then managing outbreaks when they do happen, Mr. Speaker. We've also included \$40 million in the residential relief fund and I know that's been extremely well received.

At the same time, we're making sure that when it comes to visitors to these homes, we're working with the local medical officers of health in the region to ensure that we're keeping those individuals safe inside.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'll just remind the minister that, while he was posting pictures of his family skating yesterday on Family Day, there are mothers who cannot see their children in group homes because they are locked out. Congregate care residents have waited for too long, with much uncertainty and incredible anguish, wondering when they will have meaningful access to their essential caregivers, their loved ones.

I've heard from mothers who haven't been able to see their child who has a disability and lives in a group home; sons and daughters that haven't held their elderly parent's hand to comfort them in months. Some people are dying alone, denied the love of family and the peaceful passing that we all hope for. Some caregivers have been locked out of their loved one's residence for almost a full year now. Congregate care settings across the province have vastly different policies, some even within the same boundaries. The current government guidance isn't working. It's not enforceable. There needs to be legislation.

Speaker, my question is, why won't the Premier pass the More Than a Visitor Act today, to end this harmful forced isolation and reunite these families?

Hon. Todd Smith: I hope that everybody did have a happy Family Day yesterday. I want to thank the member opposite for bringing the legislation forward. I was pleased to see that it did pass second reading. I can assure the member that we're continuing to work with all of our partners in the sector. Keep in mind that we're dealing with very, very different-sized homes here. Some of them have four or five residents; some of them have 45 residents, Mr. Speaker. There are over 4,000 group homes in the province of Ontario. All of them have special treatments. Some of them have very frail individuals inside; some of them don't. So we're working with our partners in the sector, and I know that when I speak to our partners in the sector, they're very appreciative of the resources that we're providing as the government of Ontario and also the guidance that we're providing as the government of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, we're continuing to respond to the risk of community transmission presented by COVID-19 by implementing increased precautions when necessary, including visitor restrictions in congregate care settings. As I say, working with the local public health units, the medical officer of health—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The next question. The member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker, and happy new year.

Speaker, my question is to the Premier. The government is hoarding \$4 billion in standard contingency funds, with just six weeks left to the fiscal year-end. Last week, the FAO Economic and Budget Outlook showed that ballooning contingency funds this close to the end of the fiscal year serves only one purpose, and that is to reduce the deficit when it remains unspent.

Speaker, through you to the minister: With the need to invest in public health, staffing for long-term care, schools and paid sick days for people at high risk of COVID-19 in Ontario, why is this government continuing to hoard all these funds, instead of giving people the support that they need now?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The Minister of Finance and President of the Treasury Board.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Mr. Speaker, through you to the member opposite: Every quarter, this member opposite gets up and says that there is a secret stash of money. The evidence would show otherwise. We have increased the funding for the people of Ontario by \$25 billion over last year. Mr. Speaker, last Wednesday I got up in front of the press and said the \$13.3 billion that had been set aside has been fully allocated.

The Premier has been very clear, I've been very clear, and everyone on this side of the House has been very clear—and parts of that side too—that we will spend whatever it takes to protect the lives and livelihoods of every Ontarian. We won't stop doing that. That's why we continue to make sure that we allocate and spend the money. Every quarter the member opposite sees that that's what we've done.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Back to the minister: The FAO does not agree, and more importantly, Ontarians don't believe it. Allocation does not mean spending.

So, if all the contingency funds have been spent and the cupboard, as you say, is now bare, how much of the \$2.1 billion announced last week is being spent to increase our lab testing capacity? And how many new contact tracers have you hired? Now, with the faster-moving variant expected to spread across Ontario, we are on a collision course for a third wave and perhaps a further lockdown. COVID-19 community spread is high in places like Scarborough, Mississauga, Brampton and Windsor. New variants are expected to dominate fast. Ontarians are worried that we are no longer in a continuous pandemic, that we are in a new virus season.

Will the minister tell us how much of the \$2 billion is being spent on genomics testing—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you.

The Minister of Finance to reply.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that question. I think the member opposite just answered

the question. Isn't it the prudent and wise thing to do to set aside some money in the fourth quarter for things like the third wave?

Let me go to the facts, Mr. Speaker, because the facts matter and the numbers matter. In the third quarter, which we just ended, we had set aside some money, and do you know what happened? The second wave. Let's take a look at where some of that money was spent:

—\$869 million for additional funding for hospitals;

—purchases of PPE: \$609 million;

—long-term care and our response: an additional \$398 million; and

—\$1.4 billion for small businesses who are suffering and struggling through this.

Thank goodness, Mr. Speaker, that we set aside some money and we spent that money to protect the lives and livelihoods of the people of this province.

LONG-TERM CARE

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is for the Premier. Last week, the Hamilton Spectator reported that it has been over two years that any Hamilton long-term-care home had a comprehensive inspection. This is a massive failure in keeping long-term-care residents safe. I saw this failure first-hand in my riding of Hamilton Mountain at Grace Villa nursing home, where poor management led to over 230 cases of COVID-19 and 44 deaths.

Will the Premier acknowledge that cancelling quality inspections was a horrible mistake that has only made the COVID-19 pandemic worse and led to preventable illness and deaths?

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Long-Term Care.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Everyone at Grace Villa has been in our thoughts. We've been very concerned about homes that are affected.

When we look at the recommendations from the Auditor General's report in 2015, that was because there were 8,000 complaints or incidents that had not been acted upon. That's why the Auditor General provided recommendations in her 2015 report. That's why we take action to not only do unannounced regular inspections, but we needed to clear 8,000 incident cases and complaints that had not been addressed by the previous government, also supported by your party.

It was the former government that promised comprehensive inspections for every home. But after three years, they'd only done 123 homes. Five years after that, they hadn't—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Miss Monique Taylor: This government has been in power for over two years and Grace Villa hasn't had an inspection since November 2018. That's your problem, Minister, not anybody else's—yours.

This government's horrific failure to protect—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Please make your comments through the Chair. I recognize the member for Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: Certainly, Speaker. This government's horrific failure to protect the residents of long-term-care homes is now common knowledge. One day before the province finally intervened at Grace Villa, a provincial inspector went into the home to respond to a complaint. Somehow, the inspector found nothing wrong. The very next day, the crisis in the home was so bad that Hamilton Health Sciences had to take over. Workers described it as a war zone, yet the province found nothing, Speaker—nothing.

I was shocked to learn that Grace Villa's last comprehensive inspection was back in 2018. Why has the Premier allowed his government to give up responsibility to ensure that Ontario's long-term-care homes provide safe and high-quality care?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite again for the question.

There is a zero tolerance for non-compliance. That's why we have our long-term-care inspectors and public health inspectors, and that's why our outbreak definition has the lowest threshold. One case of a staff member self-isolating at home is the threshold so that we can get public health into our long-term-care homes, rally the rapid response teams from our hospitals and put every measure in place.

The speed with which COVID moves is unparalleled, never been seen before in this country or around the world. Our inspectors are in contact with the homes on a daily basis and all measures are put in place to support our homes. If we look at what has been done to address the long-standing issues of the backlog, 8,000 inspections delayed under the previous government—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Next question.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. Stephen Blais: It's nice to be back. My question is for the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, everyone will remember that one of the first things this government did upon taking office was to eliminate guaranteed paid sick days. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted for all of us just how precarious it is to be an essential worker without the protection of paid sick leave. Too many Ontarians face the choice between going to work symptomatic or not, the choice between losing a paycheque or putting food on their table or a roof over their family's heads.

Since March of last year, Ontario Liberals have called on the government to bring back the guaranteed paid sick leave that they cancelled. The government's own medical experts agree that ensuring all Ontarians are protected with paid sick leave is one of the most important measures not currently in place here in Ontario. Mr. Speaker, when will the government listen to their own medical experts and institute guaranteed paid sick leave for all Ontarians?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Labour.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: The very first measure that this government took—the very first piece of action—was job-protected leave for every man and woman who go to work every day in the province of Ontario. In fact, Mr. Speaker, if you're home in self-isolation, in quarantine, if you're a mom or a dad staying at home to look after a son or a daughter, you can't be fired in Ontario. I'm proud to say that we were the first jurisdiction in North America to bring forward such progressive legislation.

In fact, we went further. We eliminated the need for sick notes here in the province of Ontario. And as I said earlier, the Premier, with all the other Premiers and territorial leaders, worked with the Prime Minister of Canada to ensure that there were two weeks of paid sick days for workers in this province and for every worker across the country. In fact, over 110,000 workers today in Ontario have either received the federal benefit or have applied for it, and we're going to continue to work with the federal government to improve the program, not duplicate it.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Mr. Stephen Blais: My supplemental is for the Premier. Everyone knows there's a difference between a federal benefit you apply for and have to wait for, and continuing to get your paycheque on schedule.

The Conservatives have often enjoyed playing political ping-pong with the federal government, but it's long past time that they took leadership and showed leadership to Ontarians on this issue. Residents of Ontario are tired of the back-and-forth. Whether it's rapid testing or vaccine supply or paid sick days, all this government knows how to do is blame and look to the federal government for the answers.

The government's own medical experts agree that guaranteed paid sick days will help curb the virus. Mayors, councils and public health authorities across the province have endorsed the plan for paid sick days here in Ontario.

Will the government show leadership and lead again and guarantee 10 paid sick days for every Ontario resident today?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Our Premier ensured there were two weeks of paid sick days for every single worker in the province of Ontario. And, Mr. Speaker, I continue to consult and talk to workers right across this province. That's why when we heard a number of weeks ago that it was taking up to two weeks to get this benefit, I worked with my colleague Minister Qualtrough, the federal minister responsible for this program. To her credit, they moved: 80% of payments are now directly deposited into workers' bank accounts within three days. I think that's progress.

It's up to every elected official in the province of Ontario, every municipal leader and every federal member to raise awareness of this program. It's up to all of us to let every single worker in this province know that there is paid sick leave available to them.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There being no deferred votes or any further business this morning, this House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1137 to 1500.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received a report on intended appointments dated February 16, 2021, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 111(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Pursuant to the order of the House of July 15, 2020, I beg leave to present the third interim report of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Kramp presents the committee's report. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I'm pleased to chair this committee during these rather tumultuous times of COVID-19—it is the responsibility that all sides of the House share.

Report presented.

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Pursuant to the order of the House of July 15, 2020, I beg leave to present the fourth interim report of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Kramp presents the committee's report. Does the member wish to make a brief statement? Okay. Thank you.

Report presented.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

NO COVID-19 EVICTIONS ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 INTERDISANT LES EXPULSIONS PENDANT LA COVID-19

Ms. Morrison moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 244, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 with respect to evictions during the COVID-19 pandemic / Projet de loi 244, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006

sur la location à usage d'habitation à l'égard des expulsions pendant la pandémie de COVID-19.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'd like to invite the member for Toronto Centre to briefly explain her bill, if she chooses to do so.

Ms. Suze Morrison: The bill amends the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006, to add a new section 7.1. Subsection 7.1(1) provides limitations on issuing and enforcing eviction orders under the act and writs of possession during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Subsection 7.1(2) provides for the circumstances in which subsection 7.1(1) does not apply. Subsection 7.1(4) provides a definition of the COVID-19 pandemic period.

ACCELERATING ACCESS TO JUSTICE ACT, 2021 LOI DE 2021 VISANT À ACCÉLÉRER L'ACCÈS À LA JUSTICE

Mr. Downey moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 245, An Act to amend and repeal various statutes, to revoke various regulations and to enact the Ontario Land Tribunal Act, 2021 / Projet de loi 245, Loi modifiant et abrogeant diverses lois, abrogeant divers règlements et édictant la Loi de 2021 sur le Tribunal ontarien de l'aménagement du territoire.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the Attorney General care to explain his bill?

Hon. Doug Downey: The recovery of Ontario's communities from COVID-19 requires a strong justice system that works as well as it can to help people resolve their legal matters with fewer obstacles and delays. The Accelerating Access to Justice Act, 2021, would, if passed, improve access to justice for Ontarians across the system, notably by modernizing processes and breaking down barriers in the province's courts, tribunals, estates law, family and child protection sectors.

SAFER SCHOOL BUSES ACT, 2021 LOI DE 2021 POUR DES AUTOBUS SCOLAIRES PLUS SÉCURITAIRES

Mr. Harris moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 246, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act / Projet de loi 246, Loi modifiant le Code de la route.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member for Kitchener–Conestoga care to explain his bill?

Mr. Mike Harris: I'm pleased to rise today to introduce the Safer School Buses Act. The bill amends the

Highway Traffic Act to require school buses manufactured on or after January 1, 2005, to be equipped with four overhead amber signal lights and four overhead red signal lights.

This amendment requires school bus drivers to then use those amber signal lights when approaching a stop and then activate the red signal lights when the bus is stopped and actuate the stop arm.

Mr. Speaker, this is something that is long overdue here in Ontario, and I'm very, very pleased to introduce this act.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I'm seeking unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding notice for private members' public business and respecting the order for second reading of a private member's public bill.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Khanjin is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion without notice regarding notice for private members' public business and respecting the order for second reading of a private member's bill. Agreed? Agreed.

Once again, I'll recognize the member for Barrie—Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 101(f), notice be waived for the following ballot items in order of precedence for private members' public business:

—ballot item number 46, standing in the name of Ms. Morrison;

—ballot item number 49, standing in the name of Ms. Tangri;

—ballot item number 51 standing in the name of Mr. Hassan;

—ballot item number 52, standing in the name of Ms. Stiles;

—ballot item number 53, standing in the name of Mr. Kanapathi;

—ballot item number 54, standing in the name of Mr. Nicholls;

—ballot item number 57, standing in the name of Mr. Mantha;

—ballot item number 58, standing in the name of Ms. Sattler; and

—ballot item number 60, standing in the name of Mr. Glover;

And that, notwithstanding standing orders 74(a) and 101(f), the order for second reading of Bill 244, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 with respect to evictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, standing in the name of the member for Toronto Centre, may be called today during private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Khanjin has moved that, notwithstanding standing order 101(f), notice be—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Dispense? Dispense. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I move that the following changes be made to the membership of the following committees:

On the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills, Mr. Kanapathi replaces Mr. Anand, Ms. Wai replaces Mr. Barrett, Mr. Ke replaces Mr. Crawford, and Mr. Roberts replaces Ms. Martow; and

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On the Standing Committee on Social Policy, Ms. Karpoche replaces Mr. Kernaghan and Mr. Anand be added; and

On the Standing Committee on Estimates, Mr. Barrett replaces Ms. Khanjin and Ms. Armstrong replaces Mr. Gates; and

On the Standing Committee on General Government, Mr. Crawford replaces Mr. Kramp, Ms. Andrew replaces Ms. Bell and Mr. Bourgouin replaces Ms. Stevens; and

On the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, Mr. Kramp replaces Mr. Baber; and

On the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, Ms. Fife replaces Ms. Shaw; and

On the Standing Committee on Government Agencies, Mr. Babikian replaces Ms. Tangri, Mr. Bisson replaces Mr. Vanthof and Mr. Gates replaces Mr. Natyshak; and

On the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Mantha replaces Ms. Singh, Brampton Centre; and

On the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Mr. Cuzzetto replaces Mr. Cho, Willowdale, Mr. Natyshak replaces Ms. Fife and Ms. Bell replaces Ms. Andrew.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Khanjin has moved that the following changes be made to the membership of the following committees—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Dispense? Dispense. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it reads as follows:

“Whereas there is overwhelming evidence to show that paid sick leave significantly reduces the spread of

infectious disease, promotes preventive health care and reduces health care system costs; and

“Whereas 60% of Ontario workers do not have access to paid sick days, and therefore must sacrifice income to stay home if they are sick; and

“Whereas low-wage and precarious workers who can least afford to miss pay are the most likely to be denied paid sick days; and

“Whereas employers benefit when sick workers can afford to stay home, limiting the spread of illness to co-workers and customers, and allowing workers to recover faster; and

“Whereas during an infectious disease emergency, it is unreasonable and dangerous to public health to make workers choose between protecting their communities and providing for their families; and

“Whereas mandating employers to provide paid sick leave through the Employment Standards Act ensures that workers have seamless, uninterrupted access to their pay; and

“Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic has left many small businesses hanging by a thread, and transitional financial support will help these businesses to pay for sick leave for their employees during the pandemic;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately pass the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act to provide workers with 10 permanent sick days (seven of which are paid) without the requirement for doctors’ notes, and an additional 14 paid sick days during an infectious disease emergency, so they can follow public health advice and keep our workplaces and our communities safe.”

I fully support this petition, affix my name and will give it to the table.

FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Mr. Mike Harris: I know I’ve read this petition in the Ontario Legislature before, but I feel this petition is very important.

“Whereas the ban on hunting and trapping in sections of Ontario to protect the eastern hybrid wolf was put in place without regard for the overall ecosystem;

“Whereas this ban has adversely affected the ability of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR), hunters and trappers to properly manage animal populations and Ontario’s ecosystem;

“Whereas this ban is no longer needed and is in fact causing more damage to Ontario’s ecosystem and increasing unnecessary encounters between wildlife and Ontarians;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry immediately lift the ban on hunting and trapping set in place to protect the eastern hybrid wolf.”

Once again, I will affix my signature to this petition and pass it off to one of our ushers.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Catherine Fife: I’d like to thank Pierce Family Vision for collecting these petitions for us.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government has underfunded optometric eye care for 30 years; and

“Whereas optometrists now subsidize the delivery of OHIP-covered eye care by \$173 million a year; and

“Whereas COVID-19 forced optometrists to close their doors, resulting in a 75%-plus drop in revenue; and

“Whereas optometrists will see patient volumes reduced between 40% and 60%, resulting in more than two million comprehensive eye exams being wiped out over the next 12 months; and

“Whereas communities across Ontario are in danger of losing access to optometric care;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately establish a timetable and a process for renewed negotiations concerning optometry fees.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my signature and give it to the House table.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I am proud to bring a petition on behalf of Colleen and Derrick of Muddy Paws in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood. This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act of January 1, 2020, insists basic standards of care that apply to all animals under the act should be observed at all times, including requirements for ‘adequate and appropriate food, water, medical attention and care’;

“Whereas section 13.1 of the PAWS Act states that ‘every person who owns or has custody or care of an animal shall comply with the standards of care and administrative requirements with respect to every animal that the person owns or has custody or care of’;

“Whereas Douglas R. Ford and his government legislate that pet grooming is not essential during either provincial lockdown, the latest commencing December 26, 2020, but veterinarian services are, so long as they are provided in a curbside/contactless manner;

“Whereas no proven COVID-19 transmission risks are posed to human beings from animals or from curbside/contactless pet grooming services provided by a licensed and trained pet groomer;

“Whereas pet groomers, prior to COVID-19, regularly used PPE to protect themselves from dirt, bacteria and fur, and are fully prepared to observe curbside/contactless protocol to safely take in, sanitize, groom, sanitize and return animals to pet owners to protect all parties involved;

“We, the undersigned, petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to forthwith deem all pet grooming services as an essential service during all provincial lockdowns in the province of Ontario, and allow

curbside/contactless pet grooming without restriction on the quantity of sanitized pets in a facility for the safety, well-being, and care of animals per the PAWS Act of January 1, 2020.”

Mr. Speaker, I will sign this petition as I fully support it.

VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARDS

Mr. Dave Smith: “Recognize Our Cadets by Passing the Cadet Citizenship Recognition Act, 2020.

“To the Legislature Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas army, sea and air cadets” represent “some of the best of our youth; and

“Whereas the young men and women of Canada’s cadets volunteer and serve their communities with honour and distinction; and

“Whereas their development and service within our community are admirable and should be emulated; and

“Whereas their teamwork, dedication, and discipline are qualities worthy of recognition; and

“Whereas the Cadet Citizenship Recognition Act, if passed, would create an annual award for a nominated cadet from within each local cadet corps to celebrate their remarkable acts of citizenship;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario vote on and pass the Cadet Citizenship Recognition Act.”

I fully endorse this petition, will sign my name to it and send it to the table.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas warehouses, food processing plants, and other high-risk workplaces have experienced continued outbreaks during the COVID-19 pandemic; and

“Whereas the essential workers at these workplaces play a crucial role in ensuring Ontarians are able to put food on the table and access basic needs; and

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“Whereas these workers have been largely ignored by this government during the COVID-19 pandemic; and

“Whereas keeping these workers safe will help to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in our communities at large;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to implement a safe workplaces plan that will guarantee 10 paid sick days for workers, mandate increased workplace inspections with higher penalties for non-compliance with public health guidelines, mandate that workplaces provide proper PPE for all staff and provide space for meals and breaks that enable physical distancing, provide immediate funding to increase rapid testing, and outline a robust vaccination rollout strategy for high-risk workplaces.”

I support this petition, will sign it and send it to the table, Speaker.

FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Ms. Donna Skelly: I’m happy to stand here today to present a petition to protect the eastern hybrid wolf.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the ban on hunting and trapping in sections of Ontario to protect the eastern hybrid wolf was put in place without regard for the overall ecosystem;

“Whereas this ban has adversely affected the ability of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR), hunters and trappers to properly manage animal populations and Ontario’s ecosystem;

“Whereas this ban is no longer needed and is in fact causing more damage to Ontario’s ecosystem and increasing unnecessary encounters between wildlife and Ontarians;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry immediately lift the ban on hunting and trapping set in place to protect the eastern hybrid wolf.”

I support this petition and will affix my signature and hand it to the appropriate usher.

WATER EXTRACTION

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario entitled “Protect Water as a Public Good.

“Whereas groundwater is a public good, not a commodity; and

“Whereas the United Nations recognizes access to clean drinking water as a human right; and

“Whereas local ecosystems must be preserved for the well-being of future generations; and

“Whereas the duty to consult Indigenous communities regarding water-taking within traditional territories is often neglected, resulting in a disproportionate burden on systemically marginalized communities during a period of reconciliation; and

“Whereas a poll commissioned by the Wellington Water Watchers found that two thirds of respondents support phasing out bottled water in Ontario over the course of a decade; and

“Whereas a trend towards prioritizing the expansion of for-profit water bottling corporations over the needs of municipalities will negatively impact Ontario’s growing communities;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks to prioritize public ownership and control of water over corporate interests.”

I fully support this petition, affix my signature and send it to the table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 16, 2021, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 238, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 238, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I recognize the member from Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate it.

First of all, I'm going to start by offering my condolences to all the people who have lost their lives: essential workers, people in long-term-care facilities, retirement homes and in our hospitals. You can't talk about workers' health and safety without talking about people who have lost their lives to this terrible, terrible disease.

I will talk about Niagara. Our doctor was threatened on the weekend because he left us in grey. We've had 360 deaths in Niagara, 38 active outbreaks, and over a period of seven days, we had one person losing their life every 3.5 hours.

So it's tough when you stand up here and talk about health and safety and I see what's in this bill. We could have put so much more in the bill, but we decided not to. It wasn't me that decided not to; obviously, it was the government.

I've been given the opportunity to speak for an hour on health and safety. Here's the whole bill. I want you to take a look at it. This is the whole bill on health and safety, after what we've gone through since we left here on December 5. As I watched in my community, quite frankly—and I may get emotional. I watched grandmothers, grandfathers, moms and dads die within days from COVID-19. We had outbreaks in a lot of our long-term-care facilities, our retirement homes, and that went right across the province. It wasn't just in Niagara. The families would call my office and tell me what was going on in these facilities—10 months later, no PPE; staffing, staffing, staffing. I stood up here in November, October, until I was blue in the face—not party blue, just blue in the face—and told you we needed staffing. And what did the government say? Mr. Speaker, help me out here. Oh, you've got a mask on, so you might not be able to speak right now.

What did you say? "We're putting an iron ring around long-term care." That never happened. You know it didn't happen. What did happen is, you made a decision, for whatever reason, quite frankly, to wait for the vaccines.

The vaccines were really your iron ring. As a matter of fact, the Minister of Health said that. But the vaccines didn't come quickly enough, and when they did—I believe it was December 17—you didn't really get them into anybody's arms until after Christmas, probably into January. I'll talk more about the vaccines around my area.

I'm going to start my speech—like I said, I've got an hour. I guess I can't say that—but I did listen to the Minister of Labour this morning for his speech for an hour.

It's always a pleasure to rise to speak in this House, to speak on Bill 238, Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act. This may look like a straightforward bill that discusses WSIB premiums and nothing more. However, during my time today, I want to highlight exactly what it means for this government to prioritize this bill and what's missing from it.

I think to understand this bill we need to understand the context of the situation we're in today, and what could have been and should have been a priority to this government.

This is the first week this Legislature has sat since December, even though we asked, "Bring us back. Let's have the Legislature sit. Let's talk about the issues that are facing Ontarians." They decided not to do that. This is the first bill coming forward.

That's right—we're facing a public health emergency, an economic meltdown for business owners and a crisis with workers' health and safety. Thousands of people living in long-term-care homes have died. Workers have died, and thousands have become sick with COVID-19 in the workplace. We've seen hospitals over capacity, dealing with COVID-19 outbreaks inside their walls—some stretched even thinner while managing long-term-care homes, because greedy corporations put profit over the people they are trusted to care for.

Mr. Speaker, I know your hospital had a lot of issues, too, down your way in Ontario.

This government rushed through a bill called Bill 218 before this House rose to protect themselves and their friends that run these for-profit homes that saw the largest and deadliest COVID-19 outbreaks.

They took away the meagre paid sick days that were available for workers, and they pass the buck when health experts tell them that paid sick days will save lives as we fight this deadly virus—they will save lives; paid sick days. I thought that's what our job was, collectively.

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Then they shut down the Legislature for over two months—that's right; during a pandemic.

While the Premier and his Conservative government shut the Legislature down for those two and a half months, health care workers have been struggling with burnout and trauma. They're working long shifts days on end. They aren't getting vacation time because the Conservative government took that away in Bill 195. Part-time front-line workers are afraid to file for WSIB. When workers have raised health and safety concerns with the Ministry of Labour, they have upheld very few, if any at all. And we saw that with a well-done article in the Star, when they

had 31,500 inspections—I'm going off the top of my head—and they only issued two fines: one to a teacher for not wearing a mask; and one to a corporation, but I can't remember that one. That was out of 31,000 inspections.

In Niagara, we have not been spared by the tragedy of this pandemic. Since Christmas, we have witnessed death on a scale in our community I can't ever recall. Quite frankly, it kept me up at night.

PSWs, nurses and staff have been on the front lines of this pandemic in our long-term-care homes and have witnessed the death and despair. They put their own health on the line to make tremendous sacrifices to contain the spread and protect our loved ones—all to face disregard from this government.

As I will state throughout this speech, front-line health care workers saw their pandemic pay delayed, had to isolate without pay and saw their WSIB claims denied by this government. It's not right. You can't call them heroes and then have them go through that, especially when they've been subject to so much loss and heartbreak in their workplace.

At the peak of the second wave, we were facing a death in Niagara—listen to this; I don't know if your communities were like this—every 3.5 hours. It was a family member, a loved one—a parent, a grandparent, an aunt, an uncle—every 3.5 hours. The mistakes that this government made, the lessons they refuse to learn—the lives lost in Niagara are a tragedy.

This government has abandoned the heroes who have stood on the front lines facing this every day in Niagara and right across the province of Ontario.

Prioritizing this legislation is another slap in the face for those heroes in Niagara and right across Ontario.

I'll hold the bill up again. Here it is. Two months—I know you can't do that; I apologize, Mr. Speaker. I won't do it again. When you're off for two and a half months, sometimes you forget the rules because you're away so long.

All this requires our government to act quickly and alongside every party in this House to create solutions for the well-being of everyone in our province, not just their friends and well-connected insiders. Yet as we headed into the worst wave of death and infection since this crisis began, the Premier decided to shut down the House for the winter holidays. This is the first week since early December, like I just said, that the Premier allowed this Legislature to sit, so what the government puts forward, especially this week, matters greatly. People are watching what we're doing.

No politician should be taking a holiday during this crisis, and this House should have been opened so the people's representatives could do the job that we were all elected to do.

Interjections.

Mr. Wayne Gates: So they understand—maybe I didn't say that quite the way they'd like to hear it. I'm not saying you weren't doing good work in your community. That's not what I'm saying. All I'm saying is, we should

be sitting in this House, debating issues in the province of Ontario.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Order, please.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You guys should listen.

So now we're back and we got a chance to see the bills the government has decided they're going to prioritize. After seeing all the financial suffering and the deaths caused by COVID-19 during this long and cold winter, we have a chance to see what the government will use their precious time in this chamber to accomplish. Certainly, when we look at the area of health and safety, we can see there is an urgent need for action.

Mr. Speaker, we saw horrible things over the holidays that demanded legislative action—action we could not take because the Premier wouldn't let this House sit. During the holidays, we saw one of the greediest and vilest corporations on the planet, Amazon, exploit workers in this province.

I can't hold this up, but I have an article here that was done by Sara—I can't say her last name—again, in the Star. It's a great article on Amazon and how they're treating their workers right here, in the States and in Canada. They put workers at risk during the pandemic, and nothing was done to stop them. In the United States, it was a scandal when it was discovered that Amazon factory workers were injured at a higher rate than other workers at other facilities. Here in Canada, there are 15% more injuries than in America. Why is that? That is a scandal, and it has happened here in Ontario with the Conservative government's holiday break.

During the holiday break, Amazon was pushing its workers to work 60 hours a week. The company was doing everything they could to make it as hard as possible for workers to take a sick day. During the pandemic, they were working people to the bone in large, crowded warehouses and sending them back into our community.

Do you know who never went into lockdown? Does anybody know? Help me out here. Other side: Do you want to say it? You were screaming a few minutes ago; I'm trying to give you a chance. Amazon. Those factory workers continued to work hard around the clock, without benefits, without decent pay and, quite frankly, without respect or without sick pay.

I'm going to add a little bit to this. They sent a letter home to the employees and said, "If you're sick, don't come to work. But if you have perfect attendance from now until Christmas"—in the same letter—"we'll give you a \$1,000 bonus." They were sending this to people who are making minimum wage, who have no benefits, who have to take care of their family. Do you think that encourages them to stay home with no sick pay, when they get a bonus of \$1,000 for perfect attendance? It drove me nuts when I read that, because it's up in Peel region, it's up in the area where we have incredible COVID-19 death.

Right now, there's a union vote by Amazon workers in the United States. To those workers, I say that we support

you in your struggle to get rights in the workplace and get a union that will defend you.

To the workers at Amazon here, who are being exposed to some of the highest rates of workplace injuries in the field and are going without the respect of the company: I hope you consider following those workers in the States and joining a union. Amazon does not care about you. You see in this bill before the House today that you're not mentioned. This government doesn't care about workers. Neither Amazon nor the Premier is going to give you the pay you deserve and the respect you're entitled to. I hope you consider joining a union to get the respect that you deserve.

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, nowhere in this—I can't hold it up. Nowhere in this bill is the situation at Amazon fixed—nowhere, in a page and a half. What does this bill do? It actually gives employers like Amazon a break. I'll say that again, just in case they can't hear me. As you can see, nowhere in this bill is the situation at Amazon fixed. What it does do is it gives Amazon a break, one of the richest corporations in the world—not a break for the workers, but a break for Amazon.

There is no mistake about it: Our small and medium-sized businesses need breaks. I've been talking about that for the last six months. Amazon, Walmart, some of the richest people in the world—they don't need breaks; it's our small and locally owned businesses that do.

In Niagara, our locally owned businesses are suffering.

Your government won't lift a finger to help workers at Amazon. Throughout this pandemic, you have backroom meetings—and you haven't denied it; I'll give you some credit. The Premier has said he had a backroom meeting with the CEO of Walmart Canada—so he didn't deny it—but you don't care about the small and medium-sized businesses across the province that, quite frankly, were closed as Walmart was selling the same products. As they had to shut down and then mortgage their small business—some of them didn't survive, as we know. This bill was not aimed at them. To save them money, if you wanted to help them, if you were serious about that, then this bill would have given them an immediate freeze on their utility bills, a ban on all commercial evictions, grants and interest-free loans to any restaurant or business that even slightly faces debt or foreclosure. But of course, this bill does none of that. This is designed to do one thing: to help major employers.

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This is a fact that—you might want to hear this. Not a lot of people know this: WSIB premiums have fallen over 40% in the last few years because your government keeps putting forward bills to give major employers the biggest breaks possible, while workers—the same ones that they're talking about, how they care about workers who get injured on the job. Do you know what's happening to them, Mr. Speaker? They're living in poverty. Is that how we should treat injured workers in this province, one of the richest provinces in the country?

Mr. Speaker, if the government wanted to come back and rush through a WSIB bill, then why not create a bill

that would actually be helping by tearing down WSIB and replacing it with an organization that even cares slightly about workers? Why not pass legislation to bring the workers out of poverty who have been forced there by a broken board?

This could be a bill that gives employers a break and helps injured workers at the same time. Maybe somebody could yell out to me why they didn't do that. Doesn't that make sense, Mr. Speaker? You could help the employer, but you could also help the worker.

This government had a choice between helping injured workers in the workplace or giving Amazon and Walmart more financial breaks. Do you really think they need them?

Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 is as much a workplace illness as anything else. If you're working in a care home like Oakwood lodge in my riding—listen to this stat: A lot of people don't know this, but almost 100% of the staff and residents were infected in the 153-person home. They were exposed in the workplace to COVID-19. So almost 100% of the staff got sick with COVID-19, and 38 residents died. If you're one of the workers who remained working during the lockdown in this essential workplace, then you were exposed to a workplace hazard. We all understand that, those who are listening. If you were exposed to this hazard and you contracted COVID-19 in the workplace, then you should be able to access workplace benefits through WSIB. I think everybody would agree to that.

Right now in the province of Ontario, 819 workplace claims are pending regarding COVID-19 in the workplace—819. That means that 819 families are watching a loved one spend their time battling WSIB instead of focusing on their health.

Right now in our province, almost 2,000 COVID-19-related WSIB cases have been denied by WSIB—2,000. PSWs, nurses—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Paramedics.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Paramedics—they're in my speech later, though, just for the record. I didn't forget about them.

That sickens me. Unfortunately, it's par for the course for WSIB. As we all know, for anybody who has dealt with WSIB, it's deny, deny, deny—especially people who have been in a labour movement and supported labour all their lives, not johnny-come-latelies.

The minister must know these numbers. The minister must have these numbers readily available. So why on earth, after having shut down the Legislature for three months, would the first goal of the Minister of Labour be to rush through a bill that does nothing for those workers?

Solving this wouldn't be hard—I'm going to ask my colleagues on the other side to just listen to this part if you don't listen to any of it. Solving this wouldn't be hard. I have a bill before the House right now, Mr. Speaker, Bill 191. I have a copy here. I'm not going to hold it up, but I can get it to that side, if anybody would like to read it. I could walk you over a copy if you need it. You can steal the language out of my bill. Take all the credit; I don't

care. It's a simple bill. What Bill 191 does is, it forces the WSIB to adhere to the standard known as "presumptive coverage." What that means is that if a worker comes to the WSIB with a legitimate claim of having contracted COVID-19 in the workplace, the WSIB would have to presume that's true and give them benefits. But that's not what happened. Some 2,000 have been denied—2,000. It puts the responsibility on the WSIB to prove that the worker didn't catch COVID-19 in the workplace, not on the worker to try to prove that they did. That mechanism would allow workers to focus on their health instead of fighting the WSIB to provide evidence that they caught a severe, contagious virus in the workplace.

Mr. Speaker, I want you to imagine this. We have front-line workers, which you know—nurses, PSWs, paramedics, cleaning staff, grocery store workers. Every single day, they're in harm's way. Every day that they go to work, they're in harm's way. With the new variants that are around here, it may even get worse. Every single day, they face COVID-19, and they do it to keep our communities safe. And what does the minister do when he knows that the WSIB is fighting tooth and nail to get rid of their benefits? He does this, a page-and-a-half bill that doesn't address workers' needs in the province of Ontario. It's wrong. I don't know how you can sit over there and not say it's wrong. He sits back and watches the WSIB ruin these people's lives.

The minister knows that the cases are being suppressed in workplaces at alarming rates, and he does nothing. Despite having a bill that could easily fix this with a few amendments at committee, he won't do it—he won't add in the sections that help workers. That's who this minister is, and that's why this bill is flawed.

Mr. Speaker, you can see an example of this in Waterloo, where paramedics were denied WSIB coverage despite the fact that they were dealing with a COVID-19-positive patient. How does that happen? Our paramedics are picking up people with COVID-19 at long-term-care facilities, retirement homes in the community and they're taking them to the hospital. They get COVID-19, and guess what happens with the WSIB? They deny them—"You might have got it at Shoppers." That's what we're faced with, with workers, and that's why my bill is so important.

You can do it in this bill. By the looks of it, there's lots of room to add to the bill; I'm just guessing.

Imagine that: The WSIB is denying paramedics coverage, and the government is standing by and doing nothing. Paramedics are our front-line heroes, saving people's lives every day, just like firefighters and corrections officers. They deserve to be treated with respect. They should not have to spend their time fighting the WSIB for coverage when it's clear that they contracted the virus by providing care for those who are COVID-19-positive. This has happened in Niagara. I mentioned Waterloo because I know the case in Waterloo. I've met with my paramedics in Niagara, and it's the same thing.

In my office, I've been working with paramedics who contracted COVID-19 in the workplace and whose partner

is now on a ventilator, fighting for their life against this virus. If those workers are watching today, know that I care about you, that you're in our thoughts, and we're doing everything we can to get you the coverage you deserve for your hard work.

I want the opposition to hear that story. It's happening right across the province of Ontario. Every day, I listen. I watched that TV show at 1 o'clock almost every day when I was home for two and a half months—I forget what it was called—the Premier show? I'm not really sure what it was. Every day, they talked about heroes: "Heroes, heroes, heroes." And I agree with you; they are heroes. They're risking their life every single day for us, for our parents, our grandparents. But when they need us, we need to treat them like heroes, not tell them, "Go fight WSIB to prove that you got COVID-19 on the job."

I hope the minister will join me in saying that none of the workers I just mentioned should have to spend their time arguing with WSIB and feel they need to go to the press just to get help.

1550

When you call 911, it's a paramedic who shows up to save you. Any one of us may have to make a call some day to 911, and it will be a paramedic who will come. Now they need our help to fix this broken system. They're not asking much. Mr. Speaker, do you think they're asking much? I don't think anybody here does. What about the other side? They're asking you to take care of them. They're doing the job they love. They love saving lives. But when they need us, we have to be there for them.

The bill before us does nothing for those paramedics, does nothing for the future workers in the same spot. We see the light at the end of this tunnel, but it's not over yet. The minister can stop this pain and suffering now by amending this bill and including presumptive coverage. I hope the minister will stand up today and do that, because so far, the minister hasn't said a word about this.

Mr. Speaker, none of this should come as a surprise. If you listen to the Minister of Labour these days, you might mistakenly think, by his words, that he's a friend of workers and he's a friend of unions. I hope none of these people will forget the comments this minister made, before he was in government—you may remember them—in the Legislature that are on the record for all to see. One of the nice things about Hansard: You can go look it up three or four years later—six years later, if you're here long enough. Lucky for me, I've been here longer than six years. He referred to electrical workers as being beholden to their union bosses. I'm old, so I've been in the labour movement for 40 years—elected. I was never a union boss, but I can tell you what the union was able to do for me: get me fair wages, fair benefits, a pension plan. I wasn't a boss. Why do they call them bosses? Because they try to run them down.

I know electrical workers in my riding are doing tough work in the worst conditions right now. They turn to the union for work and for health and safety. They're just not mindless servants like the minister thinks; they're elected. They elected their leaders. That's the one thing that people

might not understand in the labour movement. I was elected for close to 30 years, maybe—whatever it was. Every three years, I had to face the membership. I had to get elected every three years. It's the same with elections. They have elections. They elect their leaders. They elect their leaders because they respect them. They know they're going to do what's in the best interest of the workers, and they will be able to negotiate with management—in this case, the way they do their work. They're negotiating for work so it's fair and equitable.

The minister says that he cares about workers in the public service, yet here's what he had to say about elected leaders in this very chamber. He said, "Minister, over those same 10 years, OPSEU elitist Warren 'Smokey' Thomas has forcibly extracted over \$500 million in annual dues from his membership." Smokey took \$500 million from his membership; that's what he was saying. That's not what we do with our union dues. Why does your government choose to stand and say stuff like that about Smokey?

A few days before that, he said again, "When will Ontario move forward, stop standing with union" leaders "like Smokey Thomas...?"

This is the guy who is now saying that he's a friend of labour, as he attacks their leadership. Do you know who OPSEU represents? OPSEU—who this minister thinks the elitists are in society. Do you know who OPSEU represents? I'm going to tell you: PSWs. Did you guys know that? They represent community nurses, corrections officers who are sitting in prisons infested with COVID-19 and without the pay and support they need to work safely, even before this all began. Mr. Speaker, did you know that? OPSEU represents public workers who are keeping our government running, despite the Premier shutting down our Legislature for the holidays. That's who OPSEU represents, and that's who this minister is talking about.

And here's something that some of the new people from the Conservatives might not know. Do you know who else OPSEU represents? They work for us. We have OPSEU as a union that represents our workers here. It represents our MPPs. It helps us do all our stuff, the work that we do. How many over there have OPSEU members? How many over there have COPE members? Do you realize that the Conservatives do not have any union members over there on that side of the House? None. We have COPE and we have OPSEU that represent us. So if you care about unions, my suggestion would be, maybe you'd think of joining them.

Before that—and this one really should make everybody upset—they referred to a report from Quebec that said "plenty of connections between union bosses and organized crime." That was said by the minister. Organized crime? Wow. He would use that to imply that union members were irresponsible with the finances they were entrusted and demand that the Premier investigate our provincial unions for the same things. That's what he thinks of treasurers and bookkeepers across the province

who are working hard to balance funds to keep their members safe during a crisis.

Before that—this will be the last one, because I could go on forever, because there's lots in Hansard, but I wouldn't get to the other issues that I have. Before that, he asked the Premier to take the side of Ontario against "union boss Pat Dillon." Does anybody know Pat Dillon? That's him attracting our skilled trades. Well, he's not a union boss. He's a worker, and he's elected. That's him attacking our skilled trades who are trying to figure out how we can keep building in this province and keep workers safe without any help from this government. I don't know if the minister knows this, but we're not going to grow our cities without our skilled trades. You should respect the work they do and the decisions they make, including who they elect as their union reps.

During the negotiations in 2013 to keep the automotive industry in Canada—and that's important to places like Windsor, where you're from, and Oshawa—I don't know if Jen is here—St. Catharines, CAMI in Ingersoll. During those negotiations to keep the automotive industry in Canada, the Minister of Labour attacked the union representing the workers and tried to get them to side with the same company that spent the next few years shipping their jobs to low-wage districts and out of our communities.

Mr. Speaker, it goes hand in hand like that. He attacks workers in the building trades, community nurses, bookkeepers, electricians, workers in manufacturing—and his biggest enemies of all were the hard-working people in the public service. Who was he trying to defend? Let's find out. I think it's fair. I give you the one side; I think it's fair to give the other side, who he's trying to defend. You guys can correct me if I'm wrong. I don't mind that. I don't mind being corrected. I'm always willing to learn. He was trying to defend the biggest of corporations in this country. He was worried that people like Walmart, EllisDon—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Sorry to interrupt the member from Niagara Falls.

The member for Flamborough—Glanbrook on a point of order.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what any of this has to do with Bill 238.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I was listening intently. The member has referred to Hansard for comments made by the minister before he was the minister, and I think he's trying to tie it together. Thank you for that. I don't recognize the point of order.

Back to the member from Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: He was worried about people like Walmart, EllisDon and General Motors. They didn't have enough tax breaks and enough say in our politics. That's who he was on the side of, and it explains a lot of what we're reading in the bill today. Now I'm back on the bill.

1600

The minister could use the time to reform this bill and make it a bill that actually provides for workers on the job, but I can all but guarantee you that he won't do it. The minister needs to go into these communities and actually talk to front-line workers.

I've been talking about our heroes at our border in Niagara region. There are people who are still inspecting essential goods every day, still talking to international travellers who come into our country. They're on the front lines, keeping us safe. I send their concerns to this government and their desire to be respected for what they do as front-line workers. This government hasn't even responded to them. That's a disgrace. I support our front-line workers at our borders. I want to thank them for what they do every day. This government needs to offer that same help and recognition.

Mr. Speaker—it has been talked about quite a bit today, and I'm sure they're going to listen—this bill is missing one of the most crucial pieces to fighting the spread of this pandemic. Do you know what it is? Paid sick days for workers in the province of Ontario. The minister refuses to take responsibility for providing these days. He rushed through Bill 238 to give employers a break, but refuses to include a provision for paid sick days or to rush through a bill that would make them a reality. We could put it in this bill. Instead, he has spent his time fighting with the federal minister and wasting precious time we have to keep workers safe while he gets the vaccines out to the people of Ontario.

I hope the people in Ontario aren't fooled. The minister knows the federal program is inadequate. It requires a worker to be off for multiple days before they can apply. Did you know that? They didn't say that this morning when they stood up. That means if someone is exposed and is waiting for a test, and the test comes back negative, then they just have to lose pay for three or four days. He didn't tell us that this morning. They forgot to mention that. That's right: If a PSW is exposed to COVID-19 and has to quarantine safely to protect other residents, our Minister of Labour does not believe that they're entitled to sick pay. Yet he calls them heroes. I don't get him. It means that if they do manage to get the subsidy, they will get payment for less than minimum wage. So if it's approved and you're off long enough, you get less than the minimum wage. If a nurse had a crisis before COVID-19 came and used her sick days—our Minister of Labour believes that workers' front-line pay should be less than the minimum wage. Think about that. But you didn't mention that this morning. And that's if they get it at all. The benefit is difficult to manage, and there's no chance you will be able to speak to an actual human being if you call the CRA. You get a recording. They drive you nuts. The minister would have been better off sending a letter to the federal government, asking them to hire local workers to staff those phones so people can actually get timely answers.

What does all this lead to? It leads to workers going to work sick. That is what's happening in the province of Ontario. That's why we have areas with warehouses that have so many outbreaks.

Mr. Speaker, again, this should not come as a surprise to the minister.

A few weeks ago, the Star—and I'm not pushing any paper, because I read them all, but they've done some really good investigations lately, very good stuff on health

and safety, particularly in Peel. The results of that report alone should have changed the nature of Bill 238. Peel is one of the country's leading hubs for manufacturing and warehousing. We've got a lot of people there who go and work in a massive factory and then go home. In fact, Amazon, which I mentioned earlier, is located in Peel. This reporter went around and started actually talking to workers in the region. He started trying to get a sense of what was happening there. In Peel, almost one in four workers admitted going to work when they were showing symptoms of illness. Why would that be? Because they couldn't afford to take time off, because they're low-paid. They didn't have sick days. It's in the report—I can't hold it up. I'm not making this stuff up; I can't make it up. It's right here. They can check it out. I'm sure they read it.

Mr. Speaker, they're not doing it because they're bad people; they're not doing it because they're careless; they're doing it because they have no other choice. These are good, hard-working and caring people—people I wish their companies cared more about. They're doing it because the alternative is that they can't provide for their families—because they're so low-paying.

You may say, "This is dangerous. We told them to stay home." But ask yourself: If you had a choice between risking it and feeding your family, what would you do? Mr. Speaker, I know you can't answer that. They can answer: What would you do?

By the way—I don't know how far I'm going into this—put your hands up here who gets sick days, who gets paid. I get sick days; I get paid. Everybody in this House gets paid, but the workers outside these four walls don't get paid. They deserve sick days. I think when you step into their shoes, their choice becomes clear and understandable.

This is as much an economic crisis as it is a health crisis. When will this government understand that? When will you stop telling other people they must have hard choices and then sitting back and refusing to lead?

Mr. Speaker, this government could easily implement paid sick days in Ontario.

I watched a press conference where their own doctors said that they need sick days to avoid a deadly third wave. It's not Wayne Gates saying it—I am saying it, but people a lot more talented than I am, doctors, are saying it. These are the public health professionals you keep claiming you're listening to. You know that you are ignoring what they're saying. You're being told by your experts that we need sick days—but you're not doing it.

It's not just the official opposition calling for sick days—that's what they are trying to make it out as. You heard them this morning and what they were saying. I looked at the list of people trying to get this government to do the right thing, and it's staggering. It would take me my entire time to go through the list, but I'll name some of the organizations telling Premier Ford to pass legislation for sick days right now. You don't mind if I read a few, do you? GTHA mayors and chairs; Ontario Medical Association; Peel regional council; Waterloo region board of health; Ontario's Big City Mayors; Toronto Public

Health; Halton regional council; Mississauga city council; Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario; St. Catharines city council; Toronto city council; Huron-Perth board of health; Ottawa Public Health; and Toronto District School Board. They're all telling them that we need sick days, and that's just to name a few.

Why does the minister keep ignoring advice on paid sick days? Why does he keep using the same line over and over again about the federal benefit? He's trying to pretend he's a new guy when he talks to labour leaders now. He's trying to pretend he didn't attack them and their members for years. I'm going to say that again so he doesn't get confused. He's pretending that he's a new guy when he talks to labour leaders. He's trying to pretend he didn't attack them and their members for years. But do you know who else wants paid sick days? The Ontario Federation of Labour, the Canadian Labour Congress and just about every other major union in the province of Ontario. He should go ahead and ask them. The minister talks about his friends in labour despite the fact that he insults just about every one of them behind their backs. Why doesn't he listen to their input? Why not add paid sick days to the bill? Like I said, I can't hold it up—but it's not very big. It's not even a page and a half.

We've got basically every major organization focused on community and worker safety in Ontario calling for paid sick days. What is he waiting for? We're trying to avoid a third wave, and every doctor that's showing us this modelling is saying that we need paid sick days to avoid it. So why isn't it in this bill? How hard would it be for the minister to stand up right now and say that Bill 238 will be amended at committee to include presumptive legislation and include paid sick days? I would think, from talking to the Greens, the Liberals and my own party, they would have unanimous consent in this House to support that. So what's the holdup? Can the minister face those who were denied WSIB or went to work sick to feed their families, or nurses who lost pay—can he face them and explain why he doesn't think it's worth it to have paid sick days?

1610

Mr. Speaker, this doesn't even talk about workers who don't have WSIB coverage. I've been saying this for years, but I hope the government understands how serious this is now: There are thousands and thousands of workers who do not have WSIB, and that's wrong. It needs to change. It needs to be fixed now. I'm challenging this government: Amend the bill. Expand WSIB coverage to uncovered workplaces. No single worker in the province should have to go to work every single day and not know if a workplace—if they have a workplace accident, it will condemn them to poverty. Workers gave up the right to sue employers in exchange for coverage. It's a system that has the potential to work if the minister fixes WSIB. The Premier knows that workers are working every day without coverage. How can they justify that? There needs to be change immediately. Not only do I support it, but I challenge you to do it today. Include it in the bill. There's lots of room.

Mr. Speaker, here's another suggestion—I've got lots of suggestions for the bill today—for what the minister

could do to implement mass testing. Go to factories in the hot spots and implement mass testing. If we do this, we can really get on testing. We can clamp down on outbreaks before 50 or 60 workers are infected and it's out of control. It would take government action and government leadership, but it can be done. Instead of seeing these articles written, we could see articles saying Ontario is leading the world in workplace health and safety. They can achieve it through mass testing.

I know the minister will stand up and talk about how they're now inspecting big box stores. Before the minister does that, I'd like to ask him to do something for the working people of the province. Is that fair? I think that's fair. Make those reports public. If you're going to inspect workplaces across the province, make the reports public, so we know about them, which ones aren't safe to go to. Why won't you do that? Let the public actually see what your ministry is doing to keep us safe. Let us see the comments and the fines or the stop order your ministry is actually issuing—because right now it seems like you're constantly trying to put out fires instead of stopping the next one. Every time I talk to health and safety stakeholders, this is information they want to see. Make it public. Honestly, it's the information our local residents want to see and deserve to see. They go to Costco. They go to Walmart. They see the lines. They want to know that you're following through and thoroughly inspecting these places. If the inspections are occurring, then what have you got to hide? Make them public.

That's a concern, Mr. Speaker. What are they hiding? Why won't they make them public? That's what people want to know.

This is a public health crisis. I keep coming back to what Toronto's public health board is saying—and I know a lot of them aren't really paying attention, and that's fair; that's what they can do. But I want them to hear this. I keep coming back to what Toronto's public health board is saying: Transparency saves lives. That's our job here—to save as many lives as we can. Transparency here will save lives and will give residents comfort. We want to know who the abusers are. Who are the big box stores that keep overworking employees and cutting back on health and safety standards? The public cannot make an informed judgment without the facts.

Your ministry has the ability to solve this—you could put a solve in this bill and legislate that for the duration of this crisis, those reports will be made public.

The Minister of Labour says he's undertaking blitzes to keep consumers safe. Well, where is the evidence? And if he has it, why is he hiding it? Shine a light on it. Make it transparent. I think that's fair. I think it's reasonable and should be done.

Mr. Speaker, there's another piece that should be in this Bill 238 that's not, and that is transparency. Workers should be safe in their workplace. That means they deserve to be aware of the dangers they face in the workplace. They cannot avoid outbreaks if they are flying blind and have no idea that they're working in close contact with a COVID-19 outbreak.

The city of Toronto has taken the step to act where this province has failed. The city of Toronto is now publishing data on all workplace outbreaks. That means workers have the knowledge, and where there are customers, customers have the knowledge. I think that the Toronto Board of Health is pretty clear: Transparency saves lives. But they can only do so much. Mr. Speaker, if the biggest city in our province and the hottest of hot spots can publish data on workplace outbreaks, why can't this province?

As we've seen from his previous comments, clearly the minister doesn't like auto workers or their elected representatives. These workers are going to work every day in manufacturing facilities with thousands and thousands of workers. Thankfully, they have a union to fight for them, for their health and safety. But none of these plants are located in the city of Toronto. If we get an outbreak in these plants, it could be devastating to the area around them. That's why Bill 238 must include transparency.

Niagara remains in grey lockdown because of the Premier's actions. He diverted away thousands of doses of life-saving Moderna vaccine because we weren't a hot spot but then kept us as the lone region in grey lockdown because we're a hot spot. So he didn't give us our vaccines because we weren't a hot spot, but he's keeping us in grey because we're a hot spot. It absolutely makes no sense, and it's entirely at the feet of the Premier's failed vaccine strategy.

By the way, and I want to be clear on this—I'm not going to read this. I want to be clear on the vaccines. The vaccines were coming to Niagara on January 7—5,500 Moderna vaccines. They were going to go in the arms of those in our long-term-care facilities, our retirement homes, and some of our front-line workers, and some in emergency wards where we were having outbreaks. And do you know what they did? They gave those 5,500 vaccines to somewhere else. They went somewhere else. To this day—I've sent a letter to the Premier; I've talked to the Minister of Health—they won't tell us where they went. It's not fair to Niagara. You made a decision to take them away from us. I think you've got an obligation, as a government, to tell us where they went. It's terrible. And then, from not getting our vaccines—we've had a terrible six weeks. I already told you the numbers that have died in Niagara: for a period of seven days, one every three and a half hours, most in long-term care and retirement homes.

It's not just the NDP either—he has done the same thing in Bruce-Grey county, where there are PC members. This isn't political. It's a simple failure of governing; that's what it is.

Mr. Speaker, I know the Premier will blame the Prime Minister, and the Prime Minister will kick back and blame the Premier. Both of them are to blame. Canada lags behind almost half the world in vaccinations, and the Premier left doses sitting in storage over Christmas. Despite all the time they had to prepare for this, I give them no sympathy. Both have dropped the ball, and both need to immediately help to get this program back on track. That's a situation we are facing in Niagara and why one workplace outbreak is so deadly. Make no mistake

about it, this endless cycle of lockdown and infection is happening because of this failed vaccine rollout.

Mr. Speaker, our region is home to a lot of seniors. With one in four of our residents over the age of 65, we're in the top three oldest regions in the entire country. We know the virus preys on people in that age group. So if a place like GM St. Catharines has a major outbreak, with thousands of workers, those workers and those families need to know. The seniors in our community would need to know. The nurses who are saving lives on the front line need to know. It makes sense. It saves lives. And if the city of Toronto can do it, we should be doing it.

The Amazon warehouse I talked about earlier pushes for workers to work themselves to the bone, ignores when they are sick. The last thing they want is for you to make them have to be honest about how unsafe they may be.

I want to make sure I get to one part of this. In Quebec, they officially declared that COVID-19 can be spread through the air in a workplace, and they mandated that nurses have proper PPE to protect themselves. I saw that nurses issued a public letter to this government pushing for the same precautionary principle here in Ontario. If the government did respond, it hasn't been made public yet. Mr. Speaker, this is something that shouldn't be taken lightly. The ONA represents 66,000 nurses and health care professionals, represents the very people the Premier has called heroes.

1620

Here's what they had to say to the minister: "Ontario now lags behind the Public Health Agency of Canada and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in recognizing that COVID-19 can be airborne. Now we can add that Ontario is behind Quebec in the proper protection of those who have the responsibility of saving lives. It's irresponsible and outrageous."

Mr. Speaker, I think that says it all. We're falling behind in health and safety measures that are desperately needed to protect our front-line heroes. You don't get to call them heroes and then do absolutely nothing. Your government has the power to act. Act now and listen to nurses; there's absolutely no reason why you shouldn't.

I've only got a couple of minutes left, so I'm trying to make sure I get to this. You have educational staff and their representatives screaming from the rooftops not to repeat the same mistakes you did in the fall, before the second wave. You need to make sure our schools are a safe place to learn and work. That means testing, that means lower class sizes, that means ventilation, and that means PPE for all teachers and educational workers.

Mr. Speaker, you saw what happened when the minister ignored this evidence last time. So why are we marching into another crisis? It's going to be the same mistake. Schools are a great example of where you can start, with lower class sizes, with PPE, with supports to keep these places clean, so we can get there and avoid outbreaks. You made the mistake before; don't make it again.

There are dozens and dozens of easy things this minister could do today to actually make this bill a true bill to help workers. He could include presumptive coverage.

He could pass a bill ending deeming at the WSIB. He could include transparency mechanisms. And he could add paid sick days.

I want to talk quickly about deeming. Deeming is where you get injured on the job and WSIB will deem that you could do a job—it doesn't matter whether the job is available, and it doesn't matter whether you could do the job; they deem you could do it. So if you're getting \$21 from WSIB and you can get a job for \$14, they take that \$7. That's what you get. So you go from making \$21 down to \$7. And what does that force you to do? You end up going on ODSP and OW. You live in poverty.

Do you know what that does to families? Do you know how many families—no fault of their own—go to work in a factory or in a warehouse and get hurt, then go to WSIB? They deem that they could do a job parking a car somewhere—even though they couldn't do it—or lifting groceries at a grocery store. They can't do it because of their injury, but they deem they can do it, so they take \$14 away from the \$21. They've got \$7 left, so they live in poverty. Do you know what that does to the family? Do you know how many injured workers have split up with their family—because they lost their house; they lost their partner; their kids couldn't go to skating and they couldn't participate with their friends, because they had no money—and what that has done? And you don't put deeming in the bill? You don't put presumptive language in the bill? You had the chance to do that.

If this is the most important thing that we're discussing over the last two months, and you say you care about workers—how can you say you care about nurses when you won't have presumptive language? How do you say you care about workers—when you get injured on the job and you're living in poverty, having to lose your family and in some cases lose your kids and end up with mental health issues? You had a nice home. You were working every day and got injured.

You could do a lot more with this bill. If you're going to stand up and say you care about workers, then make amendments. I've given you a lot that you could change and add to this bill.

I appreciate your time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time now for questions.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: My question to the member opposite is—he's talking about different things that he has done in his riding, and obviously his context over unions. He has been here longer than I, and he often sided with the government of the day, which was the Liberal government, who created the largest unfunded liability in WSIB's history. They had an opportunity then to really stand up for the workers. Now that we have another opportunity to stand up for the worker, will you help us pass these WSIB changes that are needed so much? In the words of David Frame, this legislation change will avoid any unforeseen pandemic significant impacts to employers across the country and across the economy.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate your question. I'm going to go back to what I've been saying—and I'm

probably going to say it to every one of your questions, quite frankly: What you should be doing with the bill is taking care of workers. What the Liberals did the Liberals did. I don't support the Liberals. That's why they're not in government. You're in government today. You can fix the deeming bill today, you can stop workers from living in poverty today, you could provide sick days today, you could do presumptive language today with this bill, and you're choosing not to. So you can't stand up there and say you care about workers.

This bill is about making sure Amazon gets more benefits so that they can make more money—one of the richest corporations in the world. It's about making sure Walmart—which, by the way, for those who don't know, has doubled its profits during the pandemic. That's what it's about.

So we could do a lot more with this bill. That's what I'm trying to say to the Minister of Labour. We can do better for workers. If you care about workers, then add those—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Conclude, please.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm sorry. Go ahead. I'm done.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): When I say "conclude," I'm giving you a 10-second warning. I'm not cutting you off.

Next question.

Ms. Sara Singh: I'd like to thank the member from Niagara West, I believe it is—

Ms. Donna Skelly: Niagara Falls.

Ms. Sara Singh: Just Niagara? Okay—for highlighting the realities of workers across the province, especially here in Peel region, where many of our workers are essential workers going into those warehouses. You spoke about Amazon and the lack of protections that have been in place for those workers.

When we look at a hot spot like Brampton—our medical officer of health has very clearly outlined that 25% of our essential workers are going to work because they're sick and they can't take a day off.

So can you help us understand—because clearly the government doesn't understand—the importance of paid sick days here in the province of Ontario, why we can't just rely on a federal program, and why this government needs to implement provincial paid sick leave for workers?

Mr. Wayne Gates: As you saw during my speech, I did talk about the federal program and how inadequate it is for workers.

In your region, as you know—and I'm trying to say, just so you know, my riding is Niagara Falls, Fort Erie, Niagara-on-the-Lake and everything in between. I have to say that, just so you know.

They know that the federal program is inadequate. They know that they could be off for four days and not get a penny. They also know, in your region, in Peel, because they're so low-paid, they're working for places like Amazon—even though they're sick, they don't have sick days and they're going to work because they have to feed

their family, they have to pay their rent, they have to pay their mortgage. If they lose a day, they can't feed their family. If they lose a day, they can't pay their rent. If they lose a day, they can't pay their mortgage. This government knows that the federal program is inadequate, that they're saying stuff that's not remotely accurate.

We need sick days from the provincial government for the province of Ontario, and we need them now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question.

Mr. David Piccini: I appreciate the understanding between large employers and small and the need to advocate for everyone.

I don't know if the member opposite is aware that Amazon actually partnered with FH Health to leverage technology from Ontario, invested through the Ontario Together Fund, to implement rapid antigen testing and PCR testing that's, quite literally, protecting workers. That's investment this government has made.

Furthermore, I just want to know from the member opposite if he has any suggestions for improving the federal program, or will he continue to mislead Ontarians and tell them that there is no paid sick leave program?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I'll ask the member to withdraw, please. That's unparliamentary language.

Mr. David Piccini: Withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I'll turn to the member from Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You know full well that this program is inadequate. It requires you to miss four days of work, so if you're waiting for a test and it's negative, you lose pay. It's \$500 a week. It's less than the minimum wage. You have to fight through the CRA to get it. This means employees have to miss work and miss enough work, and then they can apply for the CRSB, then wait and eventually receive payment. You know it's not paid sick days. I'm going to do the same thing to you that you just tried to do to me, sir—so why are you lying?

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Come on. Let's not go down that rabbit hole. I'd ask the member from Niagara Falls to withdraw, please.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I will gladly withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Next question.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Brampton is one of the worst-hit areas by COVID-19 in the entire province. Over 36,000 people in Brampton have been infected with COVID-19. Over 220 people have died from COVID-19 in Brampton. When we talk to medical experts, they are clear: One of the worst areas of spread for COVID-19 in Brampton is workplaces. Almost 100 workplaces have had outbreaks of COVID-19 in Brampton.

The medical experts have explained that if we had paid sick days, that would stop a worker from choosing between going to work sick or not paying the bills.

So why is this Conservative government putting the lives of Bramptonians, of workers, of Ontarians at risk by refusing to bring in paid sick days?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm not sure who that question is to; I don't know if it's to that party or whether it's to me.

I think I've been very clear for the last hour on how important sick days are.

I was unaware of some of those numbers from my colleague from Brampton—36,000 people have got COVID-19; 220 people have died. I'm going to repeat what I said about Peel. They're going to work because they have to.

I've already explained, but I'll explain it again, if they like, why the federal program doesn't work for the province of Ontario. It's not going to work for Peel. It's not going to work for Brampton. What's going to happen is, they're going to continue to go to work. They can't afford to take a day off. They're living paycheque to paycheque, minimum wage, in Toronto and Peel, where the cost of living is relatively expensive. You can fix that. Include paid sick days in this bill and stop—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Next question.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk about Bill 238. The proposed bill, Bill 238, clearly provides a win for both employers and employees right across the province. I'm sure that there are many small business owners, small businesses, family-owned businesses in the member opposite's riding of Niagara Falls that would greatly appreciate all of the efforts this government is making to help them navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic. Bill 238 is just one more way that we are helping small business owners try to weather the storm. We know it has been very difficult. We've presented a number of things, such as the \$20,000 grant that we just proposed, that I was working on during our break. But this is just one more measure.

Does the member opposite from the riding of Niagara Falls—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Pose your question, please.

Ms. Donna Skelly: —oppose all of these supports for businesses in this proposed legislation?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm going to be clear—because I think I was, but you might not have listened to my entire speech.

I support small businesses. I've raised lots of issues on small and medium-sized businesses.

What I'm saying about this bill, very clearly, is that it's not for workers. We know it's not for workers, but you tried to say it was in your speech. That's what the minister talked about.

What this bill should be about: Include presumptive coverage for front-line heroes—it makes sense—for our nurses who are being denied WSIB. Include paid sick days in the bill. That's what I'm talking about. End deeming. Are you trying to tell me—you're from Hamilton. Do you think anybody in the steel plant should have to live in poverty after they worked in a factory, because the WSIB

decided to deem them and they end up losing their house, losing their family, losing their kids? Come on. What are we doing? We can fix it right here in the bill. That's what I'm saying, very clearly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We don't have enough time for a question and response, so we'll go to further debate.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a pleasure and a privilege to be in the House today and be able to speak to this bill.

I'd like to get on the record that—I just confirmed this, too, a couple of minutes ago—there have actually been 38,000-plus inspections in workplaces since last March; not even a year yet. I wanted to get that on the record because I think it's important to do that.

It's an honour to rise today and join the debate on Bill 238, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2021. This is a very important piece of legislation for the businesses in my riding of Sarnia–Lambton. Today is the perfect day to discuss another one of the ways that our government is doing everything within its power to support small businesses. Of course, today in Sarnia–Lambton, we're transitioning back to the COVID-19 Response Framework and we're actually in the colour orange. Businesses in Sarnia–Lambton will be reopening today in that zone, as directed by Dr. Williams and the medical experts making recommendations to the provincial command table, and I'm very happy about that news.

I want to commend everyone in Sarnia–Lambton for their continued co-operation with our collective efforts to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus. It has certainly been a challenging 11 months for businesses and employees in Sarnia–Lambton. I'm really pleased, too, with how everyone has adapted in response to the public health guidance, and in order to continue to serve their customers.

I think that our government has been very responsive to meeting the needs of businesses over the past 11 months—and looking forward into 2021. From the Premier's office to the individual members, everyone in this House has stepped up their game on behalf of the people of Ontario. Certainly, right at the front, leading the way for our government has been the Minister of Labour and his dedicated team and, of course, his parliamentary assistant, Ms. McKenna from Burlington. They have shown tremendous leadership throughout this COVID-19 pandemic.

The Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development took immediate action last March, introducing legislation protecting workers and their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic. As I said a little earlier, as of today, they've conducted some 38,000-plus inspections. I know they hired 500-some new inspectors they've assigned to the workplaces. They've launched a workplace inspection blitz to ensure that all employees are protected and that the workplaces are following all the COVID-19 public health guidance. They've invested \$77 million in the Second Career program, to help over 2,750 individuals who have been displaced from their jobs by the COVID-19 pandemic to retrain for in-demand careers.

Just last month, they launched the Ontario government's new two-year, \$115-million Skills Development Fund. This fund, which will support workers and apprentices, is specifically designed to address the challenges brought on by COVID-19 and help reduce obstacles to hiring, training and retaining employees while preparing workers for the province's economic recovery.

The Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development has really been taking the steps that we need as a province to respond and to move forward during this pandemic. So it comes as no surprise to me that the minister would table such an important piece of legislation as Bill 238, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2021. It's a straightforward bill. There are only a few amendments included in the bill, but it will go a long way in helping to support businesses and their employees in Ontario over the coming months—because if there are no employers, there are no employees. We have to keep that in mind, Mr. Speaker.

For those who are watching this afternoon, they may have missed this morning's lead-off debate by the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development and the parliamentary assistant to the minister, PA McKenna. Let me spend a few minutes explaining what this bill does and why that is important to the people and workers of Ontario.

Bill 238 is described this way in the explanatory note:

“Amendments are made to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.

“New section 88.1 sets out a special rule for the calculation of certain premiums payable by employers for the 2021 calendar year. The Lieutenant Governor in Council is given regulation-making powers with respect to the calculation and the period during which the special rule applies.

“New section 167 provides that the minister may direct the board to provide the minister with information that the minister considers necessary for the proper administration of the act. The board is required to provide the information on or before the date specified by the minister and in the form specified by the minister. The minister may delegate the minister's powers under section 167 to the deputy minister.”

In simplest terms, if this bill is passed, Bill 238 will protect employers from unexpected increases in Workplace Safety and Insurance Board premiums due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Why this is important is that these businesses, by getting this guaranteed reduction in premiums, will have that money to invest in training, hiring new employees and retaining their present employees.

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This legislative change is meant to address, on a temporary basis, an unexpected rise in the Ontario average industrial wage due to the economic impacts of COVID-19. Most years, the average wage rises by anywhere from 2% to 3%. However, in 2020, COVID-19 led to far fewer low-wage workers being employed. As a result, the average industrial wage increased by 7.8%, because there were more higher-income workers working.

The effect of this unanticipated rise is that the total premiums payable by some employers would increase in 2021 without this change, despite the WSIB board of directors' decision to freeze premium rates in 2021 at 2020 levels. Assuming that the average industrial wage returns to its expected year-over-year change in the following year, the way Bill 238 is drafted means that the WSIB would revert to the existing wording in section 88 and, on a go-forward basis, go on to establish the maximum insurable earnings ceiling, which would more or less take it back to where we were.

Let me step back for a moment to unpack this a little bit. A perfect example of what is happening here took place in my riding of Sarnia–Lambton. Twelve months ago, our local economy was doing very well. As the home of Ontario's petrochemical and biorefining hub, we were in the middle of several critically important construction projects, representing billions of dollars of economic investment in this province and crucial to the whole of Canada, as people in the petrochemical sector told me. The project I'm speaking of mainly is the Nova project in Sarnia–Lambton: \$100 million invested by this government of Ontario—\$100 million in provincial money, with \$2 billion by the private sector. This was crucial to guaranteeing that there was going to be a future in Ontario and in Canada for the petrochemical sector.

Because of this investment in the local area, many new stores were opening across Sarnia–Lambton. Many existing businesses and services, like bars and restaurants, were benefiting from the ripple effect of these major investments. Then the pandemic hit. Unfortunately, it has been necessary for many businesses to operate with public health restrictions or to remain closed to help stop the spread of COVID-19. Essential work, like that work taking place in Sarnia–Lambton's Chemical Valley, was able to continue in order to deliver these critical projects for the people of Ontario. This was all work guaranteed by the Minister of Labour, his PA and others who knew the importance of this work and the completion of these projects to the province of Ontario and especially to the bottom line for the Ministry of Finance and Treasury Board, who need those taxes.

This work was being performed, in many cases, by higher-wage employees. This wasn't just happening in Sarnia–Lambton, but across this great province. As a result of this temporary pause in the number of low-wage workers being factored into the annual industrial wage increase, the WSIB and the Ministry of Labour observed an increase in its annual calculation that far outpaced what is expected in a normal year. As I mentioned, in most years, employees across Ontario would expect to see a 2% to 3% increase. Instead, the increase that was calculated was estimated to be somewhere between 7.8% and 8%. This increase in the average wage could lead to higher insurance costs for those employers who have workers at or above the earnings cap.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit workers making lower wages the hardest. Many of them, including a high percentage of youth, have lost their jobs in sectors such as

retail, hospitality and the service sector. In comparison, far higher wage earners, like those in the construction sector, have retained their employment during this difficult time—and thank God for that, Mr. Speaker. This has resulted in a spike in the average industrial wage of Ontario's workers—which is a good thing, because so many lower-wage jobs aren't in the workforce temporarily.

This year, the average industrial wage is expected to be 7.8% higher than last year. As an unintended consequence of this spike, significant increases to workplace safety and insurance premiums would be in line for some employers, and that's because those premiums are capped on a formula using Ontario's average industrial wage, the AIW. That premium is based on a cap of 175% of the average industrial wage for each worker on the business's payroll. This calculation is intended to insulate employers from excessive premium payments for high-earning workers. This cap is set out in the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act and is calculated by the WSIB based on the average industrial wage on an annual basis.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 238 is another example of how our government is responding to the avalanche of new challenges that have popped up in this global pandemic. As the Premier and the minister have mentioned many times, everything is on the table. Bill 238 is just the latest initiative aimed at helping employers and their employees through this difficult time.

Last year, the WSIB deferred premium payments for employers between March and August 2020. This gave employers \$1.9 billion—almost \$2 billion—in relief from premium payments and saved the average business \$1,760. On top of this deferral, WSIB premiums have been reduced by over \$2 billion since 2018. When introducing a new rate framework in 2019, the WSIB cut premium rates for approximately three quarters of the employers who pay them. To further assist non-profits, the WSIB also froze their premium rates for five years. This made a big difference to Legions, women's shelters, daycares, the YMCA, soup kitchens, art galleries, churches, addiction recovery centres, theatres and nursery schools, hospices, retirement homes, children's aid societies, animal shelters, charities—probably many more—the rape crisis centres and many other non-profits.

Again, Mr. Speaker, our government is doing everything it can to support workers and the businesses through this difficult time. I don't know whether this is in my notes here, but the small business grant that many small businesses in my riding have applied for—because I've talked to many of these small businesses. I'd certainly encourage all members, if you haven't, to certainly refer them through your MPP's office, through editorials you do—whatever—on your Facebook, make sure you refer to the small business grant, because there are millions of dollars there and we need to get them out to these small businesses to help them survive so that they'll be able to land on their feet when we do come out of COVID finally.

Again, our government is doing everything it can to support these workers and businesses through this difficult time. These proposed changes will provide much-needed

relief for businesses just trying to survive this global pandemic.

The Minister of Labour has also considered what the changes proposed in Bill 238 will mean for businesses in the future. Some business owners might be worried that Bill 238 will create greater financial burdens for them in the future—that future employer premiums will be impacted by this proposed legislation. The answer to that concern is that near-term increases will be paid out of the WSIB insurance fund. The WSIB currently has more than enough funds to cover the cost of current and future benefits of injured workers. At the end of June 2020, the WSIB reported a sufficiency ratio, or way to pay, of 115.4% in surplus to premiums. It's important to note that the proposed legislation is a temporary premium relief measure for 2021 only, with a possible extension by regulation until December 2022 at the latest.

Mr. Speaker, I finally want to stress the most important of all these changes. Bill 238 will not impact any injured worker's entitlement to benefits or services. The WSIB fund is healthy, and any additional costs associated with these temporary changes will be absorbed by the WSIB. That really is terrific news, and as a government we are hearing a lot of really positive reactions to the changes in Bill 238. I'd like to quote a few of them right now, Mr. Speaker.

Richard Lyall, president of the Residential Construction Council of Ontario says, "We're pleased to see Minister McNaughton taking action on behalf of businesses impacted by COVID-19, protecting employers from excessive premiums, while ensuring benefit payments for workers will not be impacted."

Giovanni Cautillo, president of the Ontario General Contractors Association, responded to the introduction of Bill 238 by saying, "Ontario's industrial, commercial and institutional general contractors commend the legislation proposed by Minister McNaughton. This will mean workers remain supported, and employers can continue building the critical infrastructure needed for Ontario's economic recovery. This legislation adds to the significant steps taken by the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development to support the WSIB system."

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David Frame, chair of the Construction Employers Coalition for WSIB and health and safety and prevention, has remarked, "This legislative change will avoid an unforeseen pandemic-related issue from significantly impacting high-wage employers across the economy. These industries are essential to Ontario's economic recovery. The government's proposal will provide injured workers with a benefit ceiling increase while protecting employers from unreasonable costs.

"It's clear that Minister McNaughton is committed to listening to employers and making the institutions aimed to support them more effective."

Mr. Speaker, these individuals represent some of the very important employers in our province. They clearly appreciate the work that the minister of labour, skills and training is doing. They also have a very high opinion of

the minister. I want to read just two more quotes about the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

Again, from Giovanni Cautillo, president of the Ontario general contractors: He says about the Minister of Labour, "Overall, from the industry's standpoint, we are very happy that the government has been responsive on this matter. Clearly under the minister's leadership, they stepped up for the contractors."

And finally, from Andrew Pariser, vice-president of the Residential Construction Council of Ontario: "Minister McNaughton and the Ford government are clearly showing contractors, employers" and their employees, "and businesses that they are priorities and they believe we are going to lead the recovery."

Mr. Speaker, I couldn't agree more. I think because of the way our government has responded to the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, the way Team Ontario has pulled together, we are poised to lead a strong recovery in the months ahead. Bill 238, if passed, is another important step in supporting businesses as we build the momentum of the economic recovery.

I'd like to say also that I know there was some reference to other health and safety changes. Those would be addressed in a health and safety bill. This is about the financial implications of WSIB premiums to both employers and their employees indirectly, because they're employed by these small businesses. So when the minister, with the advice of this House and advice from labour and from contractors and small business and larger businesses—if there are changes to be made that way, the minister would certainly introduce them, but they wouldn't be part of this bill here that we're dealing with today. I think that's important that we know that.

I know there was reference to Mr. Pat Dillon. I worked with Pat Dillon many years ago in Sarnia-Lambton. I know the Minister of Labour works with Mr. Dillon on an ongoing basis. They consult many times. Mr. Smokey Thomas of OPSEU, another labour leader the minister works with on an ongoing basis—in fact, he was one of the first labour leaders I met with many years ago when I was the labour critic. It seems like a long time ago now, but anyway, in opposition, I met with Mr. Thomas at that time. We've always had a good relationship, and I know he and Minister McNaughton do as well. Mr. Jerry Dias from Unifor, I know him and the minister consult on an ongoing basis for impacts that changes in WSIB—and with the minister of labour and skills training; he also deals with him on an ongoing basis. So I think that that's important to get on the record.

The WSIB is a big, important part of ensuring safe workplaces in Ontario. Over five million workers are covered by the WSIB insurance program at more than 300,000 workplaces across Ontario. It's one of the largest insurance companies in North America. Our government is taking action to support those workers and workplaces by introducing Bill 238.

I guess I'll wind that up now. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): It's now time for questions. I turn to the member from Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: What is this member talking about? You have called Bill 238 a business support bill. Businesses in this province are still waiting for the first wave of supports, like rent support and direct funding. The grants that this government has put out into this province—there's no rhyme or reason for it. You can lose 99% of your income and revenue as a business, and you get \$10,000. If you lose 70% of your revenue, you get \$20,000. People in this province have lost faith in this government to do anything to support businesses. You shouldn't be saying "business support" and "Bill 238" in the same breath in this province, in this Legislature.

One out of every four workers in Peel went to work sick because they have no paid sick days. Paid sick days are an Employment Standards Act revision. When are you going to support workers? Because when you support workers in the province of Ontario, you support businesses.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I beg to differ with the honourable member. I know many small businesses in my riding have taken advantage—I'm glad you brought that up—of the small business grant. I just talked to a lady the other day; she applied in January and got her money in her bank account by February 3. I know there are hundreds of small businesses in my riding that have applied—a number of them have received their money already—and I'm sure there's a number in your riding.

I challenge all of the members in this House—especially the opposition, who are always running the small business grant down—to get out and do your job. Make sure that the small businesses in your riding take advantage of these programs. Make sure they refer to the federal programs that are available, as well, because that's what you need to do. That's what we've been doing for the last two and a half months. Somebody said it was a holiday; my staff weren't on a holiday, I wasn't on a holiday and I'm sure most of the members on your side of the House weren't on a holiday either.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Next question.

Mr. David Piccini: To the member opposite: Thank you. I listened intently to your speech. No doubt the global pandemic has been difficult for businesses globally, and Ontario has been no different, but we've made a number of important measures, like in this legislation, to support small businesses. Rather than sort of throw up our hands, grasp at straws and double down on federal programs and duplicate them, we've launched unique programs here to support small businesses.

Can the member elaborate a little more on the support for Ontario's small businesses and the importance of doing our job and getting out there and working with small businesses to make sure they're aware and that they apply?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the honourable member for that question. Yes, I know how important this is. I've got lots of small businesses in my riding, as well. I know the member from Niagara spoke about the small businesses in his riding that are suffering; I've got lots that were hard-hit as well. We were in some of the lockdown

earlier on in the fall and into the winter, and we're coming out into the orange now.

But a number of these small businesses—that one I spoke about a few minutes ago is a single proprietorship. I won't say what line of work she's in—she might be listening today—but I know that she really appreciated getting this money. She put in for it, entered the portal—at our office, we assist many of these people, if they call our office, to help them access this program. We also suggest the federal program.

Now, it's my understanding you can't access both. If you qualify for the provincial program, you can't qualify for the federal program. A number of people can qualify for one or the other.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Next question.

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: I want to take this back to the question of paid sick days, because that is the only question that this House should be considering until it's passed. I don't understand, and I would really like the member's opinion as to why the government is ignoring its own public health experts, who have been very clear that we can't get a handle on this pandemic, we can't get a handle on the lockdowns that keep shutting down small business, until we put out the social supports, including and especially paid sick days. Why aren't they in this bill?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the honourable member for the question. I think the minister himself, the Premier and others have indicated that we're not going to start another provincial program when there's a federal program that's available that's under-solicited. There are a number of people who have not taken advantage of the federal program. I understand that the money is in your bank within three days; they did away with the one-week waiting period for unemployment insurance.

I'm old enough that I remember—I was on unemployment once, a long time ago now. I've been fortunate in the last few years that I've been able to keep gainfully employed, but I remember those days: filling out cards, mailing them in and all that kind of stuff. Today, I'm not saying it's easy, but it's better than it ever was before. Could it be better yet? Yes, and I'm the first one to admit that I know what it's like. I have a number of constituents who have approached me as well. We work with them every which way that we can to help them qualify for these benefits.

1700

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Flamborough–Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: While some members of the House may have been using our break as a vacation, I know members on this side of the House were working hard to help small businesses access our \$20,000 small business grant. In fact, 46,000 small businesses across Ontario have taken advantage of our small business grant. That's something I'm very proud of. I've worked with many small business owners in the city of Hamilton outside of my riding who appreciate that money. We have given out almost \$700 million to date in this small business grant.

Bill 238 is just one more program that will help small businesses in Ontario. Would the member please talk to us about how Bill 238 will help small business owners in Ontario keep their doors open?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the honourable member from Flamborough—

Ms. Donna Skelly: Glanbrook.

Mr. Robert Bailey:—Glanbrook. Yes. I know that she developed a website. I was very impressed with it. I modelled my own after that as well, to help people navigate all these programs. I know she has not just provincial programs on there, but also federal programs, so that anyone who goes on there can navigate their way through. It's non-partisan because it is available to—I know the federal Liberals have programs down there. We're encouraging people to apply for those as well, because at the end of the day, we're all in this together. We need to do whatever we can do to make these grants accessible to people. If we were talking about—I should respond. I've got—oh, I've only got a couple of minutes. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question? Didn't you just ask a question?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Well, the member for Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I just want to point out that what the member opposite has not considered is that businesses have been asking for paid sick leave. They want the province to amend the Employment Standards Act and they want that support. Businesses understand—I know you don't understand, but businesses understand—that when workers come to work and spread COVID-19, that is bad for business. It was in my statement today.

Why would you couch Bill 238 as a business support strategy when you have missed the mark on so many measures, including paid sick days, to keep this province open, to keep businesses going?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the honourable member from Waterloo for that question. Like I said before but I'll say again, this is a financial bill to do with premiums on small business, large business, anybody that pays WSIB premiums in the province of Ontario. If the minister and this government were going to introduce any other health and safety bill, they would introduce a stand-alone bill. That would be a great time for the members opposite to introduce amendments.

But this bill is about making those businesses in your riding and the member from Niagara's riding—every member in this House, and my riding—making those businesses more solvent so they can land on their feet when we eventually get out of this COVID-19. We can look at improvements in many different ways, and I'm sure we will.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Flamborough—Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I appreciate the opportunity to join my member to talk about all of the important plans and programs that this government has put together to help

small businesses. The changes proposed in Bill 238 can be confusing to some members who are not experts when it comes to workplace insurance and the operations of the WSIB. Can the honourable member please elaborate on how capping the maximum insurable earnings will provide support for businesses?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Sarnia—Lambton has 20 seconds.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I think it takes me that long to clear my throat. But thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for that question. At the end of the day, we want to freeze these levels so that businesses aren't impacted by the unexpected rise in premiums because of the COVID-19 pandemic. We'll maybe have more to say later.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Point of order: the member for Barrie—Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you, Speaker. If you seek it, you will find we have unanimous consent to see the clock at 6 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Just before we do that, I beg to inform the House that pursuant to standing order 101(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business, such that Ms. Sattler assumes ballot item number 52, Ms. Stiles assumes ballot item number 58, Ms. Khanjin assumes ballot item number 54 and Mr. Nicholls assumes ballot item number 92.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the clock is now recognized as being at 6 o'clock?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I have to get agreement. That's what I'm trying to do. All agreed? Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

NO COVID-19 EVICTIONS ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 INTERDISANT LES EXPULSIONS PENDANT LA COVID-19

Ms. Morrison moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 244, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 with respect to evictions during the COVID-19 pandemic / Projet de loi 244, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation à l'égard des expulsions pendant la pandémie de COVID-19.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Pursuant to standing order 101, the member has 12 minutes for her

presentation. Now I turn to the member for Toronto Centre.

Ms. Suze Morrison: It's a pleasure to be back in the Legislature. I rise today to speak in favour of the No COVID-19 Evictions Act, which I have co-sponsored with my colleague the member from University–Rosedale.

The No COVID-19 Evictions Act prohibits the issuing of new eviction orders as well as the enforcement of any current evictions standing in the province of Ontario. If passed, these measures would be in effect until one year after the pandemic is declared over by the Chief Medical Officer of Health. This ensures that tenants are given the time that they need to rebuild their financial security, to catch up on their arrears and to stay safe in their homes during the pandemic.

Right now, thousands of families all over the province are at risk of losing their homes, through no fault of their own. Many have lost their jobs, their income or their small businesses as a result of COVID-19. Forcing people to apartment hunt, to couch-surf, to overcrowd in homes with extended family, or to turn to our overcrowded shelter system will quite frankly put all of our communities at risk. Keeping people housed is a matter of public health.

In December, I tabled a motion to ban residential evictions during the pandemic, which did pass unanimously in this House. And yet, three months later, tenants still do not have the protections and the supports that they need to remain safe during the pandemic. That's why I'm calling on all members today to vote in favour of the No COVID-19 Evictions Act and to commit today to helping tenants stay in their homes in order to keep our communities safe.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, I have heard harrowing stories from tenants across the province who are living in constant fear. Last spring, my office helped Teresa, a tenant from Barrie who was evicted from her home even though her landlord owed her thousands of dollars after exploiting her in a rent-to-own scheme. She was able to find temporary housing but was then illegally evicted for a second time during the pandemic when her landlord forced her out to convert the unit that she was staying in at the time back into an Airbnb for the profitable summer season up in Barrie. She's now living in a hotel after being illegally evicted during the pandemic.

This fall I spoke to a mom from Kitchener who had lost her job back in March and had been unable to pay her rent. When she returned to work this summer, she was able to begin paying her rent in full again. Despite this good-faith effort to get caught back up on her rent—she was paying in full on time every month, but she was struggling to get caught up on the arrears—her landlord decided to proceed with an eviction anyway. She is now terrified about what this means for her son who is immunocompromised.

1710

In December, I spoke with a constituent for my riding in Toronto Centre who is also facing eviction. He's worried about what will happen to him and his wife and their children when they are evicted. They simply don't know where they're going to go. They have lived in their home for four years, and never once in that four years have

they ever paid their rent a day late. They have always paid their rent on time, in full, but this constituent lost his job and, as a result, the family has fallen behind. For months now, they have been paying the regular rent, plus an additional \$500 a month every single month, trying to get caught up on those arrears. But the landlord is still proceeding with an eviction.

I've also heard from tenants on ODSP who have had to take on the extra costs associated with the pandemic, including grocery delivery and buying cleaning products. These are folks who were already struggling to pay rent on the inadequate housing allowance that's offered through the Ontario Disability Support Program, and that was before the pandemic even started. But the extra costs associated with being a disabled person in a pandemic have been devastating.

Speaker, there are countless stories like this from every corner of this province: people who have never missed a day's rent in their life, who have been working up until the pandemic started, and who have lived in their homes for years without any problems. But these are people who lost everything this year, and they just need time to recover so that they can get back to work and back on their feet.

Community organizations and housing advocates warned this government last spring that without immediate action we could be facing an eviction crisis, and that is exactly what is happening. From March to July of last year, the Landlord and Tenant Board processed over 6,000 applications to evict tenants for nonpayment of rent. The eviction crisis is upon us and instead of helping people, this Conservative government is burying their heads in the sand and allowing evictions to continue.

A survey released by the Daily Bread Food Bank back in August found 81% of respondents were now spending over half of their household income on rent, compared to 67% before the pandemic, and 34% of those respondents said they would be unable to continue paying rent within four to six months. In December, activists estimated that 105,000 households in Ontario are at risk of losing their homes because they were unable to pay their rent in the fall during the pandemic.

Instead of stepping up to the plate with any sort of real support, this government went on the attack. This summer, the Conservative government opened up the Residential Tenancies Act and started ripping up some of the very few protections that tenants in Ontario had. Coupled with devastating cuts to legal aid and chronic mismanagement of the Landlord and Tenant Board, the government laid the groundwork for disaster.

During the committee hearings on Bill 184 this summer, the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation shared their concerns with how these changes were going to make the COVID-19 eviction crisis worse:

“The proposed changes to the Landlord and Tenant Board's ... rules of procedure undermine access to justice, remove procedural protections for tenants, and increase the likelihood of an eviction.

“The mass homelessness that could result from these evictions” caused by COVID-19 “could be the largest human rights crisis that this province has ever faced and,

in their current state, the proposed changes to the LTB rules and procedures would only make it easier for that to happen.”

Just as more and more tenants found themselves struggling to pay their rent, this government made it easier to evict them. To make matters worse, the Landlord and Tenant Board has devolved into utter chaos and is actively marginalizing low-income tenants. Legal aid and housing lawyers have been trying to raise the alarm on this for months: that these online hearings are an absolute affront to the principles of access to justice; that they are rife with procedural unfairness and have not adequately made accommodations for people with disabilities, people with language barriers, people who are low-income or don't have Internet access or access to technology.

From a report in October, the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario said, “The LTB appears to wrongly presume that low-income tenants have reliable access to the required technology to participate in an electronic proceeding, and the wherewithal to use it effectively.” Later on in the report, they say, “We have overheard a tenant struggling to take part in a hearing from a pay phone in the rain on a cold day before ultimately giving up and dropping the call. In another case, when a member became aware that an absent tenant did not have a telephone, the hearing proceeded” anyway “after it was suggested that the tenant could have used a pay phone to attend. We believe this is not an appropriate way for a party to be heard in a proceeding where important interests are at stake. If these tenants were evicted, they will have lost their homes contrary to the rules of natural justice, deprived of the statutorily mandated opportunity to counter the landlord's allegations and/or to seek relief from eviction. This would be unacceptable during normal conditions, let alone during a pandemic that puts the inadequately housed and homeless at greater risk of disease and death.”

Speaker, I've heard of cases where people with disabilities were refused alternative hearing formats, where tenants who did not speak English were not given access to translators, where adjudicators presided over hearings where they had a clear conflict of interest, cases where tenants were evicted without ever even being notified that they had a hearing before the board because the notice was sent to the wrong email address. Evictions shouldn't be happening at all, but they absolutely should not be happening like this.

I have stood in this chamber for months now asking both the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Attorney General to immediately address these issues, and they have done nothing. The move to remote hearings never took into account the realities faced by low-income Ontarians, by people with disabilities, by people in rural areas without Internet access or by people with language barriers. And instead of ensuring fairness under the law, the board has been focused on ramming through as many evictions as quickly as possible, whatever the cost.

According to an analysis by ACTO, the board conducted over 7,000 eviction hearings in November, 20% more than were heard in the same month in 2019; 96% of

those were filed by landlords. The board is so focused on fast-tracking as many of these evictions as possible they even scheduled hearings through the winter holidays, something that legal aid lawyers say they have never seen before.

Speaker, the problems at the board are horrific and are making Ontario's eviction crisis even worse. We can't afford not to act. If evictions are allowed to proceed, people will die. Researchers from the United States found that the lifting of state moratoriums on evictions caused as many as 433,000 excess cases of COVID-19 and almost 11,000 additional deaths in the United States between March and September. We know that low-income neighbourhoods where the majority of residents are Black, Indigenous, and racialized also have disproportionately higher rates of evictions than other Toronto neighbourhoods. These are the same communities with the highest level of evictions that have been among the worst hit by COVID-19. Failing to address the crisis sends a very clear message to Ontarians that if you are Indigenous, if you are Black, if you are brown, if you are racialized, if you are disabled, if you are poor, your life does not matter, that protecting your landlord's bottom line matters more to this government than saving your life.

Ontarians need an eviction ban. Lives are at stake and we cannot wait. The bill I have tabled today will ensure that no one is forced out of their home during a pandemic. We also know that the effects of the pandemic will continue after this crisis is over, and that's why this bill calls for an eviction moratorium until one year after the pandemic is over. Ontarians need time to get back on their feet, to get caught up on their arrears and to have the opportunity to rebuild their financial security. Ontarians impacted by the pandemic also need direct rent relief to help catch up on their arrears. We are in a time of crisis, Speaker; we need urgent action.

For all of these reasons, I am calling on all members of this House to vote in favour of the No COVID-19 Evictions Act and commit today to helping tenants stay in their homes until we are safely on the other side of the COVID-19 crisis.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Mr. Parm Gill: It's a pleasure to rise in the House once again and speak to the private member's bill introduced by the member opposite.

Mr. Speaker, I want to first begin by acknowledging that our government recognizes that many Ontarians continue to face financial hardship as a result of COVID-19. Because of these uncertain times, we believe it is essential to help provide more stability and predictability around the cost of rent to Ontario's tenants. That's why our government has frozen rent increases for the vast majority of Ontario's tenants for 2021. This change is in effect starting on January 1, 2021, until December 31, 2021. Mr. Speaker, Ontario is the only province to freeze rent for the entirety of 2021, and we are proud of that.

1720

We were the first province to sign a joint investment agreement with the federal government to provide funding

directly to people, to help them afford their housing costs. The Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit makes \$1.4 billion available in a portable benefit directly to those who need it most. To date, 7,200 Ontarians have already received direct rent assistance through this program, and that number is expected to grow each year.

In direct response to COVID-19, our government provided \$510 million through the social services relief fund to municipal service managers and Indigenous program administrators. This funding is flexible. Municipalities across Ontario have been using this funding to address the COVID-19 outbreak in ways that best meet their local needs, including helping people to stay in their homes by providing increased funding for rent banks and utility banks, as well as providing emergency loans for those most in need.

Mr. Speaker, at the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak, our government took decisive action to stop residential evictions to keep Ontarians safe in their homes. Last month, in response to the concerning rising number in cases, our government declared a state of emergency and put in place a stay-at-home order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and protect the health and safety of all Ontarians. This was the second time in less than a year that we put a pause on residential evictions. We wanted to ensure that no Ontarian would be forced to leave their home while a provincial stay-at-home order was in place. We put in place a province-wide stop on residential evictions.

Just this month, we extended the pause on residential eviction enforcement in areas under provincial stay-at-home orders to ensure that no one is forced to leave their homes while a provincial stay-at-home order continues to apply to their region. This emergency order also prevents the enforcement of writs of possession for residential property in a public health unit where a provincial stay-at-home order is still in place. Rest assured, our government knows how important it is for people to stay home and stay safe, to help limit the spread of COVID-19 and save lives.

Before the COVID-19 outbreak began, the ministry consulted on changes to the Residential Tenancies Act as part of our historic housing supply action plan. We received over 2,000 submissions, 85% of which were from the public. These consultations were crucial in developing Bill 184, the Protecting Tenants and Strengthening Community Housing Act, where we introduced measures to further discourage the practice of renovations and encouraged alternative dispute resolution measures. It encourages landlords and tenants to mediate their disputes and possibly pursue repayment agreements rather than seek an eviction order, which is especially important, as many Ontarians have been financially impacted due to COVID-19. This will help reduce or avoid evictions, keeping more Ontarians in their homes, as landlords and tenants can work together to mediate their disputes. It will also be considered whether a landlord made an effort to negotiate a repayment plan with their tenants before the Landlord and Tenant Board can issue an eviction order.

The ministry was also hearing increasing complaints about renovations. To be clear, repairing and renovating

units is not against the law. In fact, maintaining and modernizing units, like ensuring they meet property standards and fire code requirements, makes them better and safer places to live. But if a landlord needs to evict a tenant to do the repairs, they must give the tenant the opportunity to move back in, at the same rent, before offering it to others.

Speaker, our legislation doubled the maximum fines upon conviction of illegal evictions, to \$50,000 for an individual and \$250,000 for a corporation. We are also providing tenants with two years, instead of one, to apply for a remedy if their landlord does not give them the opportunity to move back in. And we are requiring landlords of small buildings to give their tenants one month's compensation for evictions for repairs or renovations, where previously there was no compensation. These are concrete changes we have made to discourage evictions and continue to protect both tenants and landlords.

I would now like to spend some time discussing the bill that is in front of us today. Keeping people in their homes to help limit the spread of COVID-19 is critical, but this bill proposes a number of measures that we have already implemented. For example, the bill proposes measures that would prevent evictions or writs of possession from being enforced. However, our emergency order pausing residential evictions already prevents enforcements of evictions and writs of possession while a stay-at-home order is in place.

This bill also proposes to prevent the Landlord and Tenant Board from enforcing residential evictions for illegal activity, stating that an emergency eviction can only be enforced for health and safety purposes. Our emergency order that is pausing evictions ensures that landlords are able to keep their rental units free of criminal activity and keep their communities safe, by allowing emergency eviction enforcement for illegal activity.

This bill is also proposing to extend the pause on enforcements far beyond the stay-at-home order. Mr. Speaker, this proposed timeline will not help Ontario bounce back from the effects of COVID-19. It will only disrupt the rental housing market and dissuade small mom-and-pop landlords from entering or even staying in the market.

This bill also proposes that the Landlord and Tenant Board completely stop operations for issuing eviction orders during this unnecessarily long proposed period. But in situations of home sales where new owners plan to use the home as their primary residence, this is sometimes required. And in the case of urgent repairs, it's possible that waiting for a building permit to be issued before giving termination notice would unduly delay urgent repairs, and further damage the unit.

Some parts of the bill simply don't make sense. Why is the Landlord and Tenant Board required to stop operations to issue eviction orders in any part of the province for more than 12 months after emergency orders are lifted when some requests are not even related to COVID-19? Likewise, it doesn't make sense to require the Landlord and Tenant Board to stop issuing orders across the

province when we have seen success with regional-based approaches to reopening the province.

Mr. Speaker, while this bill is well-intentioned, when compared with the measures undertaken by the government in the emergency order, it duplicates pauses of enforcement for evictions and writs of possession, ignores the success of regional-based methods and proposes a timeline that will ensure Ontario does not bounce back better than before.

Proceeding with this bill would bring in measures that would create even more unnecessary backlog at the Landlord and Tenant Board and dissuade investment in the rental market, potentially reducing the rental housing supply across the province.

1730

Our government is committed to continuing to protect the safety and well-being of Ontarians and ensuring that no one is forced to leave their home while a stay-at-home order is in place. And we continue to call on landlords to work with their tenants, as they have been, to ensure Ontarians are kept safe.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Ms. Jill Andrew: I emphatically support the no evictions act. That is very, very necessary. I'm thinking about constituents in St. Paul's; I'm thinking about folks at 100 Vaughan Road, folks on Wynona, folks on Tichester; people who are living in buildings run by Starlight, by Sterling Karamar, by Akelius; where they haven't had running water, in the case of Akelius, for months last spring; where toilets weren't working.

What's happening, because the Landlord and Tenant Board doesn't have enough staff, essentially, to facilitate hearings, is that we have rent payers who are sitting in apartments with no toilet function or no showers, waiting and waiting for their hearing date while still paying rent, because guess what? They can still receive eviction notices.

This is a concern. We need to ensure that evictions are banned and, frankly, we need to also ensure that residents can feel safe and be healthy in their homes and have access to clean water, for goodness' sake, and have access to toilets and showers that work. Because what are you paying rent for if your home is broken down? And what's the government going to do? What's the answer to those who are paying rent in a home they cannot live in? What's the answer?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: This morning, I attended a Landlord and Tenant Board hearing for 17 families in Beaches–East York whom corporate landlord Pinedale Properties is trying to evict because they lost income during COVID. One of them is Zinnat Jahan. Zinnat just lost her husband to cancer a year ago, and then lost her job to COVID. Now a single mom, she has been working her tail off to pay rent and arrears, but Pinedale won't negotiate in a meaningful way, as it's required to do by law, and instead has been trying to get her to sign a

repayment plan she can't afford and that is tantamount to agreeing to her own eviction.

The government needs to hear that this is happening on a massive scale. Corporate landlords are not meaningfully negotiating. Families like Zinnat's, many of them Black, Indigenous or racialized, just like those hardest-hit by the pandemic, are the new wave of homelessness that the Ford government is creating by refusing to help vulnerable people with rent arrears and paid sick days, and by refusing to ban evictions in a real way.

Entire families are going to be in tents in the park because this government refuses to act. We need a ban on evictions throughout the pandemic: not just the sheriff pounding on the door, but the hearings that have been resulting in 60-second evictions for families like Zinnat's.

Speaker, these aren't statistics; these are hard-working people whose income has disappeared during the pandemic. Stop making excuses. Ban evictions now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you to the member for Toronto Centre for bringing this forward today.

COVID-19 has been with us for a year. Thousands have lost their jobs because of forced business closures, and the government cannot say with any confidence when regular economic activity will return or for how long businesses will be able to remain open right now. As a result, thousands of tenants across the province are struggling to keep up with their daily bills, pay their rent and put food on the table for their families. No family should face eviction because a job was lost due to forced closings or missing time and pay because of sickness, home-schooling or isolation requirements.

While the government has stopped the enforcement of eviction orders, they have done little to nothing to help families or small landlords avoid that inevitable eventuality. From paid sick leave to supporting people and businesses, everywhere we turn, the Premier is passing the buck to Ottawa.

Throughout the pandemic, the Premier has been adamant that if people can't pay their rent, they shouldn't, but he has taken no specific action to help residential tenants or small landlords with rent payments during the crisis.

Early in the crisis, Liberal leader Steven Del Duca called on the Premier to protect tenants and landlords with an emergency rent program. Coupled with the moratorium on evictions, this would have ensured that both landlords and tenants were protected from the insecurity created by the pandemic.

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, the government is creating the potential for a post-pandemic tsunami of evictions and homelessness. Just when we will want residents to be happy and healthy and to get back to work and kick-start the economy, some of the most vulnerable will be facing eviction and homelessness because of their lost job or because they got sick during COVID-19. That's not setting them up for success, that's not setting the economy up for success and the government needs to do more.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good afternoon. I am very pleased to join this urgent debate today and to add my voice and the voice of my constituents in Davenport, who have overwhelmingly demanded that this Legislature act to ban COVID evictions—constituents like Becky and Ryan, two small business owners who have been struggling to keep their business afloat, only to find themselves forced out of their apartment during the pandemic when their landlord filed papers to move into their unit; or Ashley on Dovercourt Road, who wrote to say, “I’ve barely been able to afford my rent.... I’m being pushed out of my place because of it, and I am not sure I will be able to afford another place to live.”

Week after week for the past 11 months, my office has been inundated with heartbreaking stories of people forced from their homes, and those evictions continued unabated even when the government’s so-called moratorium came into effect. I am proud to stand with my colleagues in support of this important legislation, and I want to challenge MPPs across the aisle to consider the people in their communities who face eviction, who face homelessness and illness because of their inaction. We can and must do better. Let’s end these evictions today,

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Mr. Joel Harden: Amanda Proulx was evicted from her Ottawa home on December 29, 2020. Her fiancé, Travis, had died of a stroke on November 9, 2020, and the day after Travis died, Ontario’s Landlord and Tenant Board processed Amanda’s eviction.

Amanda had been at Travis’s side for a year. She had left her job at an electrical company, and she had only recently qualified for the EI compassionate care program because somebody at EI, I guess, had figured out that Travis had a terminal condition. But in the months leading up to that, Amanda had almost nothing, like a lot of people living under COVID. She barely survived as she cared every day for Travis, but she heard Premier Ford say, “If you can’t pay rent, don’t worry,” and she believed that. But four days after Christmas, 10 police officers and a sheriff showed up to evict her.

Was Premier Ford there for Amanda in her time of need? No, but 25 neighbours were. They tried to stop the eviction. They stood outside her door. They helped raise money with a GoFundMe campaign, and now Amanda is housed. God bless everybody involved in that work. Thank you.

We need this bill to pass, so what happened to Amanda doesn’t happen to anybody else. And do you know what? It’s beyond evictions. We have a housing market that’s out of control, that’s run like a commodity for rich people who want to bet on pieces on a poker board. Housing should be for people. Pass this bill. Let’s create a housing market for people, not for profit.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It is a pleasure to rise and speak on the private member’s bill, Bill 244, to ban evictions during the COVID pandemic. I want to thank the member from Toronto Centre for bringing forward this important piece of legislation.

Speaker, right now, as we speak, there are still places in this province where people are in a stay-at-home order. Many parts of the province have just come out of a stay-at-home order—and it’s pretty darn hard to stay at home safely if you don’t have a home. The bottom line is that when the moratorium on evictions was lifted, thousands of eviction notices went to the Landlord and Tenant Board, at a time when we knew there was going to be a second wave. And here we are debating whether we should have an evictions ban when health experts are telling us that a third wave is on the horizon.

We simply cannot contain this virus and we simply cannot keep our schools safe and reopen our economy if people can’t stay home during a pandemic. If they’re evicted, they are not going to be able to stay at home.

1740

I’ve heard the members opposite from government speak about the plight of small landlords. I’m concerned about small landlords too, because I know there are a number of landlords out there struggling to pay their mortgages, to pay their bills, to pay their utilities. If the government was serious about standing up for small landlords, they would have listened to the Federation of Rental Housing Providers, who came to the SCOFEA committee over the summer and said, “Can you please bring forward a rent support program that will help tenants and small landlords?” Speaker, I thought that was the purpose of us meeting over the summer. We spent hours and hours listening to hundreds and hundreds of people talk to us about what we need to do to get out of this pandemic, how we could support people. The people who support small landlords said, “We need a rent support program.” If we’re serious about supporting landlords, bring a program like that in. Ban evictions so people can stay at home when they’re asked to stay at home.

If we’re truly serious about saying that we’re all in this together, if we’re truly serious in saying that those essential front-line, low-wage workers are heroes, we will ensure that they don’t lose their home to stay in during this pandemic.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Ms. Jessica Bell: I want to tell you about Jessie Tang. She lives on Ossington Avenue, in a rooming house. Her landlord has been harassing her for two years in an attempt to evict her. She’s only one of two people left. The landlord has removed walls without taking any precautions against asbestos. The landlord has argued that she needs to move into this rooming house, even though she has a home of her own in North York. She has been physically aggressive. She has refused to turn on the heat. She has even installed a surveillance camera in the kitchen.

Jessie has called the police; they couldn’t help. She called the rental enforcement unit; they didn’t have

enough staff to help. So then she filed a complaint with the Landlord and Tenant Board, and she is still waiting for the date.

But the landlord's bogus application to evict Jessie? That's getting fast-tracked, and that case is scheduled to be heard on February 22, the very day the eviction ban in Toronto is going to be lifted, in the middle of a pandemic.

Jessie is deeply, deeply stressed, just like the thousands of people who are facing evictions right now. It is not okay. It is immoral and it is wrong to evict people in the middle of a pandemic, simply because they have lost their jobs through no fault of their own.

I am urging you to support this bill and put a moratorium on evictions so that renters and the people of Ontario can get through this crisis safely.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Tens of thousands of my constituents in Parkdale–High Park are tenants, and many of them currently face the risk of losing their home if we don't take action now by passing this bill to ban COVID-19 evictions.

One woman facing eviction in Parkdale is a mother of two young children. Before the pandemic, she was studying to be an early childhood educator. Like so many others, she lost her job when the pandemic began, and she could now lose her home because she is unable to pay back rent owed in the first lockdown.

This very morning, another constituent, with epilepsy, who's currently in the hospital recovering from a seizure—despite the vulnerable state of their health, their landlord is trying to evict them, and the Landlord and Tenant Board is insisting on holding their hearing today, while the constituent is in the hospital.

Thirteen thousand eviction hearings have been scheduled in the last three months. This government is not listening to the people who are saying they need rent relief to get through this pandemic—people like Amelia, who also wrote, saying, "Please don't worsen the homelessness crisis by allowing evictions to resume." She goes on to ask the Ontario government to extend benefits to Ontarians who are out of work so they can pay rent.

With the increasing threat of COVID-19 variants and during the coldest time of the year, a humane government wouldn't idly stand by as people and families lose their homes.

We must halt evictions until we are all safely out of this pandemic. No one should be evicted because of COVID-19.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Mr. Chris Glover: I rise to stand in favour of Bill 244 to ban COVID-19 evictions.

We're in the middle of a humanitarian crisis across this province—it's not just COVID-19; it's also a homelessness epidemic across this province. In my riding, there are 59 tents—people living in tents through the winter in Trinity Bellwoods Park. All of you, all of the members of this House, to get here today, you had to have passed homeless people living on the streets, even though

it was minus 10 and we got 20 centimetres of snow last night. Those people are suffering.

I was talking to Kim Curry from Seeds of Hope. She says that there are no warming centres. The churches were not able to open to let people get warm. People are being tortured because they have no place to get warm.

Instead of supporting people and finding homes for people, you are fuelling this homelessness crisis by passing Bill 184, which accelerates the Landlord and Tenant Board evictions. You've got evictions happening right now, as we speak, in the middle of the winter, in the middle of a pandemic, and you've already said that you're not going to support this ban on COVID-19 evictions. It's absolutely inhumane, what you're doing. It's a crisis out there. Go talk to the people who are out there on the streets right now, see how they're suffering, and then use your conscience to vote in favour of the member from Toronto Centre's bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I really appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. As you're well aware, I have a very large population of tenants in my riding who have been pressed very hard. They are the essential workers, they are the front-line health care workers, who desperately need stability in their housing. When they are in a situation where landlords continue to press them hard, to look for the opportunity to move them out so they can crank the rates up through the roof, it undermines their ability to do what they have to do, and it undermines, as has been said in this House, our efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Speaker, all this talk about taking on the epidemic, and yet at the same time not dealing with the fundamental things that need to be done to stop the spread—no paid sick leave, no investment in the schools to make them safer, and a failure on the part of this government to protect people from eviction, which we know will put them in a precarious position, expose them to more disease and lead them to expose others.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Toronto Centre has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Suze Morrison: I want to thank my colleagues from Milton, Toronto–St. Paul's, Beaches–East York, Orléans, Davenport, Ottawa Centre, Guelph, University–Rosedale, Parkdale–High Park, Spadina–Fort York and Toronto–Danforth for all contributing to the debate on the bill today. I want to thank them for their thoughtful comments and debate.

What I've heard in this chamber today is that we need a fulsome and immediate eviction ban in the province of Ontario. People can't stay at home as the Premier has asked, no matter what language he asks it in, if they have no home to stay in. Keeping people housed is good public health policy, and it's clear that this is an urgent priority that we need to take immediate action on.

Today, I heard from a tenant named Elizabeth who sent me this letter. It says, "How do you expect people to stay at home when they have no home? This is not a smart economic decision but more importantly it is completely inhumane to be evicting families for circumstances outside

of their control. Landlord profit is not more important than family's safety. Please act compassionately and quickly.”

Speaker, Elizabeth is right. Lives are at stake here. I don't want to look back on this moment and think that this was the moment the Legislature could have acted to save thousands of lives and didn't. This can't be the moment when thousands of lives are put at risk because we failed to act to address the eviction crisis and the homelessness crisis that is unfolding around us. I don't want to look back on this moment and trace tens of thousands of COVID-19 infections and hundreds of thousands of deaths to the inaction of this Legislature to implement a fulsome, long-term eviction ban in the province of Ontario, to put the interests of Ontarians before the interests of corporate landlords.

To my Conservative colleagues: Choose the right path here. Choose the compassionate path. Let's work together, let's get this bill passed, and let's keep folks from being tossed out of their homes in the middle of a pandemic.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The time allotted for private members' public business has expired.

Ms. Morrison has moved second reading of Bill 244, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 with respect to evictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say “aye.”

All those opposed will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Pursuant to standing order 101(d), the recorded division of this item of private members' public business will be deferred to the proceeding of deferred votes.

Second reading vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, this House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1751.

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Cho, Stan (PC)	Willowdale	
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Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Parm (PC)	Milton	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gravelle, Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
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Hardeman, Hon. / L'hon. Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hassan, Faisal (NDP)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor—Tecumseh	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
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Kusendova, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre	
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Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
MacLeod, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa (PC)	Nepean	Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries / ministre des Industries du patrimoine, du sport, du tourisme et de la culture
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Miller, Norman (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Mitas, Christina Maria (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough- Centre	
Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Morrison, Suze (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports

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Park, Lindsey (PC)	Durham	
Parsa, Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	
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Piccini, David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie, du Développement du Nord et des Mines Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Roberts, Jeremy (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa- Ouest—Nepean	
Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associé délégué au dossier des Petites Entreprises et de la Réduction des formalités administratives Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
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Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurrratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
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West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
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