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Jeudi
18 février 2021

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Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 18 February 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 18 février 2021

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Let us pray.
Prayers/Prières.

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 London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I rise today to participate in the debate on Bill 238, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act. Speaker, I recall when this legislation was introduced back in December, the final day of the fall session of this assembly, it was introduced just prior to the introduction of Bill 239, the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act, which is a private member's bill that I introduced and that has generated widespread support across the province.

I mention my bill, which was introduced that same day back in December, in the context of this bill, because both of those bills claim or purport to do the same thing: (1) to support workers; and (2) to help small businesses with their costs and their workforce. But it's interesting, Speaker, when you look at the actual impact of those two bills and what Bill 238 will achieve compared to what Bill 239, my bill, the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act, could have achieved.

The Minister of Labour, when he spoke to Bill 238, the bill that is before us this morning, took some time to talk about paid sick days in the context of what this government is doing to support workers and businesses. Therefore, Speaker, I want to focus on some of the things that the minister said about paid sick days as a workplace safety measure that this government is implementing—or actually not implementing.

The minister said that there is a program—his words, Speaker: “There is financial help for workers who need to

stay home. Thanks to an agreement between” the Prime Minister, the Premier, “there is over \$1 billion available for workers to access two weeks of paid sick days.” Now, Speaker, I have to note that the federal program that the minister referred to in his remarks is not two weeks of paid sick days for Ontario workers. It is a temporary program that provides \$500 a week of income replacement, \$450 after tax, which is below minimum wage and, for many workers, does not come close to income replacement. It requires a worker to have missed at least 50% of their work week in order to be eligible, and it is only available on a weekly basis.

This is not a program that was designed in any way to support a worker who wakes up one morning, goes to have breakfast, and notices that they have lost their sense of taste or smell. They may be running a mild fever. They may have a cough—some of these classic symptoms of COVID. They may want to go and take the day to get a COVID test and wait for the results. They want to do the responsible thing: to stay home—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order, please.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: —to stay home and not go to work and risk infecting their co-workers and the customers that they serve.

Unfortunately, Speaker, the reality is that many workers don't qualify for the federal program because they may already have some access to paid sick days through their work. If you already have access to paid sick days through your work—there are 40% of workers in Ontario who do have some access to paid sick days—you don't qualify for that federal benefit.

I want to share with members of this House an email that I just received yesterday from a resident of the city of Guelph. He said that his son tested positive for COVID-19. He did the responsible thing: He told his work immediately that his son had gotten a positive test. They told him that he had to get a positive test and not to return to work for a minimum of 14 days. He did test negative, but his employer asked him to do another COVID test, which also came back negative, but he was still required to self-isolate for that full period of 14 days. The paid sick time that is available through his employer was not available to him for the purposes of self-isolation. He is one of the lucky few in this province, the 40% of people who do have paid sick time, but because he had that available through his work, he's not even eligible to apply for the federal benefit, because that's one of the requirements that you have: You don't have access to paid sick time through your work.

Now, this resident of Guelph who emailed me is in a situation that many health care workers in our province are experiencing. Let's acknowledge the heroic, unbelievable efforts of health care workers over this past year to help us through the ravages of this pandemic. We know in our community of London—I see my colleague here, the member for London—Fanshawe. We have heard from nurses at St. Joseph's Health Care in London, at LHSC. If they have a COVID-positive result that can't be linked to their workplace, they are required to stay home from work and they are not permitted to use their sick time that's available to them. They have to use holidays, if they have holidays available, or stay home on their own dime.

Speaker, they want to do the responsible thing. Of course they do. They're a health care worker. They don't want to go into the workplace and risk spreading a virus to their co-workers or the patients that they work with. And yet they are expected to use their own resources to do the responsible thing, to stay home if they are sick.

0910

That's two examples that I've just shared of people who have access to paid sick days who aren't supported by the federal benefit, but the reality is that there are 60% of Ontarians who do not have any access to paid sick days at all. When you look at who makes up that 60% without any paid sick days, we find that of the people who are least likely to have paid sick days, about 90% are racialized and immigrant workers. These are the workers who are working in warehouses. They are working in transportation facilities. They're working in delivery services. They're working all around the GTA, the regions of Peel and Brampton, where we know that COVID-19 is such a concern that the mayors have asked the province to not lift the lockdown, to keep those regions locked down because they are so concerned about reopening the economy when the virus continues to spread, and in particular, the new variants.

We just have to look at the experience of Newfoundland as a cautionary lesson in how quickly those new variants can spread, and particularly in workplaces where workers are congregated, as in warehousing and transportation and manufacturing and many of those essential jobs that so many workers in the GTA must go into to continue to work.

We know from WSIB data—and we're talking right now about a workplace safety and insurance amendment act—that the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board has reported that 15,000 people in Ontario have been infected with COVID-19 as a result of work-related exposure. The risk of contracting COVID-19 at work, Speaker, is very real. In fact, workplaces are second only to long-term-care homes as the most frequent source of COVID-19 transmission. I have to say, Speaker, that even when you think about that statistic—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Come to order, please.

Ms. Peggy Sattler:—you have to recognize that long-term-care homes are also workplaces. We have heard

many examples of staff in long-term-care homes who have also been infected by COVID-19 because of where they work.

Speaker, the government had an opportunity in Bill 238 to do something meaningful with the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, to make meaningful changes that are actually going to deal with the real issues that workers in this province are facing. What this bill does is it reduces—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Sorry to interrupt the member. I recognize the member from Essex on a point of order.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Pardon me, Madam Speaker. I hate to interrupt my colleague, but I've heard you, from the chair, ask for order five times already in the first 10 minutes of the session. I appreciate that the member across the way is a well-known baritone, but his voice is really distracting in the building.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. I do recognize the point of order that all members do need to allow debate to continue. I have asked for order several times. I haven't individually noted the members, but I would ask that the side conversations cease or quiet down. It's difficult to hear each other over the masks, I recognize, but it's very disruptive. Thank you.

I return to the member.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you very much, Speaker. What Bill 238 does is it legislates the freezing of WSIB premiums paid by employers for 2021. We heard the Minister of Labour, when he was speaking to this bill, talk about how important this would be for small businesses in this province. But I have to tell you, Speaker, that what I am hearing from businesses, what the government must also be hearing from businesses, is that paid sick leave is what would actually support businesses to make it through the pandemic and ensure that they are able to survive and remain open with their workers still on the payroll.

There was a media conference last week, on February 10, from the Better Way Alliance. This is an organization of small and medium-sized businesses that came to tell the government that paid sick days are good for their business, their employees and their communities. They pointed out to Conservative MPPs that “paid sick days are not only a public health imperative, but also make good business sense.” They said, “The cost of providing paid sick leave is minimal compared to the cost of outbreaks or the cycles of lockdowns and restrictions, which will continue as long as workers without paid sick days have no choice but to go into work sick.”

One business owner here in Toronto, Sam Conover, said, “If someone comes in sick, everyone gets sick and it's a horrible cycle. Providing paid sick days protects against this. It means a better experience for customers and employees.”

Those businesses understand that paid sick days are a support that would help them keep their workers healthy, keep their workers on the payroll and keep their business going after the pandemic is over.

But it's not just the Better Way Alliance, Speaker. When I tabled my bill back in December—the same day that Bill 238 was tabled—the Ontario Chamber of Commerce issued a statement. In their statement, they said, “Public health and safety are priorities for us all. Ensuring people, particularly during a pandemic, can afford to stay home, is both the right thing to do and an economical thing to do. When a worker protects themselves, they protect their colleagues and employer and in turn, they safeguard the entire business.”

It's not just the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. There was an editorial earlier this month by the senior business columnist for the *Globe and Mail*—not known typically as a bastion of left thinking. The senior business columnist for the *Globe and Mail* wrote an opinion piece entitled, “Politicians Must Realize Paid Sick Leave Isn't About Entitlements, It's Smart Economic Policy.” She points out, “It's unconscionable that our provincial legislators are still treating essential workers as if they're economically expendable....”

“Our premiers need a reality check about this humanitarian crisis and the potential for more economic destruction before Canada's stalled vaccination efforts get back on track....”

“Stopping the spread is key to easing lockdowns. Simply telling vulnerable people to call in sick” is not going to keep them at home. It's not going to reduce workplace transmission.

I'm disappointed that—the government, you know, in December had an opportunity to introduce amendments to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act that would have made a meaningful difference for workers in this province. They could have also—at the same time, there was—I introduced my bill in December. The government could have recognized a good idea when they saw it. They could have worked for the rest of December, when we were in recess, for all of January that we were in recess, for the first three weeks of February that we were in recess. They could have worked to incorporate my PMB into government legislation, if they wanted to take credit for it. A good policy idea is good policy, regardless of which party brings it forward. I would love to see the government bring a paid-sick-days program forward in a government bill, but they chose not to do that. They chose not to do that.

The first day we returned to this Legislature after a period of lockdown that we hadn't seen for months prior, as COVID-19 caseloads spiked, in the face of dire warnings from Dr. Steini Brown from the scientific advisory table that if the government doesn't take strong measures now and proceeds with its irresponsible reopening of the economy, we could be looking at 4,000 to 5,000 cases before the end of March; and we could be facing an even longer, deeper lockdown in April that will be necessitated because of this government's failure to implement the measures that are widely acknowledged as absolutely essential if we are to actually curb the spread of COVID-19—and that starts with curbing the spread of COVID in workplaces.

0920

This legislation that was brought forward will do nothing—nothing—to deal with protecting workers in their workplaces from COVID. It will do nothing to enable a worker to stay home if they are sick when they know that that would mean taking a couple of days' loss of pay. And for the lowest-income workers, that could mean not being able to make the rent that month, not being able to buy groceries. Those workers should not have to be forced to be economically penalized for doing the right thing. In many cases, it's not a choice. Doing the right thing is not a choice. We shouldn't put that on the worker.

We have an obligation to support these workers. If we're going to give these public health messages, “Stay home if you are sick,” we have to actually enable that to happen. That's why we called on the government on Tuesday to give unanimous consent to my PMB, the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act. The government chose not to do that. Even though they had many weeks to study that bill, they chose not to do that. They will have another opportunity on February 25 when my bill comes forward for second reading debate. I hope that every member on that side of the House is listening to the phone calls and the emails that they are receiving from public health experts, from workers, from business owners who are calling for this government to do the right thing and pass paid sick days legislation now for workers and businesses in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions and comments?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I would like to thank the member from London West for her brilliant presentation. My question is, with public health experts, leading scientists, epidemiologists, boards of health, municipalities and even the Ontario Chamber of Commerce endorsing Bill 239 for paid sick leave, why do you think this government is shirking its responsibilities under the ESA and wanting the federal government to do all the heavy lifting?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I think that what we have seen from this government throughout the pandemic is that they are more interested in protecting corporations than protecting workers. We saw that in the legislation they brought forward to absolve long-term-care-home operators, for-profit chains, private sector chains, from any liability for negligence in their treatment of residents under COVID-19.

Speaker, this is a pattern that we have seen from this government. They are not actually interested in supporting workers. They had an opportunity. There's much more that needs to be done with the WSIA. They had an opportunity to make amendments that would have been meaningful, and they chose not to.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Donna Skelly: This proposed bill clearly provides a win for both employers and employees. I'm sure that there are many family businesses from the honourable member's riding of London West that would greatly

appreciate any and all forms of support from the provincial government. I've heard from many small business owners who appreciate the grants that this government has put forward, and they need help. Why would you oppose the supports for businesses in this proposed legislation?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to be clear to the member across the way: The NDP has been the party on the front lines of advocating for supports for businesses. We did that back in the spring during the first wave with our Save Main Street plan. We have continued that advocacy and we will remain committed to supporting small businesses.

Speaker, as I feel that I outlined in my remarks, paid sick days are the actual supports that small businesses need so that they don't have to worry about all of their employees coming down with COVID-19. They don't have to worry about sick employees transmitting the virus to customers. They can keep their workers healthy and on the payroll and their business going.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to ask a question of my colleague from London West about the bill before us, Bill 238, the workplace safety and insurance amendment. I sat and listened intently, even over the noise coming from the other side of the House, and I know that in this bill, which is barely a page long, there is no provision for paid sick days for workers. There is no presumptive legislation, something that my colleague from Niagara Falls introduced that this government could pass so that workers that become ill with COVID-19 and have to file for WSIB, it is automatically a given that they got COVID at work, rather than having to fight WSIB and be denied.

The member from Flamborough–Glanbrook says something in this bill supports businesses. Yes, it's giving them a break on paying into supporting sick workers. So I'm just wondering if the member for London West can tell me what in this bill she sees that actually directly supports the workers in this province.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I appreciate the question from the member for Windsor West. There's nothing in this bill, Speaker, that supports workers despite the comments that we heard across the way from the minister when he spoke to this bill. This bill helps employers by freezing WSIB premiums, but it does nothing to help workers. You know, businesses may welcome a WSIB premium reduction; I'm sure they do. But more than that, businesses are looking for paid sick days to keep their workers healthy and their workplaces safe.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Jane McKenna: First of all, I just want to address this. There's no other province or territory in Canada that is looking to duplicate what the federal government is already doing, including the NDP in BC. I also want to point out that two provinces that did do that, Saskatchewan and Quebec, cancelled it when CERB came in, and also five days after that. So just so we're clear.

I also want to say that there's \$800 million there; 73% is unspent that people can call on. I just want to reiterate to say there is a 1-800 number, 959-2019, but clearly people are not obviously being able to do that. The Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development's explanation of this proposed legislation and the large numbers of supportive stakeholders that will help the people of Ontario—my question is, why does the member from London West still believe this change would cut workers' benefits? That is obviously not true.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I'm sorry, the member will withdraw.

Ms. Jane McKenna: Withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Response? The member from London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: The federal minister responsible for the CRSB actually wrote a letter to Minister McNaughton and she clarified that there would be nothing duplicative between the federal program and a provincial program.

I would also want to point out to the member that Ontario has the most cases of COVID right now than anywhere else in Canada, and so the urgency of paid sick days is particularly—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Northumberland–Peterborough South, come to order.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: —important in our province at this time. It's not just me saying that, Speaker. It's municipal councils, it's mayors, it's health care experts, it's boards of health, it's union leaders, it's labour, it's workers, it's businesses—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. Further questions?

0930

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: We're talking about WSIB and how important it is that we protect our workers when they are injured or they become sick. I want to highlight the agency workers and the contract workers that aren't covered by WSIB. In particular, there's an example in London. Yassin Dabeh was a 19-year-old contract worker that went to a long-term-care home and contracted COVID-19. As a result, he died. I just wanted the member from London West to expand why are—WSIB is broken; we need to fix it, and the vulnerability around workers who aren't covered at all. They wouldn't even be accessing sick days under an agency or contract work. What about those workers? What are we doing for them under this WSIB bill?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I really appreciate the question from my colleague the member for London–Fanshawe. Look, all of us hear, I'm sure, on a regular basis from injured workers in our ridings who either don't have access to WSIB, are shamed by WSIB or are deemed to be able to work in a phantom job as an excuse to be cut off from WSIB. WSIB has failed injured workers in Ontario—there's no question—and in particular throughout COVID-19.

In December, we saw an investigation that showed that more than 7,600 workers at that time had contracted

COVID-19 on the job. There were thousands of workplace safety inspections across the province, but only two fines were issued, Speaker—two fines for the 7,600 workers, and one of the fines was to a worker. One business was fined for not protecting their workers, after 7,600 workers had contracted COVID on the job.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): We don't have time for another back and forth.

Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Good morning, everyone. I rise today to speak on Bill 238, a bill to protect employers from sudden increases in Workplace Safety and Insurance Board premiums in 2021. On the surface of it, yes, this bill is fine, and I understand why the government might want to add some additional supports to struggling businesses, because there are a lot of businesses struggling out there. But I would say the number one thing we can do for struggling businesses, in addition to providing them with direct financial support—which this government is not doing enough of—is to actually contain the spread of COVID infections so we can protect people's lives and be able to reopen our economy.

I think a discussion about workplace safety is an essential discussion about how to contain COVID, because we know that's where most of the outbreaks are happening. But unfortunately, this bill doesn't really offer much of a discussion about workplace safety, even though it's in the title.

I want to take a few moments to talk about the motion I put forward to actually address workplace safety. Yes, it begins with guaranteeing 10 paid sick days for all Ontarians so they don't have to choose between going to work or staying home, but it's beyond that, Speaker. It's about mandating increased inspections and fines for non-compliance. It's about mandating proper PPE so when workers go into the workplace, they're actually safe. It's about introducing an awareness campaign so workers know how to complain about unsafe workplaces. It's about providing immediate funding to roll out rapid testing with the staffing available to actually administer those tests in vulnerable workplaces, especially our long-term-care homes, schools and warehouses and food processing places. It's about outlining a rollout strategy for the vaccine that shows how essential, vulnerable workers will be prioritized and providing them with paid time off to actually go get their vaccine shot.

Speaker, if we're going to update the WSIB act and bring it up for debate, why don't we have amendments so it expands coverage to people who are currently not covered, such as developmental support workers and those working in residential care facilities, including retirement and group homes? Why don't we stand up and protect injured workers by ending WSIB's practice of deeming workers? I believe there's a bill that's on the order paper to do exactly that.

So Speaker, if we're going to stand up and call essential workers heroes, let's provide them with safe workplaces so they're treated like the heroes they are.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions and comments?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: My question to the member—I was listening to his speech—is that I talk to my constituents and the business owners and the employers, and every little bit helps and it goes a long way. So I just want to ask, why would you—if every little bit helps and your businesses are going to be impacted, what are you telling your businesses that are looking at this change and saying that this is a sigh of relief for them, they can take on more employees, and they don't have to be worried about their payroll taxes being increased because of other policies?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you for the question. I appreciate the member's question. Madam Speaker, what I tell those businesses is, yes, I support things that provide businesses with some relief right now, but I also am going to come into this House and advocate for a comprehensive safe workplace plan, because I know that is vital to containing the spread of COVID. What businesses need right now is a provincial government who's going to provide them with the financial support they need when they're forced to shut down and put the protections in place to avoid future lockdowns.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Good morning, Speaker. It's a pleasure to see you there this morning.

My question to the member from Guelph—you talked about finances. To those of us who are perplexed as to why paid sick days weren't put into this bill, in your opinion, do you believe it's because the government doesn't have the money to pay for that? Just a simple question.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question. It's been clear that this government's been sitting on money that's been provided primarily from the federal government throughout this pandemic, which, unfortunately, has meant that we haven't acted as aggressively as we should be acting to contain the spread of COVID. In particular, over the summer, if money had been spent on more LTC staff, more testing, more workplace safety measures, we could have reduced the spread of COVID during wave 2. To me, those types of investments, especially in safe workplaces, are absolutely critical to staying ahead of this virus and avoiding a third wave and another lockdown.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Jane McKenna: I just want to be very clear when we're sitting here in this House: First of all, the health and safety of the people and workers of Ontario is our top priority, full stop. Second of all, we are all on the same side: employers, employees and government, working together to put the health and safety of all our workers—make sure everybody's safe.

But I want to say a couple of things, just because you were talking about health and safety. The minister has been out—total inspections to date are 39,000; total orders issued are 40,000; stop work orders are 67. We are making sure that everybody is safe in their work environment. Everybody deserves to go to work and come home safe,

and we have done a phenomenal job making sure that that continues to happen. Yes, there are bad actors, but we're making sure that we continue to do that.

But I'm a bit perplexed, because we keep talking about the paid sick days. We have 73% of the monies unspent, and no other province has done this—two have, but then they stopped after the federal government came in. There's \$800 million. My suggestion to you is: What do you suggest, then, when there's money there—\$800 million—and no one else is talking about this but you people? It's confusing everybody that's out there.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question. First of all, on workplace safety: Do you know what? The inspections have actually pointed out that a fairly high—and I would say a dangerously high—percentage of workplaces were non-compliant, and yet there have hardly been any fines administered to those workplaces. So if we're going to be serious about it, then they need to be fined for non-compliance.

Secondly, when it comes to paid sick days, one of the reasons a lot of workers are not accessing that is because it's not part of—

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Because they don't know about it.

0940

Mr. Mike Schreiner: No, they know. Everyone knows there is a federal paid sick leave benefit. The problem is that it falls far short of what is needed. Everyone is saying that. Mayors are saying that, former PC Party leaders are saying that, public health officials are saying that: The federal program is insufficient. It's in the best interest of all of us to work together to strengthen that program, so why don't we do that here in Ontario?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate? I recognize the member from—sorry, just a moment.

REPORT, FINANCIAL
ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I beg to inform the House that the following document was tabled: a report entitled Ontario's Labour Market in 2020: COVID-19 Pandemic Causes Record Job Loss, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario.

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

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate? I again recognize the member from Peterborough–Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's good to see you in the Chair today. I always enjoy it when

you're Speaker. We get to have a little bit more fun at times, it seems.

We've had—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Hey.

Mr. Dave Smith: That is not meant as disrespect to any of the other deputy Speakers. It's simply, you're my favourite Speaker in the Chair today.

We've had about four and a half hours or so of debate on this. There have been a lot of things that have been said. I can repeat a lot of it, and I probably will end up repeating a lot of it, but there are a few other things that I'd like to talk about that emphasize, really, what this bill is all about.

I'm 50. Back in the early 1990s, I owned a pizzeria. I know that there are a lot of other people who have been small business owners. I know that there are a lot of people who understand how all of that works. But there also are people who don't know how that works.

For every dollar that I spent on labour, I was paying about 20% more in other fees. When someone comes forward to their employer and they say, "I'd like a raise," and they ask for \$1 more, it's not costing that employer \$1 more; it's costing that employer about a buck twenty more. We don't think about that as employees. We look at what is it that we make, what is it that we take home, how much value do we think that we put into the company. But every employer, small or large, is going to have to look at it and say, "What's the total cost, then, of me having someone work here? How do I get to the point where everybody who's working for me is happy and I'm satisfying their needs, and I am still able to keep the company open?" Those are all things that get taken into account when you're running a business. Again, it's something that most employees don't know about.

So what can the government do to help with that? This is one of those things. WSIB premiums are something that get tacked on as an employer cost with every employee. It's not a lot of money, and I will freely admit that: It's not really a lot of money for a company in the grand scheme of things. If I've got a small company with two or three employees, I'm probably paying \$150,000, \$160,000 in salaries, maybe \$200,000 in salaries. The WSIB premium, when you're comparing it to the \$200,000 that you're paying out, is not that big of a deal. It's not a huge amount.

The problem is that there are a lot of these little things that got added on—a little bit here, a little bit there; a little bit here, a little bit there. When people are making the argument that you should be adding to this or you should be adding to that or you should put these additional costs on, they always say things like, "It's only a little bit."

We have a previous Premier who once stood up in a press conference, talking about the Green Energy Act and how it was only going to add \$3 or \$4 a month to somebody's hydro bill.

Hon. John Yakabuski: A cup of coffee.

Mr. Dave Smith: The example was a cup of coffee. Two coffees a month: That's all it is. You can go to Tim Hortons. Two coffees a month: Surely, to have a green energy, we could afford that.

At face value, it's probably a legitimate statement. The problem is that it's \$5 here, it's \$7 here, it's \$3 there, it's 20 bucks here, and at the end of the month you're adding up and it's hundreds of dollars, or in the case of a lot of businesses, hundreds of thousands of dollars. It becomes unsustainable.

The approach that we have been taking as a government, then, is how do we mitigate that? How do we start to lower some of those costs—just a little bit here and a little bit there, because those little bits make a big difference. I'll say it again because I think it's really important to recognize: Those little bits make a big difference.

How much of a difference? Well, I'll use that Tim Hortons analogy. I'll probably get pushback for saying the name of that company because, for some reason, it's a bad company now to say when we're talking. It's about three bucks; let's say \$4. You go in and you have a coffee and a doughnut on your drive through. You do that once a week and it's 200 bucks a year. You do that every day and it's a thousand bucks a year. It's only \$4; it's not a whole lot. It's a thousand bucks a year.

I do date night Friday nights with my wife. I don't get to see her an awful lot because of what our jobs are. I'm not complaining about that. I'm not saying that I regret it at all. But I try to make Friday night something that's special for my wife. I take her out to dinner or we order in for dinner right now. It's not uncommon to spend \$50 or \$75 on a nice dinner now. But when you put that over the course of the year, it's a fair bit of money. It's only 50 bucks or 60 bucks. It's a nice thing to do. But when you take that little bit—and it is just a little bit—and you expand it over the course of the year, it becomes a lot. You can't just look at, what is that little bit?

We had the egg farmers here before COVID, and they had a campaign. What they were looking for was one egg more per week. Just eat one more egg per week. That's all they're asking for because, at the end of the year, that's four dozen eggs. That is a massive increase for them.

What we're looking at with this WSIB bill is something that makes a small adjustment to what the cost is going to be for the employer. It's because of the pandemic. We can do all of our planning based on historical data. We know historically that the increase in the average wage is about 2% per year. It's not a huge amount. It's something that you can count on year after year after year. It might be 2.5%, it might be 1.9%, but it's going to work out to about 2% per year.

We're in a pandemic. It's not that wages have gone up. The problem is—and I'll talk about my area in particular—last month we had 13.9% unemployment. The people who are hit with that unemployment are not the six-figure salaries; it's the average person. In my riding, the average family income is only \$63,000. Some 13% of them have been hit by COVID-19 by losing their job. That means that the average salary or average wage has gone up. It hasn't gone up because we've given increases or the companies have made massive amounts of money and they're sharing it with their employees. The average wage has gone up

because the essential workers, the front-line people, are the ones who are working, and they're good-paying jobs. It's the police officers, the firefighters, the nurses and the tradespeople. Those are the people who are there still working because of what the need is.

The hospitality industry and the tourism industry have taken a massive hit. That's a big part of what my riding is. Those aren't super-high-paying jobs. And when you lose all of those people in that employment field, it means that the average wage goes up, but it goes up because so many people lost their jobs. Some 7.8% is what the increase was this past year—a 7.8% increase, then, in the premiums for an employer who's struggling right now because their revenues are down. It's not something that's sustainable.

0950

We want to have healthy businesses. We want to have companies that are able to open and go full bore once COVID is over, and we're doing things to help, to make sure that we do have those employment opportunities for people. You just have to look at the grant program that we put out. When we went into the lockdown, we knew that there were going to be companies that had zero income—none whatsoever. How were they going to survive?

So what did we do? We introduced a grant—not a loan; a grant: grass-level support for those small businesses, the mom-and-pop shops, your next-door neighbours. They qualified for \$10,000 to \$20,000, because we knew that with no income, they weren't going to be able to cover their rent. They weren't going to be able to cover their hydro bill.

And then we added to it. We reduced the cost of electricity during the lockdown, not just for employers, but for the average person, because we were in a lockdown and we knew people were going to struggle and we had to give them that hand up. We had to help, and we took those definitive actions. This is just another tool in the toolbox. It's one more thing that we can say, one more thing that we can do, to help those businesses weather this storm, and it is weathering this storm.

Now, the opposition have come out and said, “Well, you could have done this. You could have done that. You could have done all of these other things.” I find that kind of ironic, because whenever we have introduced a bill that has had a lot of things in it, they stand up and they slam their desk and they yell and scream and say, “How dare you put all this stuff in there? We're only going to debate it for six hours, it's going to go to committee and we have only got two days of committee work. We can't get everybody in there. It's too much.”

So now we come out with a bill that is very targeted, that hits the point directly. What do we hear? “It's only two pages. You could have done so much more. Why didn't you add this, add this, add this, add this?” Pick a lane. Pick a lane: Either put a lot in, which you get mad at, or target it, but you get mad at that as well.

Whatever we do—I have been here almost three years now. It doesn't matter what we do; the opposition stands up and says, “That's wrong. You shouldn't do that. That's wrong. Too complicated; don't do that. Too simple; don't

do that.” You have got to pick a lane, guys. Come on. Either we follow some of your advice, we target these things and we make it so everybody can understand exactly what we’re trying to do—we make it simple, we target what we’re supposed to be doing, we help people and we help businesses—or we make it really, really complicated and we add a lot of stuff to it because we’re trying to get a lot of things done. But you have to pick a lane. You have to decide: Which way do you want to go? Is it that you want it simple? Is it that you want it complicated? Because apparently you don’t want it simple and you don’t want it complicated. You don’t want a lot in a bill and you don’t want a little bit in a bill. You don’t want something focused and you don’t want something that is broad-based.

We’re trying to put something forward now that is very focused, that is going to help businesses. We’re trying to show that we are all weathering this storm together. We’re trying to find ways of making it so that every business out there can be successful and can reopen, because the only way that Ontario’s economy is going to rebound is if we have businesses that can be open. The only way our consumers can get product, can buy product, can support businesses is if there are businesses there. The only way people have jobs so that they can pay their bills is if businesses are there.

We have taken a number of steps to do everything possible to make sure that businesses are still there so that when we’re able to reopen, when we can come back to what was the old norm—and there’s a lot of things about the old norm I would love to have again. There are some things I don’t want, but there’s a lot of things about the old norm I’d love to have again. When we get to that point, we have to have companies that are able to survive.

We offered the grants—\$10,000 to \$20,000. That helped during the lockdown. That made it so that companies were able to stay open. We changed the rules around temporary layoffs so that someone could remain temporarily laid off for a longer period of time so that those businesses have the opportunity to recover and bring back their employees, because if the business doesn’t recover and doesn’t bring back their employees, we have what we have in Peterborough right now, and that’s 13.9% unemployment, which isn’t acceptable.

We’re doing all of these measures. We’re stepping forward. Hydro bills, property taxes, WSIB: These are all small, incremental things that make a big difference. It is small, incremental things that make a big difference. There is no home-run hit that we can make during COVID-19. But if we can hit singles every time we’re up to bat, if you score a run every inning, at the end of a nine-inning game, you’ve scored nine runs, and there aren’t too many games in baseball that you will lose if you score nine runs. It’s about finding balance. It’s about helping people.

We’re proposing a cap of 2% on the WSIB premium, not the 7.8% that has been the increase in the average wage. Why 2%? Because 2% is historically what we have seen. Businesses can plan for that. Businesses have a little bit of certainty then, and they can figure out how they’re

going to make that adjustment. But the key to it is that we’re not lowering any of the coverage. The coverage is still going to increase by 7.8% because we recognize that there are people this is going to affect. Again, we’re finding the balance. We’re reducing the cost to what has been the historical average so that businesses can survive, so that businesses can absorb that, so that businesses can continue to employ people.

I’ve been disappointed by some of the rhetoric that has been brought forward today, disappointed with some of the rhetoric that came forward on Tuesday. It’s pitting groups against groups. I’ve heard things like, “Commercial-industrial landlords are bad. They do all these things.” I’ve heard things like, “You’re not supporting this group.” I’ve heard, “You’re giving an advantage to large corporations.” I can’t say it enough: This is a storm that we’re all in, weathering together. We are all in this storm together. It’s not just Ontario; this is a global pandemic.

We’ve made mistakes, absolutely. Everyone is going to make a mistake. But we’ve also done a lot of very, very good things. We get attacked by the opposition fairly frequently, saying, “You’re not doing enough. You should do this. You should”—sorry. What we usually hear is, “You shouldn’t do that.” Very rarely do we hear, “Here’s another idea.”

If you take a look at what has happened in some of the other jurisdictions—and I’m going to use New York state as a perfect example, because New York state is just across the lake from us. It’s separated by a natural barrier. They’re 25% larger than we are. We have just over 6,000 people who have passed away as a result of COVID-19 here in Ontario. They have just over 45,000 people who have now passed away because of COVID-19. They’re about 25% larger than us. We’re down to a daily seven-day rolling average of about 1,000 infections a day. They have been successful in bringing their rolling average down to about 9,000 infections a day.

1000

We don’t get everything right, but we’re getting a lot of things right. What we’re doing is we’re trying to make sure that most businesses in Ontario can stay open, because the more businesses that we have open, the more people we have employed. And the more people that we have employed, the more people who can pay their bills. And the more people who pay their bills, the more things they’re buying, and it builds the economy back up again. It puts Ontario back in a place where we can become again the economic engine of Canada, and we can be the economic engine of Canada because we’re doing the things to support businesses, employers and employees.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I just want to jump on a comment the member from Peterborough–Kawartha just mentioned. Sometimes, we look at the dirt that we have in our own backyard. When we start digging, we start finding out where the real issues are and where the priorities are. This government coming with this particular piece of legislation doesn’t really show the real priorities.

I'll give you a target. The member from Niagara put in presumptive legislation. He also put in to end deeming. Those are targets that are not included in your bill. When we start digging in our own backyards—I know if we look in our own backyards, we find out that there are cancer clusters of workers that are working over at General Electric who would benefit and really want these priorities as far as presumptive legislation and ending deeming. Here's a target: Can you shoot at it?

Mr. Dave Smith: That just goes back to exactly what I had been saying. We have a bill that's very targeted, that is focused on something that we know is a challenge. We heard so much over the past two and a half years that we're putting out too many bills that are too broad-based, that have too much that's going on in there, and "We can't focus on this." So now we've introduced a bill that is very focused, and what does the opposition come forward with? "You need to put more in that. You need to have a whole lot more involved."

Pick a lane. Either you want a lot or you want something to be focused. We're focusing right now on WSIB premiums to help all businesses.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you to the member from Peterborough-Kawartha. As you mentioned, we hear often in this Legislature comments from the opposition that there is too much in a piece of legislation, a bill that we've brought forward, or there isn't enough. We've also rarely heard anything from the opposite side of the Legislature about true support for business. There seems to be a constant attack on small business in Ontario from members of the opposition.

This is one element, one of the many programs that we're putting forward to help small business so that we can keep jobs. People in Ontario not only want to be paid, they want to have a job to go to. Can the member please share how this will help small businesses keep their doors open?

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much for the question, because I think it's an excellent one. How does this help small businesses?

As I said in my speech, I was a small business owner at one point. Twenty per cent, roughly, of what I would pay in salaries I had to pay in other source deductions and expenses for that individual employee. We're trying to make sure that we're reducing the cost to have employees, because the less cost to the business to hire people, the easier it is for them to hire more people.

My riding has 13.9% unemployment. The more people that we can have employed, the better it will be. This is one small tool in the tool box to help, to relieve some of those pressures that those small companies, those small employers, the true economic drivers of the province—it's one tool to help them.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to turn to the comments that there are certain pieces of legislation that

have too much and some that don't have enough. This government has offered us omnibus pieces of legislation where there are a couple of cherries in an arsenic pie, and they expect us to eat the arsenic just to get to a couple of cherries.

Now, the member says that he has focus, yet I would consider this to be myopic, considering that it does not involve concepts such as deeming and concepts such as presumptive legislation to help protect workers.

The opposition has brought forward a number of different propositional elements that this government has really chosen to shut its eyes, shut its ears to and ignore, such as Save Main Street, rent subsidies, paid sick days, four hours of hands-on time for seniors, as well as rates for essential caregivers. How can this government say it stands with workers and stands with Ontarians when it deliberately leaves them out and ignores positive solutions from the opposition?

Mr. Dave Smith: I would like to thank the member for that, because he absolutely makes my point. My point is that when we put forward legislation that has a lot in it, they complain. If we put in legislation that is very focused on something—this is a need that we need to address right now because the WSIB premium changes will happen. We need to put this forward now so that we make that adjustment, so that businesses have that certainty. And what does the opposition say? "When you have a bill that has too much in it, we don't like it. You've got too much. Don't do that. When you have a bill that doesn't have enough in it, because it's focused, we don't like that. We want you to do a lot more. Unless you do a lot more, we don't want you to do that much."

Again, I say the same thing to them, because it needs to be repeated: Pick a lane. Either you want things to be done expediently or you don't.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Jane McKenna: Government has a responsibility to listen to employers and employees. We're all in this together. It's unprecedented times. So we had this bill. Two things that were pointed out, and I just wondered if you could agree with me, with this: Employees came to say they wanted to make sure that they could rely on WSIB to receive the financial support that they needed in these times, and employers came to us and said they didn't want to be negatively impacted by higher WSIB premiums at these uncertain times by going to 7.8%. Do you think we did this in the bill?

Mr. Dave Smith: I'm going to agree 100% with that statement. We had employees who did come forward and say they need that support from WSIB. They need to make sure that WSIB coverage is there for them when they need it. And we've had employers who have come forward and said, "We believe the WSIB can work, and we need to have some cost certainty involved with it. Can you help?"

This bill accomplishes both. It provides the increase in coverage for the employees, and it provides the certainty, based on historical norms, for the employer. Again, I'll point out, the employer is the one who pays the employee.

If we make it difficult for employers to hire people, we have very high unemployment. We need to do things that help the employer and help the employee, because we are all in this same storm together.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I would like to talk real quickly. You don't get a lot of time here.

You could have included paid sick days. You can say what you're saying, whatever you want, but you could have had paid sick days in a pandemic. But when you talk about priorities, are you trying to tell me this bill was a priority over presumptive coverage for our front-line heroes, who are being denied WSIB when they get COVID on the job? They're being denied. Is that not more important than what you guys are doing here?

How about deeming? You know all about deeming, and you don't include it in the bill. That deeming bill has been out there for a year and a half, and you come forward with Bill 238. And you know, because I've been to your riding and I've talked to you about this issue, that General Electric, which has a cancer cluster, which had people die—a number of people died, but you also know they've been denied WSIB; spouses who were left without a husband or a wife have been denied WSIB coverage. That could have been in the bill. Why wasn't it?

Mr. Dave Smith: It seems to be Pete and Repeat coming up here now from the NDP, because it's the same thing: "In some bills, you have too much. In this bill, you don't have enough. Add more. If you add more, we're going to complain. Don't add as much to it." Repeat, repeat, repeat—the record is on skip. We have to reset it and get back to, really, what we're trying to do.

1010

What we're trying to do is something that is very focused, that helps both employers and employees. Why? I will repeat it again; the message seems to be lost on the opposition: We are all in this storm together. We all need to work together to get through it. This bill approaches the needs of the employee and the needs of the employer, and it makes it so that we find that balance. We give the support that the employee needs and the certainty the employer needs.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate? The member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Why, thank you, Speaker, and good morning, again. This debate is taking us in different directions. The member from Peterborough–Kawartha was saying he enjoys you being in the Chair, because we have more fun on those days.

I was thinking, when the member told us about his small business experience, that he must have been really rolling in the dough when he was a pizza maker. Then he talked about the cost of adding little things to his business: "If an employee asked for a raise," I thought, "Well, that's the same as if I'm making a pizza or I'm ordering the pizza and I want anchovies and green onions. Everything I add is going to add to my cost as well." He wanted to find

ways to lower his cost, and I hope he was doing that, but not at the expense of health and safety.

The member also spoke about the higher expense that he has on Friday night, on date night. I trust and I believe, in between the lines, that he was saying, "Whatever the cost, it's worth every penny, because it's a good night out." I was thinking that to the worker, whatever increase they get after a request for a raise is worth every penny, because their costs keep going up. Without a little bit here and a little bit there, they're not getting much ahead at all.

The value that we place on the worker, to me, is as important, if not more important, than the extra little cost to the business owner. That's why, as my friend from Niagara Falls has just said, when it comes to this bill, there are things that could have been added at a little bit of extra cost. Presumptive legislation was just one of them, and that's a bill that the member has been working on for some time.

I listened the other day when the minister and his parliamentary assistant first introduced Bill 238. A word that struck me as I was listening was when the minister said he had "recently" held consultations with groups of small business owners. I said to myself, "Recently? Buddy, where have you been?" We're a year into this this, and you have just recently met to talk about these issues with small business owners? To me—and words are important to me—it's a little late to talk about "recently."

So we're limiting premiums that business owners pay to the WSIB, and we're doing that with the hope that the savings will trickle down, as the minister said, to investments in jobs, technology and better health and safety programs. Well, in America, not that many years ago, they had this theory about trickle-down economics. That usually means that it's the workers who are being trickled on, in trickle-down economics.

The minister made mention that coupled with this was that there were no premium payments from last March, which was a \$2-billion bonus to employers. With 300,000 workplaces, around average, he said the savings was about \$760, and—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I'm sorry to interrupt the member. We will have the opportunity another time to continue his debate.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): It is time for members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

POVERTY

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I rise to speak to a profoundly serious issue that is currently happening in my riding of Windsor West. The two largest shelters for people experiencing food insecurity and homelessness are facing massive COVID-19 outbreaks. Between the Salvation

Army and the Downtown Mission, there are 65 COVID-19 cases among guests and staff, with more tests pending.

The city of Windsor's isolation and recovery centre is full as of Tuesday this week. The Downtown Mission's executive director, Reverend Ron Dunn, was left scrambling to find a temporary shelter space for our most vulnerable in the face of a wicked winter storm that swept through our region Monday night. The mission receives no sustained funding from the province or the city. They raised \$4 million from the community, but this is not a sustainable practice, especially during the pandemic. Shelters must be given the proper supports to help vulnerable people survive during this pandemic.

Many Ontarians have been left without any additional supports during the COVID-19 pandemic, often living with food insecurity, precarious housing, chronic illness or a disability. Social assistance rates remain well below poverty level and recipients aren't receiving any additional support from this government to buy what is needed to keep them safe. Social assistance rates must be increased to reflect the rising housing and living costs across the province; instead, this Conservative government is enabling evictions at record speed, pushing more people into homelessness.

We need an eviction ban. We must invest in helping and protecting those that are being left behind in this pandemic.

HAZEL McCALLION

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: This Valentine's Day, Mississauga's very own Hazel McCallion turned 100 years young. Hurricane Hazel, even at 100 years old, remains an unstoppable force and an engaged contributor in her community. From her earliest days in office, Hazel was a remarkable leader. In 1979, newly elected Mayor McCallion led the city of Mississauga through the events of the shocking derailment of a CP train and corresponding explosions that released deadly liquid chlorine, requiring 200,000 homes to be evacuated but resulted in no casualties. She has had, and continues to have, a lasting impact on what makes Mississauga such a great place to live and work.

Hazel's leadership is apparent through her ongoing mentorship of new parliamentarians such as myself, inspiring me to be a better leader, communicator and public servant for the people of Mississauga and Ontario. I am privileged to have had many great talks with Hazel, who is always happy to share her wisdom and experience. I'm certain I speak not only for myself when I wish one of Ontario's finest a very happy birthday and many happy returns of the day.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Percy Hatfield: When I got back to my office this week, I had a number of Christmas cards in my mailbox. They came in after we broke for the holidays. I sent cards to the Premier and key cabinet ministers back in

December, and, in those cards, I wrote, "All I want for Christmas is funding for the next planning phase for a new regional hospital in Windsor and Essex county."

In case those Christmas cards were never passed along to the Premier and the key cabinet ministers from their constituency offices, I'll put the issue back on the table again this morning. About 10 years ago, we saw the need and began the planning for a new regional hospital. We knew the band-aids and temporary fixes we kept paying for wouldn't do for the long-term. Committees were struck, a location was chosen and the health ministry approved funding for phase 1. In December 2017, the previous Liberal government approved moving us to phase 2, but didn't allocate the funding. Since the Ford government was elected, we've answered a ton of questions, but have yet to receive the funding—it hasn't been approved. The ask is simple: \$10 million to move ahead with the essential hospital planning process.

Since there are no public consultations on the spring budget, this is as public as it gets. I call on the government to finally recognize the need and commit the necessary funding for this in Ontario's spring budget.

SENIORS IN ISOLATION

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: It's an honour to rise today for my first statement of 2021 to share a truly heartwarming story from my riding of Ottawa West-Nepean that displays the Ontario spirit.

1020

Debbie Abfalter, owner of Seniors Solution in Ottawa, started the Seniors in Isolation Facebook group, encouraging members to write to seniors in the area who are feeling increasingly isolated during the pandemic.

Everyone loves receiving a surprise letter, and that was certainly the case for some of my constituents at Stirling Park Retirement Community. Bob Ford was one of those residents. Before long, Mr. Ford was writing back and even sent flowers to the family that had let him know that although they had never met, they were thinking of him and doing what they could to keep him safe. He told CTV News Ottawa, "I didn't realize the significance of it, and how much I enjoyed it."

More than 6,000 Ottawa-area seniors have received cards so far. Let's keep it going. I encourage everyone who sees this to reach out to a senior in their community and let them know that you care.

If you would like to send a card, you can get in touch with Debbie and Cards Etc. for Seniors in Isolation through her email: debbie@seniors-solution.com. Thank you for your work demonstrating the Ontario spirit.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: This government's sluggish vaccine rollout has left seniors and their families in my riding feeling anxious, uncertain and confused about when they will be able to access their vaccine. Some seniors have gone months without seeing their grandkids or loved

ones. They've sacrificed, followed public health advice, and now, they deserve answers.

This government talks about protecting the vulnerable, and yet seniors are finding it impossible to obtain basic information such as, when will they be eligible for the vaccine? How will they be contacted? And where will they get their shot? Too many of these questions remain unanswered.

One of my constituents, Merna, asked me to think about how seniors suffer from many ailments that make them even more susceptible to COVID. Others have pointed out that seniors with mobility issues are being forgotten. How will seniors with mobility issues obtain the vaccine? Will all vaccination centres be wheelchair-accessible?

Ben and Judy Goldberg, who are 90 and 91, asked Jane Sims from the London Free Press, "How are they going to find us? Are we supposed to put a flag out front?"

"Judy said they wonder if their age group's last-minute addition to phase 1 was made just to shut down the criticism."

On behalf of London seniors, I'm asking this government to finally release answers to these essential questions about the vaccine. After months of enduring this pandemic, often in isolation, it is the least this government can do for them.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. John Fraser: Paid sick days save lives. Virtually everyone in this province—medical officers of health, municipal councils, doctors, nurses, public health experts and even the government's own experts—says paid sick days will save lives. That's the message they're sending.

The majority of low-wage workers, workers with precarious work, don't get paid sick days. In 2018, when this government came in, one of the first things they did was take away a raise to the minimum wage and take away equal pay for equal work, and then they took away—wait for it—paid sick days. That was a mistake, and we can now see how clearly that was a mistake in this pandemic. It was a big mistake. People are struggling to make ends meet. They shouldn't have to decide between putting food on the table and going to work sick.

On this side of the Legislature, we're all agreed that Ontarians need paid sick days—all of us. It's fair to workers and, most importantly, it's going to save lives, especially as we're heading into a third wave.

My colleague from Don Valley East has put forward a bill—just yesterday—and I'm so proud to support that. I encourage all members of the Legislature to support that, and I encourage the government to reverse its opposition to paid sick days for Ontarians.

YWCA HAMILTON'S WOMEN OF DISTINCTION AWARDS

Ms. Donna Skelly: This morning, I want to recognize the incredible women nominated for the 2021 YWCA

Hamilton's Women of Distinction Awards. This year's awards are particularly significant because they shine a light on the extraordinary efforts of women who have shown courage throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Women have been disproportionately impacted by COVID. Women have been on the front lines of care and contact throughout the pandemic.

The YWCA of Hamilton reimagined the award categories this year to acknowledge individuals on the front line of this battle. The awards recognize the courage of front-line workers, innovators, advocates, change-makers, community champions, young trailblazers and everyday heroes. There is also a lifetime achievement award. There are 97 nominees this year, representing a wide range of ages, backgrounds and experiences. They are women who have shown courage and leadership on the front lines. They have improved and enriched the lives of others.

The 2020 awards ceremony was held a year ago, just before our world was turned upside down by COVID. The event was one of the last large gatherings in the city before everything was shut down. This year, in keeping with COVID protocols, the awards are going online. All of the nominees deserve recognition for their contributions to their communities and their courage in the face of challenges caused by the pandemic.

GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Mr. Michael Mantha: To the good people of Algoma-Manitoulin, I left Algoma-Manitoulin on Sunday, and left with a list of priorities, some of the priorities that my leader, Andrea Horwath, and our caucus have been coming forward with. Some of them included paid sick days, the Time to Care Act, More Than a Visitor Act, a return-to-school plan.

Surprisingly, this was the priority of the government: to present legislative reform, a non-substantive motion, which means—catch this—it enables the standing committees to sit while the Legislature is recessed or adjourned. It gives the government House leader the chance to start on Wednesdays from 3 p.m. to 1 p.m. and for the deferral slips to be delivered from where I stand to the Clerks' table. God forbid there was a tripping hazard there that would happen. Those are the priorities of this government.

We didn't talk about the real priorities that you have been relaying to me, in regard to small businesses and tourism, them losing 95% of their clientele in their business. We didn't talk about a PSW recruitment program. We didn't talk about northern shortages in regard to doctors. We didn't talk about the pandemic in long-term-care homes. We didn't talk about the northern highways and the fact that people are dying on the roads. We didn't talk about broadband. We didn't talk about autism services. We didn't talk about the mental health or opioid crisis, or disabilities, WSIB, ODSP, and OW workers.

It's all about priorities, folks. This government doesn't have them.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Mr. Dave Smith: With all of the focus we have had on COVID-19, it would be very easy for us to forget about some of the random acts of kindness that still occur. On January 14 of this year, one such act of kindness occurred in a hamlet in my riding. A neighbour spotted a deer that had wandered out onto the ice on Lower Buckhorn Lake, and as I'm sure you can guess, the deer fell through.

Rob, a local resident, grabbed his kayak and a rope and ventured out onto the ice and eventually into open water to rescue the deer. Rob was able to rope the deer and pull her alongside his kayak and paddle back to the ice. After repeatedly struggling to get onto the ice on her own for almost an hour, Rob decided he needed to lift her out himself. So he climbed out of his kayak, laid down on the ice to distribute his weight and pulled the deer up.

Of course, the deer was exhausted, because it had been in cold water for that long struggling to get out, so he picked her up and carried her to shore, dried her with towels, and his wife wrapped the deer in warm blankets. After resting for about three hours, the deer stood up and was on her way.

It's nice to know that throughout all of the stress of a pandemic, there are still people like Rob willing to help simply because they can.

FARMERS' MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Last fall, I recognized Ontario Agriculture Week. I thanked farmers and agri-food workers for growing some of the best food in the world.

1030

This morning, I want to acknowledge that many are struggling. There's a growing conversation around mental health and agriculture. As someone who farmed for a number of years, I can say that mental health is not always a familiar conversation. However, mental health affects every one of us. A national survey of farmer mental health found 35% of farmers surveyed met the criteria for depression, 45% reported high levels of stress and 58% met the criteria for anxiety.

But many organizations are supporting them. They include the Perth County Federation of Agriculture, the Wellington Federation of Agriculture and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, just to name a few. I also want to acknowledge the tremendous work of CMHA here in Perth and CMHA Waterloo Wellington. These organizations are working around the clock to help those who are in crisis.

Our government is also supporting them, and I want to thank the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions for his leadership on this issue.

Last year, the Listowel Agricultural Society launched the Farmers' Toolbox. It's an online resource created to connect farmers to local mental health resources. I would encourage anyone who's struggling to visit their website, thefarmerstoolbox.com. I want to thank everyone who

made this project possible, including Alanna Coneybeare, Steve Dolson and others.

To every farmer in Ontario who is struggling, please know that you are not alone. We hear you, we support you, we thank you and we want the best for you.

COVID-19 DEATHS

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent for the House to observe a moment of silence to pay tribute to the hundreds of Ontarians who have succumbed to COVID-19 since December 3, the last time we were in the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to observe a moment of silence to pay tribute to the hundreds of Ontarians who have succumbed to COVID-19 since December 3. Agreed? Agreed.

I'll ask the members to rise.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Members may take their seats.

The member for Don Valley East has a point of order.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to move a motion regarding the immediate passage of Bill 247, the Paid Personal Emergency Leave Now Act.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Don Valley East is seeking the unanimous consent of the House for the immediate passage of his private member's bill, Bill 247. Agreed? I heard a no.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Point of order.

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

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Mr. Speaker, I speak unanimous consent to move a motion regarding the immediate passage of Bill 196, the Seniors' Advocate Act, to help better protect Ontario seniors from COVID-19.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Kitchener Centre is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion regarding the immediate passage of Bill 196, the Seniors' Advocate Act, to help better protect Ontario's seniors from COVID-19. Agreed? I heard a no.

The member for Essex.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: On a point of order: I seek unanimous consent to immediately pass private member's motion 136, calling on the Ford government to provide assistance for small businesses not eligible for other supports.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Essex is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to immediately pass private member's motion 136, calling on the Ford government to provide assistance for small businesses not eligible for other supports. Agreed? I heard a no.

Ms. Sara Singh: Point of order.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: I'm seeking a point of order here. I seek unanimous consent to immediately pass private member's motion number 139 calling on the Ford government to address inadequate pay for PSWs and other health care sector workers.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Brampton Centre is seeking unanimous consent of the House to immediately pass private member's motion 139 calling on the Ford government to address inadequate pay for PSWs and other health sector workers. Agreed? I heard a no.

MEMBERS' COMMENTS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Before I initiate question period, I have a short statement I wish to present to the House:

My responsibilities as Speaker of the assembly include presiding over the debates in this House and enforcing the standing orders. Standing order 25(k) reads as follows: It is inappropriate to use "abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder."

Once again, I will say no speech, no question and no response is enhanced by a gratuitous personal insult, at the best of times. This applies to all members on both sides of the floor.

I should not need to remind members that these are not the best of times. The pandemic is challenging all of us in ways we could not have imagined a year ago. I understand emotions at times come to the fore during debate, but I urge all members—in fact, I implore all members—to remember that the people of Ontario are looking to their elected representatives for leadership now, perhaps more than ever before in the last 30 years. We need to be up to that challenge and our behaviour in this chamber is part and parcel of the leadership that we can demonstrate.

By showing respect for each other, even across the floor of the House, we show our respect for the democratic process that gives each of us the legitimacy to walk into this chamber and represent our constituents. Let us reach higher and make them proud of their members of provincial Parliament.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Good morning. Speaker, my first question this morning is to the Premier. Every day it seems like more and more public health experts are imploring the Premier to slow down the reopening of our province and stop loosening the restrictions that will help us deal with the spread of COVID-19. In fact, just yesterday, we saw a couple of prominent medical officers of health do exactly that. They're asking for the Premier to not end the stay-at-home orders and the lockdowns.

The medical officer of health for Peel, Lawrence Loh, says this: "I'm very concerned about the tenuous situation that we find ourselves in." And Dr. Loh was backed up by the mayor of Mississauga, Bonnie Crombie.

Eileen de Villa, the medical officer of health for Toronto, says this: "I have never been as worried about the future as I am today." And Mayor Tory, of course, backed up Dr. de Villa.

Dr. de Villa, Dr. Loh, Mayor Tory and Mayor Crombie are all imploring this Premier to do the right thing, to slow down the reopening. Will he finally start listening to them?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: What we're looking at is not a reopening. We're looking at a transition back to the framework that we had before the stay-at-home order was brought forward. This has been contemplated with careful thought. We need to do this very gradually, very carefully, particularly with the variants of concern in operation right now. I know that they are spreading across the province, so we have to be very, very careful. We do have the emergency brake that we can bring forward in any situation, any part of Ontario where the cases are growing exponentially, particularly due to the variants of concern, that will then put that region back into grey or lockdown area zone.

But with respect to the comments made by Dr. de Villa and Dr. Loh, that is something that we are taking very carefully and considering very carefully. Dr. Williams is in frequent contact with both of those physicians. There is a new load of data that is coming in tonight that's going to determine the recommendation that Dr. Williams will be making to the government with respect to the situation for both Peel and Toronto.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, Ontarians have been doing the right thing. They have been working so hard to stop the spread of COVID-19. Folks are absolutely exhausted. The last thing they need is a government that's preparing to transition us into a disaster with the third wave.

1040

The Minister of Health talks about the emergency brake, and yet nobody has any details as to what that looks like. What is the criteria? Why isn't the government forthright about exactly what that emergency brake is all about? They refuse to do the things that we know will stop the spread of COVID-19, things like sick days for workers who are our essential workers that are still going to work and spreading the virus.

We know that the variants of concern are heading into Hamilton. We know that they're in Simcoe. And those places are already coming out of lockdown. Dr. de Villa said this: "By the time the confirmed" variant "case counts are big enough to shock us, it will be too late to do anything." Why isn't the government acting now?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Protecting the health and safety of the people of Ontario has been our number one priority since the beginning of this pandemic, and always

will be. That's why we brought forward a very, very careful, thoughtful, slow transition back into the framework to protect the people of Ontario.

We are very aware of the variants of concern. We are very aware that the numbers are low right now, but they can increase exponentially. That was the purpose of the emergency brake. We are looking at that on a daily basis, and if the emergency brake needs to be brought forward in Peel, in Toronto or any other place in Ontario, we will not hesitate to use it to protect everyone in Ontario.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, it looks like this government is just going to make the same mistake again that it's made twice already, and people are tired. They're tired of the lockdowns. We have a third wave upon us. In the UK, the third wave was worse than the second. In one day, 1,500 people died in the UK.

Charles Gardner, the medical officer of health for Muskoka District Health Unit, said this: "Be fully prepared to put back in place the stay-at-home order and a shutdown."

Dr. Michael Warner said this: "We're being put in a position where we're much more likely to see" a third wave. "We need to course correct."

Why is the government ignoring the experts, ignoring the facts? Why is the Premier prepared to yet again have people get sick, have another lockdown and overwhelm our hospitals instead of doing the right thing and slowing down the reopening?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Speaker, I would say to the leader of the official opposition, through you: I'm not sure what mistakes you're talking about since Ontario has the lowest level of cases per 100,000 in North America, other than the Atlantic bubble, at 75 per 100,000. So clearly we are doing some things right.

We also created a lab system to be able to test people, and we're up to 100,000 people a day that we can manage. We can test up to a 100,000 people per day. We created all of that. We've created the vaccine immunization task force. We don't have the supply of vaccines that we need, that we're waiting for from the federal government, but notwithstanding that, we've already administered over 500,000 vaccine shots so far.

We are doing everything that we can. We are protecting the people of the province of Ontario. If we need to bring in the emergency brake across the province again, we'll do it. But we are doing everything that we can to not have to do that. We are relying on the evidence and we are relying on the medical advice from Dr. Williams and the public health measures table, which I would remind the member opposite contains at least—

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

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. I have to say, that's not what we've seen here in

the Legislature. We came to this Legislature this week, the NDP, and put some hopeful, helpful proposals on the table to try to actually do things to help people get through COVID-19 and stop the spread. And it was shocking to see that here we are on the third day and the government has not brought forward a single action to help people get through COVID-19.

There are many things the government can and should do that experts are asking for, things like paid sick days for workers so the spread doesn't happen in workplaces, things like lower class sizes in schools, things like the four hours of hands-on care for every person that is living in long-term care. Instead, the Premier comes with threats and insults and bad behaviour.

The people of Ontario deserve much better than that. When will they start listening to the experts and actually put in place things that will help us get through this next couple of months?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. The member for Don Valley East will come to order. The Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry will come to order.

Start the clock. The Minister of Health to reply.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much, Speaker. We have taken action since the beginning of this pandemic to protect the people of the province of Ontario with expanding testing, lab capacity, case and contact management, and with respect to the variants of concern that I know Dr. de Villa and Dr. Loh are very concerned about.

We have started a six-point plan, which started with mandatory on-arrival testing of international travellers at Pearson airport. Despite asking the federal government to do this for many, many months, we finally moved that forward ourselves, because that's how the variants of concern got into Ontario in the first place. We are waiting for the federal government to take further measures, but in any event, we knew it was necessary to do that screening, and we have caught over 2% capacity. We have caught a number of people who inadvertently have COVID-19 coming into Ontario, and they are being closely followed to make sure that we control the spread.

We also enhanced screening and sequencing to identify new variants. That is something where, with new testing capacity, we can now determine if people are coming in with known variants or if new variants are being determined. We've also maintained public health measures to keep people safe, strengthening case and contact management—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, just a few minutes ago, another suggestion that the NDP brought forward was shot down by this government, and that is to actually permanently increase the pay of PSWs in our province. Those folks work very hard. PSWs have one of the hardest jobs in Ontario, and yet they are not respected, nor are they well paid by this government. Sure, there's a

temporary increase in their wages; it's going to end on March 31.

Look, the government's own staffing study showed that the PSW wages need to be increased. In fact, we've known this for a very long time. But particularly in the context of COVID-19, those workers deserve a better pay packet each and every day for the work that they do to protect our seniors in long-term care. When will the government act and permanently increase the wages of PSWs?

Hon. Christine Elliott: We also recognize the incredible work that personal support workers provide in hospitals, in long-term-care homes and in home and community care. They are on the front lines. They come to work each and every day. They deserve our additional financial support, and that's why we have increased PSW wages: \$3 an hour to eligible workers in long-term care, \$3 an hour to eligible workers in home and community care, \$2 an hour for eligible workers in public hospitals, and \$3 per hour for eligible workers in social services, providing direct care and support services for the activities of daily living.

This is something that we know is very important. We know that we need to keep more PSWs. We know that we need to increase their pay. We are doing that to March 31, at which point we will re-examine that and see what needs to be done going forward.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, the government needs to assure PSWs that the value of their work is not going to go down suddenly on March 31.

But look, people have made tremendous sacrifices across our province. Folks have dealt with unbelievable loss: loss of loved ones, loss of businesses. It has been a very, very tough time. COVID-19 has really devastated our province. We saw 7,000 people evicted when the government raised the eviction ban last time around. We saw 355,000 people lose their jobs in 2020 because of COVID-19. Some 6,700 people lost their lives to COVID-19, 3,800 of those in long-term care, and yet the government continues to refuse to do the things that all experts are telling them they need to do.

Why is the Premier putting money ahead of public health? Why aren't they putting lives ahead of profits and politics? Why will the government not step up and do the right thing to protect Ontarians?

Hon. Christine Elliott: From the beginning, the health and safety of the people of Ontario have been our priority. That is what we have addressed. We have dealt with it in terms of health. We've dealt with it in terms of supports for living, for housing, for every other aspect of people's lives. But with respect to health, that has been first.

We've increased our capacity greatly. We've increased our capacity to make sure that people can be cared for in hospitals. We've put several billion dollars into doing that. We've put over \$450 million into enhancing home and community care. We're working every day to increase our supports, and we're working every day to provide inoculations, vaccines to every person in Ontario.

1050

I'm sure the leader of the official opposition is very well aware of the shortages and the shipments that we've not received from both Pfizer and Moderna. We expect to receive significant shipments by the end of this month. That's what we've been advised by the federal government. We will be able to triple or quadruple our production of immunizations at that point, because we're working with each of the public health units across the province.

PERSONAL SUPPORT WORKERS

Ms. Sara Singh: My question is for the Premier.

The Premier should know, as we do on this side of the House, that front-line health care professionals like our personal support workers deserve much better recognition and much better pay than this government has been willing to provide. PSWs have been the front-line heroes of the disaster in long-term care from the beginning of this pandemic. They deserve more than just a temporary pay bump. They deserve a permanent pay raise.

Will the Premier support front-line workers and our motion to make the pandemic pay for personal support workers a permanent pay increase?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: As the Minister of Health highlighted just moments ago, we've actually already done that in a very significant way, with respect to the motion that the member just tried to pass through the House with unanimous support.

I think I was very clear yesterday that these types of motions should be dealt with by the entire House in the proper fashion that the House has put forward. If it's a good motion, it will pass. If it's not a good motion, it will fail. But I think trying to do such things with unanimous consent, without the opportunity for members to have their say, is just wrong—notwithstanding the fact that, of course, we have already made significant supports for PSWs. They are the heroes of this, and we've continued to support them, and we'll continue to do that.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: What PSWs need is not empty platitudes from this government. They actually need permanent pay increases.

The minister and the Premier know that the pay increase is set to expire on March 31, but the crisis in long-term care is still under way.

PSWs have been lifelines for family members of residents in long-term care throughout this pandemic, but their pay bump was temporary.

The government's own staffing strategy clearly urges the government to address the compensation disparities in the sector that drive amazing staff out of this workforce. The Premier can fix this today.

Will this government support passing our motion to make that pay increase permanent for PSWs?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, as I just said, when the members sought unanimous consent to do that—I think I've been very clear over the last number of days and since I've been in the House leader's role that the House will deal with motions like this, private members' business, in the time that is allotted for us to do so. I think it would be completely inappropriate for us to be passing items through unanimous consent.

I say to the member: When it is her opportunity to have a bill debated or a motion debated, the House will consider it. If it is a good motion, the House will pass it; if it is not, the House will turn it down.

WASTE WATER MONITORING

Ms. Lindsey Park: Governments around the world continue to work hard to respond to the wide-ranging and unprecedented impacts of COVID-19. As we continue to deal with the risks of new variants in Canada, it's important that we continue to find ways to quickly identify, manage and monitor outbreaks of COVID-19.

In my riding, I've been really impressed with the work at Ontario Tech University—a recent project I learned about. They started research last June in the faculty of science on the early detection of traces of COVID-19 in waste water. This project has expanded. The city of Barrie is now sending samples to Ontario Tech as part of it; Durham region public health is sending samples.

So I just wondered if the Minister of the Environment—that's who my question is to, Speaker—could tell the House what work his ministry is doing to support this kind of work in Ontario.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thank you very much to the member from Durham for that question.

Nothing is more important than the health and well-being of Ontarians. Under the leadership of Premier Ford and our entire caucus, we've worked hard to ensure that we contain the spread of this virus.

As we continue to respond to this pandemic, we invested over \$12 million in a new COVID-19 waste water surveillance initiative. Monitoring waste water for COVID-19 gives us a choice for a real-time way to track the spread of the virus, even before people are experiencing the symptoms, Mr. Speaker. This initiative will help us prevent the further transmission of the virus and save lives. This data allows public health officials to take early action that could prevent further transmission, reduce the severity of outbreaks, and again, save lives.

We hope to build on the good work that is already under way in regions across Ontario and successfully use waste water sampling to detect and monitor COVID-19 throughout our communities in Ontario.

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

Ms. Lindsey Park: That initiative was announced in budget 2020, and I just want to thank the minister and the whole government for their support of this research. I know how appreciative Ontario Tech University is of that support.

Waste water monitoring is a tool that's being used to identify populations at higher risk of outbreaks even before we're aware that an outbreak is occurring. Scientists around the world are finding that the early detection of COVID-19 from traces of it in the waste water may provide public health authorities with an additional detection tool. This early detection can be used in tandem—not in isolation, but in tandem—with clinical testing and other public health data to help inform these real and complex decisions our public health units are making that are required for the ongoing management of COVID-19.

Can the minister expand on the benefits of water waste surveillance and how it's being used in Ontario to fight COVID-19?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks again to the member beside me for that question, Mr. Speaker. Waste water monitoring has been used for years by scientists and public health officials throughout the world as a non-invasive way to monitor how diseases are circulating within communities. For example, waste water sampling has been used internationally to monitor the surveillance of polio.

Our government is partnering with academic institutions, in co-operation with public health units and municipalities, to create an integrated project that expands waste water sampling and analysis province-wide. Along with other clinical and public health data, waste water sampling results can help local public health units identify hot spots for the virus and can inform decisions on where and how to mobilize the resources to best deal with that response. Mr. Speaker, this is an Ontario-led approach to waste water surveillance that we can help ensure that more public health units have access to waste water data management and enhance the ability of our public health agencies to provide timely responses to COVID-19 in many of our communities and continue to save lives throughout this province.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. Small businesses across the province are barely hanging on, and tragically, 10,000 businesses closed their doors forever last year. The CFIB says that one in six business owners are considering permanently closing their doors this year. But again here today, this government voted against a small business support package, voting instead to leave those businesses in the lurch.

Speaker, through you to the Premier: Main street businesses need help today, and they are going to need it fast to survive the third wave that is inevitable in this province. Why won't the government give it to them?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant and the member for Willowdale.

Mr. Stan Cho: I appreciate the member opposite bringing up a very important issue. We recognize how difficult this pandemic has been on small businesses. Running a small business is hard at the best of time, let alone during this very difficult time. That's why our

government has been there for small businesses from the beginning with a series of supports, in conjunction with multiple levels of government.

Most recently, \$1.4 billion was allocated to the Small Business Support Grant program. I'm proud to say that over 55,000 businesses have received money in hand of up to \$20,000 apiece. Speaker, that's \$755 million in direct supports for businesses that were forced to shut down as a result of rising COVID-19 numbers.

We understand that there is more to be done, and I look forward to presenting, on or before March 31 of this year, our budget for further supports for small businesses.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: If businesses do end up surviving the crisis, it's going to be in spite of this Conservative government, not because of them or anything that they did or pretend to do.

Last year, the Premier failed to give businesses rent relief or bring in an eviction ban, letting main street shops across the province go under for good. He ignored calls for grants and direct supports, instead telling business that their only option was to take on more debt and just hope for the best.

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Speaker, again to the Premier: Business owners need more than a hope and a prayer to survive, because, honestly, most of them don't even have hope right now. Why won't the government join us and start fighting for small businesses today?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant, the member for Flamborough—Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes that small businesses have been severely impacted by the public health measures that we have put in place to keep Ontarians safe. That is why we launched the Ontario Small Business Support Grant: to provide a minimum of \$10,000 and up to \$20,000 in support of eligible small businesses.

In just a few weeks, we have approved grants for over 55,000 small businesses, with over \$770 million to these small businesses. I work with small businesses right across—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for York Centre will come to order.

Sorry to interrupt. The member for Flamborough—Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've worked with small business owners right across the city of Hamilton, in the Leader of the Opposition's riding. They've reached out to me. They are grateful for the support that helps them weather the storm through this pandemic.

This money can be used for whatever small businesses want. They may need support for paying employee wages or rent, while others may need support maintaining their inventory. It was designed to be flexible and to meet the various unique demands of individual small businesses—

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

The next question.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is to the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. At the beginning of this month, the Scarborough ICU director was quoted: "We're beyond capacity, and I expect it will only get worse." Scarborough has remained a hot spot for almost a year now, with no break in the spread of the virus in our community. Hospitals are seeing whole families admitted as COVID-19 positive, and sadly, some members of the family don't make it out, while others do.

You've heard that Dr. De Villa said yesterday, "I have never been as worried about the future as I am today." How can the residents of Scarborough feel safe with the emergency orders ending and its medical officer of health so worried? We're going headlong into a third wave of this virus, with unknown variants.

Deputy Premier, what are you doing to make sure that the people of Scarborough feel safe?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Since the beginning of this pandemic, we have taken every step possible to protect the health and safety of all Ontarians. That being said, we recognize that there are some areas where there have been particular difficulties. We have made accommodations for that in allowing for things like testing during weekends; walk-in testing rather than having an appointment; mobile testing; working with local hospitals for going into neighbourhoods and helping out; working with community health centres while also having areas where—we have set up 1,500 isolation spots for people in situations where, if they have COVID, they can then go and isolate on their own, so that they don't infect other family members.

These are all steps that we're taking, recognizing that there are some areas that have particular difficulties. That's what we want to do to keep the variants of concern at a minimum and not overwhelm our hospital capacity. But we certainly recognize that there are areas in Toronto particularly and in other areas—Peel as well—where we have to pay particular attention. We are on the testing side, and I can also—

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Back to the Deputy Premier: Deputy Premier, we need one of those isolation spots in Scarborough that is family-friendly, because that's one of the problems we have.

It's been 11 straight months of battling COVID-19 for Scarborough's hospitals, doctors, nurses, orderlies, admittance staff and front-line workers in our health care system, and they are exhausted. I thank them for their compassion and for their care. When it comes to this virus, and now with the new variants spreading in our province, there is a sense of dread. They don't know what is coming through the door next.

Despite loud warning bells, the stay-at-home orders are coming to an end on Monday in Toronto. Schools have already reopened. The hospital workers in Scarborough know that there's community spread. They know that these changes are going to increase their workload and that more people will die.

Speaker, through you to the Deputy Premier: Can you tell us specifically about the genomics testing, what variants we are testing and when you will report on this to the people of Ontario?

Hon. Christine Elliott: First, let me say we are also very grateful for the work that is being done by all of our front-line health care workers. They have really been put to the test over the last year. We're certainly aware that many of them are exhausted, that they are working extra hours, that they are putting themselves in danger as well. We hope to have the vaccines available to make sure that all of our front-line health care workers can be immunized as quickly as possible.

We are aware of the stress in our hospital system capacity. That's why we have put several billion dollars into expanding spots. We have created over 3,300 new beds since this time last year. We know that we need extra spaces. Just recently, we put another \$125 million into creating 500 more spots—acute care and medicine beds—across the province to make sure that we can handle any surges in capacity. That is partly with the opening of the Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital and other spaces that are being created.

But we are certainly aware of the need for immunization and the screening and testing, which you were also asking about. We are testing every single sample now and screening it to—

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

The next question.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: My question is to the Solicitor General. Earlier this year, as part of the initial rollout of COVID-19 vaccines in Ontario, our government announced that those in Ontario's most remote First Nations communities would be among the first to receive a vaccine. COVID-19 poses an increased risk to these communities due to the long travel required to receive enhanced medical care.

We have heard some incredibly uplifting stories about planes filled with precious cargo that were sent north: Operation Remote Immunity, to bring the Moderna vaccine to 32 remote and fly-in First Nations communities in Ontario.

I am sure that this is no easy feat, given that many of these communities require long travel to receive this enhanced medical care. Can the minister please update the House on how this project is progressing in protecting Ontario's remote communities?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you to the member from Ottawa West—Nepean.

The city of Ottawa is not the only public health unit that is doing an excellent job on the vaccine rollout. Operation Remote Immunity is a truly excellent example. Given the remote nature of the fly-in communities, it's wonderful to see how our teams—what they have achieved thus far.

Around this time of year, we start preparing, in the Solicitor General's Office, emergency responses for remote communities in case flooding occurs as a result of the spring melt. We wanted to make sure that these communities were given an opportunity to be vaccinated early, to ensure that potential evacuation situations weren't worsened by possible COVID-19 infections.

Working with Ornge air ambulance, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, the Canadian Rangers and other partners, this program is seeing amazing success. This includes a large and diverse pool of health professionals to administer these vaccines. Our goal is to—

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

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Well, thank you to the minister for that response. It is reassuring to hear about all of these partners coming together in support of this critical mission.

Throughout this pandemic, we have all witnessed phenomenal teamwork from local public health care teams. For example, earlier this year, in my community, the Ottawa Hospital showed tremendous leadership in the COVID vaccine rollout by piloting a project to move doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine outside the Ottawa Hospital and deliver them directly to long-term-care homes. I commend both Dr. Etches and Cameron Love for their leadership in Ottawa on this project.

The success of this community-based solution has been felt province-wide and is just one example of the success of our vaccine program. Getting the vaccines to those who cannot come to the vaccine is saving lives.

Could the Solicitor General offer the Legislature a little bit more detail on some early results on how Operation Remote Immunity is protecting these vulnerable communities?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I'm proud to say that, through the great leadership and support of Ontario's vaccine distribution taskforce, Ornge air ambulance and Indigenous leaders such as Chief RoseAnne Archibald, we are making great progress. By the numbers: I'm proud to confirm that the first doses have been completed in 12 communities, with more than nine additional communities in progress. Over 7,000 first doses have been administered across 21 remote and fly-in communities. Adults in First Nations, Métis and Inuit populations living in remote or isolated areas are among the first to receive the vaccine.

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Operation Remote Immunity is a great example of when we work together, even with limited supply, we are offering vaccines and getting communities vaccinated across Ontario.

SENIORS

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: My question is to the Premier. COVID-19 has exposed a gaping wound in the seniors' sector. The government has failed to deliver on the iron ring that they promised almost a year ago, and now thousands of seniors have lost their lives. Our call for a seniors' advocate will help to ensure that this never happens again.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: Will the government pass my bill to establish the first-ever seniors' advocate in Ontario?

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

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the member opposite for the question.

The health and well-being of the seniors in the province of Ontario is our top priority, and I think that has been illustrated by all of the actions that our government has been taking.

We believe that it's fundamentally important, as well, for seniors to have a seat at the cabinet table. That's why we've established the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility, to address those issues on a daily basis and ensure we're shining a spotlight on the need to enhance the unique challenges that come from that sector every day. I'm proud to say that we have a very active Minister for Seniors and Accessibility. I know my cabinet colleagues will agree that with every opportunity Minister Cho has to address something that the government is doing, he puts that lens on it.

We've announced several very important initiatives to support seniors during the COVID-19 outbreak, and I'll outline some of those in the supplementary.

We are committed to ensuring that our seniors stay healthy and active members of their communities.

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

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Doorknobs were taken off doors in retirement homes and there was nowhere for anybody to place their complaints.

I'm going to talk to you about somebody in my riding, Linda Perez. She's struggling to make sure that her father, who's suffering from dementia, has the quality of care that he deserves. Linda's father is 76. He's receiving some support, but unfortunately, some of the care is making it worse. He has been given the wrong dosage of medication. He has been subject to disrespect. And now his family is being put through the wringer trying to find him the care and the care workers he needs.

This is why we need a seniors' advocate: to give these families hope that government will finally fix the care system for older adults in this province.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, and back to the Premier: Why is the government standing in the way of Ontario seniors getting the independent, non-partisan advocate that families are calling for?

Hon. Todd Smith: I can tell you there's no greater advocate for seniors in the province of Ontario than

Minister Raymond Cho. He's doing an outstanding job. He really is committed. I wish people could see Minister Cho in our cabinet meetings when we're talking about these very important issues.

Our government is committed to enhancing the lives of our seniors. We've committed \$16 million to the Ontario Community Support Program, ensuring that vital services are provided to vulnerable populations, including seniors, when they're self-isolating. We've also invested \$4.5 million in the Seniors Community Grant Program, dedicated to creating more supports for seniors in all of our communities across the province. We've committed \$61 million in infection control measures to protect our seniors in licensed retirement homes across Ontario.

We recognize that many seniors are forced to self-isolate, and that's why there are many programs dedicated to the mental health of our seniors as well. I can tell you that there's a free service available 24/7. If you don't know all the services that are available to you, simply call 211. It's a free call—24/7; over 150 languages—

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

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. Michael Coteau: My question today is to the Minister of Labour.

Minister, your government refuses to support paid sick days. You constantly refer to it as a duplication of a federal program, but your federal counterpart in Ottawa has been on the record saying that it's not a substitute for paid sick leave, which normally falls under provincial jurisdiction. She also denied that a provincial program would be a duplication.

Minister, you have the power to put in place a provincial sick day program to protect workers, their families and the workplace. Will you reconsider your rejection of paid sick days and support one of the two bills in this House?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I will remind members to make their comments through the Chair, not directly across the floor.

To respond on behalf of the government? The member for Burlington and parliamentary assistant.

Ms. Jane McKenna: Speaker, for 81 years, governments of all political stripes at all levels have recognized that the federal government is best equipped to operate and manage these employment support programs. There is no reason for this province to duplicate an existing federal program.

Just to be clear: There is 73% unspent monies; there is \$800 million waiting to be spent. It is our responsibility to let people know that workers can phone the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit: 1-800-959-2019.

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

Mr. Michael Coteau: Minister, your Premier said that the federal government should add more money to the CRSB. He actually suggested that they double it from

\$500 to \$1,000 per month. With all due respect, your government has not invested a single dime to put cash in the hands of workers during this challenging time. Meanwhile, the federal government has made up to \$49,200 available for a family of four during this global pandemic.

Other jurisdictions in Canada—provinces, territories—have stepped up. In the Yukon, for example, a program has been put in place to rebate employers the cost of providing 10 paid sick days.

Minister, will you reconsider your position for paid sick days and provide the stability, the predictability and the protections that Ontario workers are looking for?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): One more time, make your comments through the Chair.

The member for Burlington.

Ms. Jane McKenna: There were two provinces that had paid sick days. They cancelled their programs once the federal supports were in place. There is no other province or territory in Canada that is looking to duplicate the federal government's 10 paid sick days.

Again, people at home who are watching, so we're clear: Please call over to the Canada Recovery and Sickness Benefit, 1-800-959-2019, so you can get your \$800 million that's waiting to be spent. Thank you so much.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. David Piccini: My question is to the Associate Minister of Energy.

We know that this pandemic has been hard hit for families, seniors and businesses across Ontario in recent months. I've heard from many of my constituents who have struggled to make ends meet. This is a plight felt across Canada, across the world.

As we look forward to a gradual and safe move to the response framework, regions across our province are wondering—and I'm asking the Associate Minister of Energy: What supports are in place to help businesses, to help individuals struggling to pay their electricity bills?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Once again, please make your comments through the Chair. The way you might phrase it is, "Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the minister" whatever you want to say. Make the comments that way.

The Associate Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bill Walker: Thank you to the member for that important question and for his incredible work on behalf of the people and businesses of Northumberland–Peterborough South.

Mr. Speaker, our government acted quickly and decisively to minimize the financial burden faced by Ontarians, while asking them to stay at home during the COVID emergency. We did this by holding the off-peak electricity rate to 8.5 cents per kilowatt hour, starting on January 1. This lower rate remains in effect 24 hours per day, seven days a week. We did this to give families, small businesses and farms stable and predictable electricity bills when they needed them the most. This rate will be in

place until February 22, as more public health regions transition back into the COVID-19 Response Framework.

Providing this rate relief on electricity bills has helped all Ontario families and small businesses in a real and meaningful way, as we now look forward to a safe reopening and focus on economic recovery.

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

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you to the minister for that answer. We know the tough situation Ontarians were left in after the electricity mess the previous government left this province in. I know that the support for electricity relief is appreciated by the people of Northumberland–Peterborough South.

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Through you, Mr. Speaker: Minister, can you inform this House about the COVID-19 Energy Assistance Program and additional supports available for businesses and individuals in Northumberland–Peterborough South and across the province of Ontario?

Hon. Bill Walker: Thank you again to the member from Northumberland–Peterborough South for the great question. We know that many small businesses have been struggling, and this is why supporting them has been an urgent priority for our government. Under our COVID-19 Energy Assistance Program, or CEAP, we've already provided help to more than 17,000 small businesses, with over \$35 million in payments issued so far.

We've also made it easier for businesses to access this support by expanding eligibility criteria: Any residential, small business or registered charity customer who is behind in their electricity or natural gas bills on or after March 17, 2020, is eligible to apply for support through CEAP, and I encourage them to do so, Mr. Speaker.

Under this program, small businesses and charities can receive up to \$1,500 in support per regulated fuel type, whether it's electricity or natural gas. Residential customers could also receive up to \$750 per fuel type.

Mr. Speaker, our government is proud to be helping small businesses and ratepayers in the member's riding and all across Ontario recover from this extraordinary crisis and lead our economic recovery.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is to the Premier. Last month, the family of 35-year-old Chris Gladders contacted me about the horrible conditions Chris had to live in at Greycliff Manor, a retirement home. Chris's family documented the conditions of his room: feces and urine in his bed and on the floor. His 12-year-old daughter was lying in the bed with him when he died. The sheets hadn't been changed in weeks.

I contacted public health, the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority and the minister's office. Greycliff's owners had previously had their licence revoked but still run the home with a third-party operator until June 1. How could the RHRA allow this home to have residents living there in such awful, awful conditions?

Will the Premier make the necessary changes and ensure that retirement home residents are actually protected and the homes are held accountable?

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

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the member opposite for the question. I know he did reach out to the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility about this issue, and it was most appreciated to hear from him.

We would like to express our sympathies, first of all, to the families affected by the stressful situation involving the retirement home, which is owned by the Martino family. Upon learning of the alleged disturbing reports, we acted quickly and reached out to the RHRA, as the member opposite mentioned as well, to ensure a thorough investigation is conducted into this matter. We've been assured by the RHRA that they will not hesitate to take appropriate action to protect all residents from any harm or risk of harm that may be there. The Canadian Red Cross has been supporting the home with infection prevention and control measures since the 5th of February, and we will continue to focus on protecting the health and safety of the residents. But I thank the member from Niagara Falls for raising this issue with the minister.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: No 12-year-old daughter should have to have the last few moments with her father in those conditions anywhere in the province of Ontario.

Back to the Premier: Chris should never have ended up at Greycliff Manor in Niagara Falls with complex medical needs. St. Joe's hospital in Hamilton discharged Chris to Greycliff Manor retirement home, where they don't have the staff or the expertise to manage complex medical needs.

Last year's Auditor General report noted this widespread problem in Ontario, with thousands of retirement home beds being used for alternate-level-of-care residents.

Speaker, will the Premier agree to replace the RHRA with a body that has the authority and the mandate to enforce strict regulations and ensure people are cared for in safe, clean, needs-appropriate homes in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks again to the member opposite for raising this very important issue. I think there is unanimity amongst all members of this House that the situation that the member has described is not tolerable in any way. That's why the ministry has acted quickly when it comes to Greycliff Manor. We don't tolerate any violations of the Retirement Homes Act or associated regulations.

We brought in the RHRA quickly. They've been investigating here, and we look forward to their findings in the review that they're conducting right now. We support the RHRA's decision of ensuring that the bad actors in the retirement home sector cannot continue operating, especially in this manner. The RHRA issued a management order for Greycliff Manor last year—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Response.

Hon. Todd Smith:—and in order to revoke the licence of the home by June 1 of this year.

The RHRA has been doing its job by using its enforcement powers to make sure that licensed retirement homes are meeting the required standards set out by the province.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Mike Schreiner: My question is for the Premier.

Ontarians are confused. The government doesn't have the money to pay for paid sick days or more long-term-care staff, but it has \$6 billion to \$10 billion to build a highway that will pave over 400 acres of the greenbelt and 2,000 acres of prime farmland to save commuters 30 seconds. Highway 413 is not only a waste of money; it threatens food and farming jobs, food security during a pandemic, and flood protection. This highway will supercharge sprawl and benefit speculators, but Ontarians will foot the bill.

Speaker, will the Premier listen to farmers, local elected leaders and community organizations calling on the Premier to stop paving over the places we love, by cancelling Highway 413?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: As the member knows, just the other day, in fact, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing outlined a significant expansion of the greenbelt in the province of Ontario, which includes something that the member raised in a private member's bill, the Paris Galt moraine.

When it comes to building infrastructure in the province of Ontario, we've been very clear from the start that there was an infrastructure deficit that we inherited and that we had to do our best to get people moving around. Whether it's subways, whether it's roads and highways, we are going to make those investments. But we'll do it in a way that is respectful, obviously, of the environment and that takes into consideration what we're hearing from our partners at different levels, and that includes this project.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, of course I support expanding the greenbelt, but no possibility of expanding the greenbelt will cover up the government's efforts around environmental destruction. Actions speak louder than words.

If the government is serious about expanding the greenbelt, they would cancel the destruction of the Duffins Creek wetland, they would restore the power of conservation authorities, they would cancel Highway 413, they would bring back proper environmental assessments, and they would restore municipal regulation of below-the-water-table aggregate extraction—all actions that effect the integrity of the greenbelt.

Will the minister give his greenbelt conversation a bit of credibility by committing today to cancelling Highway 413, restoring the ability of conservation authorities to

protect us from flooding, and bringing back the environmental protections that the Premier has taken away?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Steve Clark: Finally, Speaker, a question about growing the greenbelt—fantastic.

I was very proud yesterday to make an announcement that the government is delivering on our promise in the 2020 budget to grow the quality and the quantity of the greenbelt. I thought the member would have been a little more enthusiastic. I remember very clearly seeing the member, before he was elected an MPP, up in the gallery watching debate, and I remember talking to him about how he wanted to put partnership over partisanship. So I'm glad that he took part of his private member's bill on the Paris Galt moraine and added it to the consultation, because I believe, as members of this House believe, that we can make some good gains as a government in growing the greenbelt by looking at the urban river valleys and by looking at the Paris Galt—

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

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MANUFACTURING JOBS

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: My question is for the Premier. Alstom has now taken over Bombardier's operations in Thunder Bay, and Toronto still needs transit vehicles. There will be further layoffs at the plant unless the province stands up now and commits to funding new orders. What is this government's plan to secure those good northern Ontario jobs at the Alstom plant?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'm grateful that the member at least recognizes the important work that this government has been doing to expand transit and transportation opportunities across the province of Ontario, including the most significant expansion of subway service that this province has seen since the previous Conservative government was, of course, in power. That includes the Ontario Line, which we've announced. That includes the expansion of the subway into Scarborough. That includes light rail.

Of course, we will always be looking at not only expanding transit and transportation, but also making sure that those who supply these very important pieces of the puzzle will play a very significant role. We have some of the greatest workers in the world right here in the province of Ontario. That's why we're able to accomplish so much when it comes to transit and transportation. I am so proud of the fact that this government is making the most significant expansion of public transportation in the history of this province, and I am grateful to the member for recognizing that, and I hope she will continue to support us on these important initiatives.

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

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Again to the Premier: Ontario needs a real plan for economic recovery after COVID, and it needs it now. And we need more jobs now. The province can create those jobs in Thunder Bay by committing to order made-in-Ontario transit vehicles now. There's been a lot of talk, but not enough action. Meanwhile, hundreds of my constituents have lost their jobs. Why won't this government act now?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Well, as I just said, we are making significant investments in transit and transportation not only across the GTA. We are waiting for some additional support from our federal partners. Whether it's in Hamilton or across my area, York region, we have made significant contributions. I know that the people in the surrounding areas—York region is prepared to make significant contributions. The city of Toronto is prepared to make significant contributions. We are waiting for that partnership agreement from the federal government. They said that they would come to the table in the last election. They said they would come to the table. We're still waiting for them to come to the table and sign off so that we can continue the massive expansion.

She is absolutely correct, Mr. Speaker. These types of investments not only benefit local communities, but they benefit the people across the province of Ontario.

I know—just to segue a little bit—the member for Sarnia was talking about line 5 and Enbridge. These are all things that come together to keep the people of the province of Ontario working. We should be proud of our workers, and this government will do everything that we can to save, protect and enhance those jobs.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Minister of Long-Term Care. We all knew that addressing the critical staffing shortage in long-term care was the most important thing we could do to protect all residents in long-term care from the second wave. In September, the government announced \$14 million to train and recruit PSWs. Then in January, we learned that the government set aside \$42 million for security guards in long-term care. So, Speaker, through you, can the minister explain why her ministry is spending three times as much money on security guards as they are on recruiting and training PSWs?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. It's been very clear that staffing in long-term care has been neglected for many, many years. Dozens of reports commissioned by previous governments of all stripes from stakeholders, academics and labourers have fallen on deaf ears.

We are committed to increasing the quality of care. We're doing this by investing \$1.9 billion annually by 2024-25 to create more than 27,000 new positions for PSWs and RNs. Despite the empty promises of the former Liberal government, it will be our Conservative government that delivers on providing of average of four hours—

Mr. Michael Coteau: You're in charge. Take charge.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Don Valley East, come to order.

Interjection.

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

Supplementary question.

Mr. John Fraser: While the minister may accuse us of neglecting, it's very clear that she is right now, if she's spending three times as much money on security guards as she is on training PSWs. That's neglect.

We all knew that staffing was an issue. Last summer, when homes were begging—Speaker, begging—for a plan to recruit PSWs, that didn't come until September, the province of Quebec said, "We need 10,000 PSWs. We need them." And you know what? They went out to do that. They didn't get 10,000 PSWs; they only got 7,000, but that's about 7,000 more than Ontario got. So, Quebec took action to address their need, and the results are clear in the per capita outbreaks being less in Quebec than they are in Ontario. So their effort, Minister, made a difference. It made a big difference. Once again, Ontario is lagging behind other provinces.

So one more time: Can the minister explain why they're spending three times as much money on security guards as they are on training PSWs?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. We are the first government to understand the importance of changes that are so desperately needed in long-term care.

The opposition had the opportunity to support staffing with Bill 124 and they voted against it. The NDP and the Liberals voted against regulation 210/20 allowing for the change of management of homes in outbreak. It is a constant that the stage was set by the inaction of the previous government.

The NDP and the Liberals voted against regulation 77/20, which allows for staff to be deployed to priority areas. The NDP and the Liberals voted against regulation 95/20, allowing for homes to respond to resident care needs by streamlining reporting. The NDP and Liberals voted against regulation 146/20, the one-site order that reduced travel between homes.

The measures that our government took to protect our—

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

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. Joel Harden: My question is for the Premier; it's about paid sick days. I have to admit, it's been tough this week to sit in the chamber and listen to this government defend a failing federal program. I've heard members of this government give out the phone number. You know what the phone number should be, Speaker? It should be 1-800 useless. That's what the phone number should be. Because you have work 50% of a week. You wait for days for the program to come.

When will this government step up, because you know who wants them to step up, Speaker? Let me tell you who wants them to step up: Jessica Carpinone, a small business owner in Ottawa Centre. She has a small business that has been delivering paid sick days to her workers since 2013. She wants you to step up. She wants you to stop dodging and playing jurisdictional Ping-Pong.

People are getting sick; people are dying. When are you going to show a leadership role, spend some of the COVID money given to you, and take action with a paid sick day program now?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And, perhaps for the last time today, I'll remind members to make their comments through the Chair.

The member for Burlington to respond.

Ms. Jane McKenna: Do you know what stepping up is? Stepping up is when we negotiated an historic \$1.1-billion federal program that workers get 10 paid sick days.

I noticed, when I talked about the \$800 million waiting to be spent, that everybody over there, their jaws dropped. But let me just be clear: There are 110,000 Ontarians who have applied—just so we do the math together here today. To date, there is only \$271 million that has been accessed. So that leaves \$800 million waiting to be spent.

Again, the 1-800 number: 1-800-959-2019—so peoples' mouths don't drop when they know there's \$800 million waiting to be spent.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Paul Calandra: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, Speaker, just in accordance with I believe it's standing order 59, to outline the business for next week.

On Monday morning, February 22, we will begin with ballot item number 49, standing in the name of the member for Mississauga—Streetsville, and we will continue on in the afternoon with Bill 245, Accelerating Access to Justice Act.

On Tuesday, February 23, in the morning, we will continue on with Bill 238, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act; in the afternoon, Bill 245, Accelerating Access to Justice Act; and in the evening, the PMB standing in the name of the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka, Bill 228, Keeping Polystyrene Out of Ontario's Lakes and Rivers Act.

On Wednesday, in the morning, we will continue with Bill 245, Accelerating Access to Justice Act. In the afternoon, government notice of motion number 101 and PMB ballot item 51 from the member for York South—Weston. I believe that's a COVID-19 strategy.

On Thursday, February 25, in the morning, Bill 245, Accelerating Access to Justice Act; in the afternoon, there will be a take-note debate on line 5, and the PMB ballot item number 52 standing in the name of the member for London West. It's unknown at this time what the member will be bringing forward. We anxiously await some

indication from the member as to what she will be debating on that day.

Mr. Roman Baber: Point of order.

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

Mr. Roman Baber: I'm seeking unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding notice of private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for York Centre is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion without notice with respect to private members' public business. Agreed? I heard a no.

This House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1142 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

RECOVERY MONTH ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021

SUR LE MOIS DU RÉTABLISSEMENT

Mr. Ke moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 250, An Act to proclaim Recovery Month / Projet de loi 250, Loi proclamant le Mois du rétablissement.

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 Don Valley North like to explain his bill?

Mr. Vincent Ke: With increased opioid use and related overdoses in communities across the province, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, there is no better time than now to start raising public awareness of the issues around addiction and overdose, and to encourage drug users to seek the help they need to beat their addictions.

By proclaiming the month of September as Recovery Month, prevention, treatment and recovery programs and facilities across the province can celebrate Recovery Month. They can speak about the gains made by those in recovery and share their success stories with their neighbours, friends and colleagues. In doing so, everyone can participate to reduce stigma, increase awareness, promote a better understanding of the issues of addictions and overdose, support drug users to realize that they are not alone in their recovery journey, connect them with the resources ready and willing to help them, and emphasize that recovery is possible with help.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Ottawa South has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Long-Term Care concerning staffing. This matter will be debated on Tuesday, February 23, 2021, following private members' public business.

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 18, 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): When we last debated Bill 238, the member for Windsor–Tecumseh had the floor, and he still has some time on the clock. I'm pleased to recognize the member for Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was just saying to my friend from Toronto–Danforth that, COVID-19 being what it is, I'll be getting a haircut on Friday, but I'm not sure that my friend in Toronto will be doing the same.

I believe I left off talking about how the minister, when he introduced the bill, said he had hired 100 new inspectors and they've run inspection blitzes and visited 2,300 locations so far in 2021. Now, he didn't say much at that time about the results of those inspections, although I do recall yesterday my friend from Niagara Falls Mr. Gates saying that two fines were levied. I believe the member for London West said again this morning that two fines were levied, one against a business and one, apparently, against a teacher who wasn't wearing a mask in a classroom. So 2,300 locations inspected and two fines.

Anyway, we also heard that there were 38,000 inspections in the past year out of 300,000 possible locations—so just over, what, 12%? With 124 members in the Legislature, I guess 10 or 12 of us, in relative terms—it leaves a long way to go.

The minister said he ramped up inspections on farms, and that gets me to where I want to go this afternoon. To begin with, I want to talk about farms and migrant workers and some letters I've recently received, one from the warden of the county of Essex, the mayor of Tecumseh, Gary McNamara, co-signed by the mayor of Kingsville, Nelson Santos, and the mayor of the municipality of Leamington, Hilda MacDonald. This was written to the Premier, copied to me on February 5. It's talking about further consideration for supports in the Windsor-Essex agri-community.

They have a number of recommendations to address and mitigate a potential looming crisis that we face in Windsor-Essex. As they addressed in their initial letter, "An empowered first point of contact ... requested for first responders, elected officials, and concerned citizens was needed as clarity and coordination between jurisdictional

responsibilities is severely lacking.” We saw that in the first wave, Speaker. The cross-jurisdictional formulas that migrant workers fall under—out-of-country workers, seasonal workers who come to prepare our food in the fields and to harvest our food have to answer to a number of levels or orders of government, and rules and regulations and public health bodies. It gets very confusing, and nobody really knows who to turn to at any given point, because no single point has been designated as, “This is where you go when there’s a problem.” When you’re dealing with federal departments and provincial ministries and local health units, there’s a great deal of confusion out there, and a lot of clarity is needed.

The mayors have asked that we set up a central accommodation site outside of Essex county, where incoming migrant workers can complete their 14-day quarantine, based on the British Columbia model. “The central accommodation site must ensure accommodation oversight where the incoming workers have access to, and the ability to receive, food, nutrition, exercise and medical services ... during the quarantine period.” Last year, we saw some migrant workers taken from the field, put in a motel room somewhere and left there, sometimes not having any food delivered to them; and sometimes, the food that was delivered was not the type that they were accustomed to, not that they’d ever seen before, and that raises some concerns on its own.

The mayors say that this would “relieve pressure off regions like Windsor-Essex that are already challenged with massive community outbreak. This also provides an opportunity to educate incoming migrant workers on their rights, responsibilities and resources. Further, during the height of wave 2,” the “agri-food isolation and recovery centre was running at or above capacity (117) for almost seven days. Farms then moved to separate isolation sites and began mixing quarantine and isolation workers at multiple locations....

“(2) Include Windsor-Essex in the High Priority Communities Strategy, with immediate access to funding for an isolation centre, vulnerable community outreach and testing.

“(3) Prioritize the delivery of vaccines to communities like ours with the highest COVID-19 infection rates....

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“(4) Clarify the monitoring and enforcement responsibilities for quarantining incoming guest workers, through the Temporary Foreign Worker and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Programs (TFWP/SAWP). Employment and Service Development Canada (ESDC) administers the TFWP/SAWP and monitors the housing and quarantine components through Service Canada for employers, and enforces these regulations through ... law enforcement” such as the OPP. “However, with incoming guest workers quarantined in various hotels and motels scattered throughout southwestern Ontario due to increased space requirements, it is unclear and unknown who addresses breaches, however rare they occur, by the guest workers themselves. Unfortunately, it is critical to maintain the public trust in the processes in these programs

to prevent racism and mistrust if infrequent bad behaviour by a few, either employer or employee, leads to increased COVID spread, or perceived increased risk to the community.

“(5) Provide an increased presence of Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) locally to maintain integrity in our local workforce, and support the provincial Ministry of Labour in establishing a labour contractor registry.”

Speaker, the letter goes on, but I want to balance that some with the letter I received from the Justicia for Migrant Workers. This came in January 27, and it’s in relation to some of the leaders I’ve already mentioned:

“Justicia for Migrant Workers is a grassroots activist organization that continues to advocate for the advancement of the interests of migrant workers, and specifically migrant farm workers employed across Canada.” But their activism is primarily Ontario-specific.

“The inaction and misplaced action of the provincial and federal governments have resulted in dire consequences as we struggle to contain the pandemic. Working class communities face the brunt of the crisis. This epidemic has worsened their conditions, given the precarious labour market, absence of proactive enforcement mechanisms, and a myriad of exclusions in both provincial and federal labour legislation. As a result, they are forced into the potentially deadly consequences of working without the necessary protections to safeguard their interests. The local greenhouse industry is worth \$3 billion—an engine of the local community—while its workers continue to face 19th century working and living conditions while in Canada.”

So they were very critical, this Justicia organization, of the mayors of Leamington, Kingsville, Tecumseh and the warden of Essex county. They strongly oppose anyone calling for increased police powers and enforcement by the Canadian Border Services Agency. They say, “Elected officials at” every “level have failed to include workers and their advocates in the decision-making process regarding workers, thus reinforcing the embedded power imbalance that exists in this employer-driven program.”

What they talk about, Speaker, is: “a paternalistic and racist approach where they believe to know what’s best for farmworkers. No employers have been held accountable,” according to this association. And the “silence regarding housing and working conditions ... is a slap in the face to the decades of advocacy which have demanded the systemic changes needed to rectify Canada’s shameful system of indentured labour. The government’s practice of throwing money at employers has not worked. Workers are still living in congregate housing, are being denied hazard and sick pay, and are subject to the many legislative exclusions which allow their employers to escape accountability for workers’ health and safety. At the same time, their employers have made significant profits through their labour.”

I guess the nub of part of this letter is that the threat of arrest and deportation will significantly deter workers seeking medical help during the pandemic.

“Community leaders,” according to this association, “continue to stereotype workers as COVID-19 vectors. To them, COVID travels in one direction. They conveniently neglect the many workers who have returned home, having contracted COVID in Canada. In no way do they feel any form of responsibility”—the employers or the leaders—“for the impact of their negligence in workers’ home countries. It is not increased surveillance, additional police powers, and border enforcement which are the answer. Central to the government’s response must be resources and supports that are specifically provided to workers—not filtered through their employers.”

I’ll just conclude with the final paragraph: “Workers are disciplined to act as appendages of a multi-billion dollar industry that lines the pockets of Canada’s politicians while workers and their families face an epidemic of accelerating poverty rates that intersect with many other issues. It is unconscionable that even amid this pandemic, the rich and powerful continue to prosper while the rest of us suffer. We demand—yet again—that your governments take notice and act to protect farm workers.”

It’s signed by the Justicia for Migrant Workers.

Speaker, I’ve been so proud of my colleague the member from Niagara Falls, who fights every day for the rights of injured workers. I’m also so very pleased to serve with the member from Ottawa Centre, whose passionate voice for the disabled in Ontario rings loud and echoes through this chamber and long into the halls of this legislative precinct. The bottom line, according to my friends—and we hear them daily—is that the government is just not doing enough to improve the lives of the injured and the disabled in this province. This bill doesn’t do much in the way of bringing any assistance to them, as well.

My wife and I heard from a friend of ours recently, an educator—and it’s not her first rodeo; she has been there for a while. We have great respect for this woman. I’ve worked with some of her grandchildren for a number of years. She called one night, almost in tears, talking about her conversations with her co-workers at an elementary school. COVID-19 has brought on so much mental distress to those in the education field—working from home, the virtual reality of education these days. Teachers, for the most part, were never trained in becoming what you have to be to be on TV for five or six hours a day—somewhat of an entertainer. They’re used to teaching in a classroom and bringing discipline into that classroom and working with pen and paper, as opposed to what’s going on. A lot of educators are experiencing, in some cases, severe mental anguish. According to our friend, some have even talked about the potential of taking their own lives because of the stress they’re under, and when they take it up the chain, they’re told, “Well, take time off. You’re not going to be paid. Sick leave is going to be a problem.”

My friend from Niagara Falls gave me some interesting statistics yesterday when he was speaking about the number of COVID-19 claims. I think Mr. Gates said that more than 800 COVID-19-related cases are currently in front of the WSIB and 2,000 claims have already been denied.

Mr. Gates and others talked about the PSWs, nurses and paramedics—those we call our working heroes during this pandemic. They work directly with COVID-19 patients and they get sick, they come down with COVID-19. They put in claims to the WSIB, and their claims are denied.

Mr. Gates talked about the presumptive coverage. It’s just not on the WSIB agenda. It’s not on the government’s agenda. To me, it’s common sense. If you’re a front-line health care worker—working in a long-term-care home or a retirement home or a hospital, or being in an ambulance picking up patients seriously ill with COVID-19—and you come down with COVID-19, why is the onus on you to prove that you didn’t get it from your next-door neighbour or your child home from elementary school? You should take it for granted that you’ve been in a situation where COVID has been prevalent, and I don’t know why we don’t have this presumptive coverage for people, our working heroes, front-line heroes. I don’t know why we put them through the hoops and deny their claims. They are heroes. They are standing up, putting their lives on the line for us, and all we do is deny their claims, so I wish this bill would have had something in there to look after them.

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The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I want to thank the member for Windsor–Tecumseh for his presentation, and I’ll now invite questions to the member for Windsor–Tecumseh on his speech.

The member for Barrie–Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: My question to the member opposite is—one of my colleagues from Peterborough was mentioning this today in terms of bills: What’s in bills, it’s too little, not enough. You know, we’re debating WSIB, and a lot of the businesses that I speak to, and I’m sure folks in your riding, too, they need it now. Every little bit helps. There can’t be further delay on this bill.

My question to you is, with the additional ideas that you had mentioned, how much are you willing to increase payroll taxes to cover these so-called ideas?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I don’t think it’s a matter of how much payroll taxes have to go up. There’s money there—

Mr. David Piccini: Who pays for it, then?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: You’re putting a price on the lives of our front-line heroes. What do you mean, “Who pays for it?” How do you—

Interjection.

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

I apologize.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: As I understand it, the government is sitting on—pick a number out of the air—\$5 billion, \$6 billion, \$7 billion, \$8 billion from the federal government that hasn’t been spent. If you’re going continue to deny WSIB claims, which—WSIB is an arm’s-length appendage of the labour ministry. The money is there. The money is there, and, if people are becoming sick saving our lives, surely we shouldn’t be turning our back on them saying, “What price?” It just doesn’t make any sense.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I would like to congratulate my colleague the member for Windsor–Tecumseh on his remarks—in particular, his reminder of the impact of COVID-19 on the security of our food system, beginning with farm workers; but also, as in his region—he would know—food processing, warehousing, transportation, all the way to grocery store clerks.

He talked about the importance of presumptive coverage for WSIB to help all of these workers who are involved with the security of our food supply chain through COVID-19, but I wondered what he thought about the importance of paid sick days as another measure that should be taken to ensure the security of our food supply.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I know we've been talking about paid sick days every day this week since we came back, and that is something that all the experts say would go a long way into curbing this wave. It makes no sense. I know the federal government has an offering on the table for paid sick days, and we've been calling on the provincial government and cross-jurisdictional to help out with that as well, because if you're not paid to go home when you're ill, you're going to stay at work and infect others.

The experts say the easiest way to stop the infection rate going up is to offer people some form of compensation to stay home and recover so we don't keep spreading this epidemic, which keeps mutating and becoming worse and worse. If we don't get a handle on it now, we're really going to pay the price later. The money we're going to spend now is better-spent than paying a lot more further down the road.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Mr. Dave Smith: Through you, Speaker, to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh—I have a great deal of respect for him and I listened intently to the speech. It was broken up over a couple of hours, but I was here this morning as well when he started it, and I really have a question, because there was not a lot that was actually about the bill itself. He wandered off into a number of areas, and I understand that sometimes you're trying to make a point by doing that.

When employers come to you and say, “This is not sustainable. The 7.89% increase in WSIB costs to us this year is not something that we can absorb because of the pandemic,” and employees come to you and say, “We need to have that 7.89% increase in benefits for us through WSIB in case something happens,” and then the government creates a bill that solves both of those problems, why don't you want to talk about it?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I heard most of that. There was some chatter on the side that prevented me from hearing all of it.

When I started this afternoon, I spent most of my time talking about migrant workers, because the minister had mentioned agricultural workers and migrant workers in his presentation—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I would ask the individuals who are having a conversation over here to

quiet down so that the member for Windsor–Tecumseh can hear himself think and we can hear him.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker. It does sometimes become disturbing when others are talking while you're trying to hear a question.

We saw last year in my area—and I know in yours and across the province, as well, we have so many people who come to help us raise our crops, harvest our food. Sometimes they're housed in conditions that we wouldn't want to live in. Sometimes, when that happens, if we have an infection, we spread it around. My point was that we could improve on that if we had a cross-jurisdictional point-of-contact person you could go to and say, “This is a problem. Let's handle it. Let's isolate. Let's quarantine. Let's pay them while they're there and feed them while they're there.” That saves money in the long run. That protects our source of food. That protects the livelihood of the business owners who own the greenhouses and the farms. We have to get a handle on how we're going to deal with it. We went through it last year, and we're going to go through it again if we don't get on top of it now.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's a pleasure to rise and ask a question of my colleague the member for Windsor–Tecumseh.

I was pleased that you spoke about the conditions that front-line health care workers—PSWs, nurses and others—are facing, particularly those who've been in long-term care. As you're well aware, rates for WSIB coverage can be differentiated. If you have a bad record of more injuries, you pay higher rates. I think those long-term-care facilities that didn't actually invest in protecting their workers should be paying higher rates.

What opportunity was missed by this government in bringing forward this legislation to put in place the protections for PSWs, nurses, the front-line paramedics that we, in fact, need in this province today?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you to the member from Toronto–Danforth for the question.

Speaker, I know we've heard it several times this week—we've talked about presumptive legislation. We've talked about paid sick leave. We've talked about four hours of care in a long-term-care home. We've talked about the need to train more PSWs, as they have in Quebec and other provinces. I know the government wants to do that down the road, and they want to raise the premium pay of PSWs three or four years down the road—a little bit starting it now.

At some point, all of us, together, have to say PSWs—to point to one group out of the sector—need better training, need to upgrade their skills. We have to perhaps create a college of training for them. We have to make sure that we have the people available to look after our loved ones or look after ourselves a few years down the road—and make it a career that people want to get into and want to serve. If we don't get a grip on it now, in the middle of this pandemic, we'll never get on top of it, because it's just going to get worse.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further questions?

Mr. David Piccini: I appreciate you bringing up the agriculture sector.

My question to you is about fixed costs. Businesses spoke at length to the finance committee about fixed costs. It's a simple yes-or-no question. WSIB premiums—this is going to support businesses with fixed costs. Do you support that? Yes or no?

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Mr. Percy Hatfield: I believe WSIB premiums are there for a purpose, and if we can help businesspeople with their fixed costs, then all the better.

But there are so many other things that could have been in the bill to augment the WSIB and say to them, "You could be doing more. You shouldn't be deeming. You shouldn't be turning people away when you can see that they're ill and they can't find work in some other field." They need more assistance as opposed to more aggravation.

The number of claims that are being denied to people who have contracted COVID-19 during this pandemic—I think that's an insult to all of us in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnett): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Coteau: It is a pleasure to be here to debate Bill 238. I think this is a pretty straightforward bill. It speaks to the formula for WSIB and really putting in place a process to mitigate some of the pressure that COVID-19 has started. However, there's a big hole in this piece of legislation when it comes to taking an opportunity to really talk about workplace safety, to talk about supporting workers. I believe that the government has failed during this pandemic to actually put in a plan to support workers. In the middle of a global pandemic, with workers being really hit hard—we know that our economy has been hit because of COVID-19. The workplace is being compromised. And now we have new variants of COVID-19 spreading here in Ontario and across the country. I believe this is the first piece of legislation that has come out from the Ministry of Labour during the pandemic to actually talk about even just a little piece of the impact of COVID-19. It's a huge missed opportunity.

Over the last week, I've been talking a lot about paid sick days. It would have been nice for this proposed legislation, this bill, to include something like paid sick days.

I want you to imagine this, Mr. Speaker: Imagine that you're a hard-working person, putting in 40, 50, 60 hours a week, supporting your family. You're the breadwinner for your family. You're going to work every single day. You're trying to make a difference. You're supporting the economy. And then one of your kids comes home and says there has been some exposure to COVID-19 in the classroom. According to the parameters around COVID-19, you have to stay home for two weeks. You decide to stay home for those two weeks, but you don't have a policy in place at the workplace that actually provides you with paid leave. Imagine having to decide between providing food for your children, paying the rent, paying the bills, keeping the heat on, and not going back to work. I read a report recently that said a lot of people are being placed into these types of situations.

We have a government that claims they're there for the little guy, for the people, for Ontarians, and they've got their back. But throughout this entire pandemic, not one single dollar has gone from this government into the hands of workers. I'll be fair: They did provide a couple of hundred bucks to families with kids for, I think it was, technology or supplies for school. For a family of four in Ontario, the current government has provided, I believe, in this time span, a maximum of \$800, if they qualify. But I can't find a single program that exists in this province by this government that actually puts money back into the hands of workers who are being displaced because of COVID-19.

Let's talk about the Trudeau government, the federal government, for a second. Let's talk about what they've done. How have they responded to workers? Why is this piece of legislation a missed opportunity for this government that's sitting on billions of dollars that were actually allocated for COVID-19? It's a huge missed opportunity. The federal government has stepped up. A family of four in Ontario, over the course of the last several months, is eligible for almost \$48,000 of federal relief money going directly into their pockets. This government is giving 800 bucks away, and that's if you've got kids in school. It's shameful, Mr. Speaker.

This is a government that says they're here for the people of Ontario, and they've done nothing. Everything they've done is being focused on the federal government and trying to get them to actually fill the gaps. They need to step up as a government and actually look for a way to support workers in Ontario. This bill, Bill 238, is a huge missed opportunity, Mr. Speaker, a missed opportunity. We could have seen something in this bill that actually spoke to some of these issues. It was a conduit to move some of those items forward here in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I think that when you look around the province and you listen to municipal leaders—I'm from the GTA; I'm from Toronto. I know the municipal leaders here have been calling for some reform in the labour laws here in Ontario. They've been asking for 10 paid sick days. Again, Bill 238 would have been such a great opportunity to look for ways to include some of these provisions to protect workers. Not only have mayors and municipal leaders across this province been asking for 10 paid sick days because it's the right thing to do, it's the decent thing to do as Ontarians.

This government has turned its back towards workers in this province. And they say that they're here to support workers. Well, I would say that that's not true. Not only have municipal leaders, mayors, politicians from all stripes been calling for changes to our labour laws here in Ontario, we've seen experts actually step up, medical experts, chief medical officers, saying the exact same thing. It's a shame that this government has not responded.

Now, the Minister of Labour says, "We can't duplicate programs." The Premier has said the exact same thing. We're not here to duplicate programs that exist in Ontario and across the country. However, the federal minister responsible for labour has clearly said that this is not a

duplication of a program. Yukon and BC have enhanced programs that the federal government has put in place in order to provide more provisions for workers because of the disruption.

Going back to that family, that breadwinner who has to stay home: His or her child has come home and said, “Mom, Dad, I can’t go back to school for two weeks, and according to the rules, you have to stay home too.” That worker can’t go out. So that’s two weeks. What happens if that person actually gets sick themselves? What is put in place to actually protect those workers? The federal program provides, I believe, \$500, which works out to about, what, \$12.50 an hour—much below the minimum wage. So they have set a bit of a threshold to support the base, but this is a great opportunity for this government and for the Minister of Labour to actually step up and enhance that program. It is a huge missed opportunity for Ontarians.

A person in this province should not have to choose between paying bills or going to work. The members opposite ran on a platform—well, actually, there wasn’t a platform. They had no platform. It was a bunch of statements and ideas. They came in. So we didn’t know what we were going to get. It was almost like buying a surprise box, with the Ford government. You didn’t know what was actually going to happen after they got elected. But one of the first things they did—and it made it very clear on whose side they actually were, the workers of Ontario or people who subscribe to their ideology of cuts and really taking care of a small percentage of people in the province, and it’s usually those who are very well off. One of the first things, Speaker, this government did when it got into power was to get rid of the two sick days that were here.

Two sick days were not enough for a pandemic, but at least, again, it was a base that they could build off of. Could you imagine a government that comes in immediately and says they’re for the people, and one of the first things they do is cut two sick days that existed here in Ontario? It really is telling of what type of government this is. The Premier can go around Ontario and say, “My friends, my friends, I’m here for you. I’m here to support you. I’m here for the workers.” But let’s just look at the record. Look at what is actually taking place. This is a perfect example—Bill 238—of a government missing the mark when it comes to the protection of workers in Ontario. There could have been so much more brought into this bill to protect workers. It’s a shame.

1340

I know that all of the folks opposite have to go back into their communities, and a lot of their communities have been hit hard by COVID. The economic impact of COVID in this province over the next not only six, seven months but over the next few years will be felt, and it will be felt in rural Ontario, northern Ontario, urban Ontario—right across this province. And they’re going to have to look, these members opposite, at the people in their communities who sent them into this chamber to fight on their behalf. They’re going to have to look them in the eye and they’re going to have to explain (1) why they got rid of

paid sick days in Ontario; and (2) during a pandemic, why they would not take the opportunity—again, through Bill 238, the first piece of labour legislation that’s come forward from this government during the pandemic—to put in some safeguards and build on the federal programs in Ontario to support workers.

Do you know what? I just really would not want to be in their position when election time comes around, because it’s going to be tough to look people in the eye and actually say to them, “You know what? I cut your sick days and I didn’t believe in putting in any support while you were in crisis.”

I just want to end by saying this last point, Madam Chair. The federal government—Justin Trudeau’s government—has provided up to, I believe, almost \$49,000 in support for a family of four in Ontario. A family of four: If there are two children in that family, this government has given you \$800. And do you know what? They’re sitting on billions of dollars—sitting there and not spending it. This is 100% a philosophy, an approach, that’s locked into ideology. This is what Conservatives do. They’ll go out and say, “We’re here to support you,” and at the same time, you just have to look at their record and you can see who they really are.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions and comments?

Ms. Donna Skelly: I’ve been listening intently this afternoon to the comments of the member from Don Valley East. At one point the member suggested that he didn’t know of any business person in the province who had benefited from any government program here on this side of the House.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I said “workers.”

Ms. Donna Skelly: Worker. Madam Speaker, I have worked with many, many people on an individual basis, helping them apply for money that is available as we speak, and I think it’s shameful that people on the other side of the House are not doing the same. When we are in the middle of a crisis and people are desperate to get money to get through, and there is money on the table as we speak—\$40,000 for independent—

Mr. Michael Coteau: Twenty thousand dollars.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Forty thousand dollars for people: \$20,000 from the feds and \$20,000 from the province. And this member is not working with them to access that? That’s shameful. My question is, what are you doing to help businesses in the province?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member for Northumberland–Peterborough South will come to order.

Response? The member from Don Valley East.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I’m glad the member asked that. That \$20,000 they’re talking about: You notice every program they mention they actually attach the federal program to it because theirs is so weak.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member from Northumberland–Peterborough South will come to order.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I hope the member for Peterborough can stand up and talk to people in his community about what his government has actually done.

I'll tell you what I've done. I've been advocating with the Ministry of Economic Development and Finance for distribution companies that have been excluded from that \$20,000 you're providing.

So my question back to you is, why have you picked some companies that are eligible, while companies that distribute—and I have a couple of companies in my area that have been looking for ways to find access to that \$20,000, because they're not eligible. So please don't talk about this program being there to support—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. Further questions?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: My question for the member is, can you talk a little bit about why businesses in your riding might value paid sick days for their workers?

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you very much. I appreciate the question. In Ontario, our tradition as a province is to put in place a social safety net. When someone falls a bit behind, we've been there as a society to provide some type of resources to make sure that people don't fall too behind. We've always been good at that.

This government has cut so much since it's been here. From after-school programs, nutrition programs to library services, the list goes on and on. Actually, the list is so long now, I get exhausted even running through that list, because the cuts have been so strong.

The member opposite talked about supporting business. We're talking about supporting workers here, at the end of the day: people who get sick who are actually on the front line helping people. They could do so much more to support workers, and it's a shame that they've failed on this front.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: My question for the member opposite is, if he really cares about the workers, then why, when the Liberals were in government, were they playing politics with the funds of workers, and why would they create the largest unfunded liability in WSIB, the fund that these workers need? What we're doing today, now that we have fixed it—after years of messing it up, it's fixed and these workers can access it. So how can you stand there when you created the biggest, most unfunded liability with WSIB?

Mr. Michael Coteau: I can stand here as a Liberal because I know I was part of a party that actually raised the minimum wage when that party opposite voted against it. I was part of the party that increased personal support workers' salaries when we were in power. I'm part of a government that was there, that looked for ways to strengthen relationships with organized labour and put in new legislation to protect the workers' right to organize.

These guys, from the very beginning, have compromised so much when it comes to workers. How can they sit there and actually pretend they're there for workers when

they didn't even support the minimum wage and give people the actual livelihood they need to survive in a place like Toronto, Barrie, Peterborough, anywhere in Ontario? You should be ashamed of yourselves.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: When it comes to the WSIB, one of the things that I hear often from injured workers is about deeming. It's this practice where workers' compensation is slashed based on some theory that a phantom job exists, even though those jobs actually don't exist in the labour market. This has been an ongoing concern. It's a very serious concern. The injured workers have taken it to the UN committee to be examined. I'm just curious to hear from the member what his thoughts are on deeming.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I'm sorry, Madam Speaker, I didn't understand the question, but I will say that there's no question in my mind that WSIB has always needed some reform. We need to look for ways to better support workers in Ontario.

WSIB, in concept, is a very smart thing to have, to have that type of insurance for a worker, especially workers who are put into potential danger. That support, again, that Ontarians have built, as decent Ontarians, is something that I value, that social safety net. I think it makes us unique here in Ontario and as Canadians, because not many parts of the world have those types of insurance policies that are in place to protect our workers.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Jane McKenna: I first want to say that your government raised more red tape than any other government when you were in office, so that's first and foremost. You didn't answer the member from Barrie-Innisfil about unfunded liability; you skirted around on that answer, so hopefully you will.

But I want to tell you something: When you raised the minimum wage, every company that we listened to, prior when you were in government and when I was in opposition, they all said the same thing: "It was great. We needed it. But it was too fast, too soon," and they all struggled to be able to keep their companies open.

So you know what? It's about a government listening to what people have to say so they all don't go bankrupt, because they were thrown into something so fast that they couldn't answer, they couldn't get calls when they were phoning in to try to figure out what they were doing.

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My question, again, is from the member from Barrie-Innisfil—hopefully, you'll answer it this time: What about the unfunded liability?

Mr. Michael Coteau: Conservatives love to use the term "red tape" as code for "efficiency." The Conservatives got rid of the conservation authorities' ability to protect our land here in Ontario, under the header of red tape. They bulldoze green space. They're doing as much as they can to develop this environmentally sensitive area here in Ontario. So their "red tape reduction" is really code

for “let corporate Canada do what it wants, and we’ll just let it happen.”

We need to put in place protections to ensure that our workers are protected, that our environment is protected.

With the Conservatives, we’ve seen two and a half years of havoc, and it will continue. That’s why they’ll be removed from office in 2022.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Sara Singh: My question for the member is around deeming. I understand that you didn’t understand the question from the member from Parkdale–High Park, so perhaps we can try to explain what deeming is. Under your government, workers did try to have that practice ended—which would see them have phantom jobs that they were supposed to be employed with and then have their WSIB benefits reduced as a result.

Can you help the House understand why, under your government, you didn’t stop the practice of deeming, which is having a very negative consequence on the workers you say you’re here to protect?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): For future reference, through the Chair, please and thank you.

Response, the member from Don Valley East.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Well, I feel like I’m back in question period on the other side here. This is something I’ve missed over the years.

Madam Chair, as a previous Liberal government, we put in place protections for workers that went beyond any other government in the history of this province. The NDP had an opportunity to continue to support progressive programs like increasing the minimum wage. The Conservatives actually voted against putting in place an increased minimum wage. We are on the right side of protection of workers here in this province.

WSIB is not the perfect program, but it is something that I believe is necessary to protect workers and to provide the insurance they need.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to rise to speak in the House today about this issue. It’s my first chance, actually, to rise to speak since returning, so I appreciate the opportunity.

In Northumberland–Peterborough South, the pandemic, without question, has hit workers and families hard. It has hit people hard across the province of Ontario, across Canada, across the globe. We know that this has had a significant effect.

Madam Speaker, I was part of finance committee when we sat throughout the summer, over 800 hours—a record number of hours—for depositions from over 500 presenters. In fact, nobody who wanted to speak to the finance committee was denied. One of the common threads that we heard was on fixed costs.

As a government, it behooves us to deal with responding to the health crisis, supporting individuals, families and businesses, and then looking forward to what

sort of economy we want to have post-COVID-19 and into recovery.

This move by the Minister of Labour, supported by the parliamentary assistant sitting next to me, has been one that listens to those concerns.

For those at home watching—and one of the important things we all have to do is tie the policies that we’re introducing to what we’re hearing from people at home.

The spike in the average industrial wage in Ontario workers, because so many low-wage workers aren’t in the workforce—we know that right now. That was 7.8% higher this year. Subsequently, WSIB premiums go up. This is an unintended consequence. So not only are we responding to the COVID pandemic with record investments in our health care system; transformative change in long-term care; working to address systemic barriers in employment preventing small businesses from growing, preventing young entrepreneurs from starting; but we’re addressing these unintended consequences of the global pandemic we find ourselves in, and this is one of them.

Because we heard from the member opposite prior, I’d like to tell you a story of a young contractor whose door I knocked on in the election. This young contractor told me a story of, under the previous government, a WSIB premium hike, an overnight increase in minimum wage. As my colleague said, these employers, the 50, 40, 30, 20 employers in small-town Ontario—like Port Hope, Ontario, where I’m from—are the first to step up for their workers. They’re family. They’re there to support their workers to put food on the table, to help grow their business, because they know that when their business grows, they can hire more people. They know that that benefits their employees, and it benefits our economy in small-town Ontario.

After the WSIB premium hike, the overnight increase to minimum wage, which hit them after the burdensome regulations—yes, we need regulation, but do we need double that of the next-highest jurisdiction in North America? This was crippling them, on their shoulders like a weight, and then you add onto that the high cost of electricity. Do you know what the net result of that was? The project that that contractor was working on—general labour was sent out there at \$30, \$35 an hour. The punitive costs on the consumer forced that general contractor to close his doors. He said, “Dave, it’s just too much. I can’t deal with the shots from all angles. These overnight policies by these politicians” in this place. And he closed up shop.

My question to everybody in this House: When he closes his doors, when his workers go out of work, when that young tradesperson, journeyperson from Durham College—you and I have both been there, Madam Speaker. When that young woman is not entering that trade, when she’s out of work, tell me, how does that support workers? And do you know what he said? “It’s easier for me to collect unemployment and do cash jobs.” How do cash jobs support workers in the province of Ontario? The answer is: They don’t.

To tie this back to the WSIB premiums—and I’ll draw a stark contrast to the decisions that this government is

making. When asked about lowering premiums, this is what the Ontario chamber had to say: This “news is welcomed by the Ontario business community. Premiums come out of the pockets of business owners”—like that gentleman that I just mentioned to you. “This money saved can be better spent on job creation, new technologies, infrastructure, and better, safer workplaces.” That’s what we’re talking about here. That’s what we’re talking about in small-town Ontario, in Port Hope, in Colborne, in Norwood, in Campbellford, in Warkworth. That’s what we’re talking about.

So as we look to recovery—and I know that this Legislature makes very difficult decisions that I’ve been part of as a government. It’s incredibly difficult, the position that we all find ourselves in. For a government, especially a Progressive Conservative government that understands the plight of workers and businesses alike, mentioned earlier, it’s very difficult, these measures that we’re introducing—the measures to keep Ontarians safe through COVID-19. But we understand that there is light on the horizon. There is light under a Progressive Conservative government that is tackling issues like this WSIB premium.

I think the contrast couldn’t be starker between the rainy and dark days of the previous government, enabled by the opposition New Democratic Party, that crippled small businesses, that forced that young gentleman just trying to grow his business, just trying to thrive in rural Ontario—he didn’t want to work for someone else. He wanted to start his own business. He said to me how enriching it was to go to Durham College, to go to work, to consider growing a business, to consider partnering with players like LiUNA in our community, thanks to the wonderful training centre, who then partner with employers in our community, who help improve the situation of workers.

1400

But LiUNA knows, just like these small businesses know, that when there’s no business out there and no jobs, workers suffer. So as we look long-term to creating the conditions for economic prosperity, for growing this economy, it’s important that we look at things like this WSIB premium. We’re doing everything in our power right now to support businesses and to save jobs. That’s why this WSIB deferred premium for employers—what is the net result? It’s \$1.9 billion in relief from premium payments. It saves the average business \$1,700.

For those wondering what \$1,700 means, for a small employer, that means a lot when you’re facing the weight of the policies of the previous government, when you’re looking to grow, to thrive. When this government makes decisions, that saves you on electricity. For our larger employers, that reduces their electricity costs through the premiums. When I called the plant managers of some of our biggest employers, our manufacturers, they said, “Dave”—and let’s not forget, this is in the wake of losing over 300,000 manufacturing jobs under the previous government. They called and said, “That extra \$80,000 to \$140,000 that we’re saving on electricity, we’re

reinvesting into our business. We’re growing. We’re trying to keep up with orders.”

Let’s not kid ourselves here. When the order sheet comes in, when people are placing orders, if you can’t turn it around and get it back out to market, where does the consumer look? They look elsewhere. Lest they look south of the border, God forbid, they look to other markets. That is not an alternative that is acceptable to this government, that is acceptable to this Premier, who understands the important role that manufacturing plays in the province of Ontario and the important role that small businesses play in the province of Ontario.

The numbers speak for themselves. We have more Ontarians employed in the manufacturing sector today than under the previous Liberal government, and that’s amidst the backdrop of a global pandemic. So as we look to recovery and as we learn from the over 800 hours of finance committee consultations, listening to small employers, listening to businesses, listening to workers who want the dignity of a job, who want to remain employed, I can’t help but wonder, Madam Speaker, if the members opposite would just rather these people be on unemployment insurance, be on unemployment, because then it would justify these ever-expanding programs that they want to roll out.

People in small-town Ontario want that balance. We understand the need for programs, for vital safety net programs that support Ontarians. It’s why we’ve moved with social services relief funding to support our municipalities. That’s why I’m thankful that through that social services relief funding, our county, Northumberland county, in one of the communities I represent, is partnering with small business to provide food vouchers for the most vulnerable.

We’ve now rethought homelessness in rural Ontario thanks to investments from Premier Ford. We are now looking at a diversionary housing lens that’s taking people out of transition housing, putting a roof over their head, giving them the wraparound supports that they need. But, Madam Speaker, it’s getting them on the pathway to the dignity of a job. That’s what people want.

I appreciate the role of the opposition to stand up for workers. They’re raising important considerations for the men and women of this province who get up every day to go to work. But let’s not forget, they get up every day to go to work—they want the dignity of that job. They’re proud to work for players like Cameco. Cameco just launched their mental health initiative. They’re funding small businesses, supporting individuals in our community to access mental health services, in addition to the investments that this government is making.

I think everybody in my community of Northumberland–Peterborough South understands that government plays a vital role, but that government is not the answer to all of our problems. Government creates the conditions for job creation, for economic growth and opportunity, and that’s what we’re doing with changes like this to the WSIB premium. We’re creating those conditions as we look to economic recovery.

This was part of a \$17-billion action plan—\$17 billion—thoughtful measures to support our long-term care. Because, amidst creating changes for unintended consequences like the WSIB premium, let's not forget what we're doing in long-term care. We're accelerating the builds, like the Golden Plough Lodge, which has broken ground and which will soon open their doors.

The workers—the PSWs and the nurses—who stood up when we made that announcement, it seemed like years under the previous government that this was all talk. Now they see backhoes, they see shovels in the ground and a future—a better future, a better long-term-care facility that has private and semi-private rooms, not the ward rooms that contributed to the spread of COVID-19.

Often, members opposite talk about COVID-19 in LTC. Let's look at some of the factors why. Ward rooms were one of the major reasons. We've accelerated the builds. I'd love to click my heels together and say, "Hey, let's have these buildings overnight, tomorrow," but that general contractor I spoke to you about earlier isn't going to be there to do the jobs if we've punished them into unemployment. They're there now able to build that new long-term-care facility in the riding of Northumberland–Peterborough South with private and semi-private rooms, better care. That's what the workers tell me when they call my office, when I speak to them well into the evenings. They want that. These loved ones who are in long-term care, the workers there, that's their family.

I think of family members I've looked after. I think to the home care that I received just over Christmas after a hospital procedure. You develop an affinity for the PSW, for the nurse who comes to support you. That's the dignity that our loved ones deserve. That's the support that's there.

Without question, compensation is a major factor. That's why this government increased compensation for our PSWs and our workers. That's why this Minister of Long-Term Care launched a staffing strategy long before it became politically expedient to raise it in this House. That's why, in contrast to the 611 net new beds the previous government built—that's why we see, from Pleasant Meadow to Golden Plough, that the politics don't matter when residents of my community drive around and see brand new builds everywhere they look. That's the net result of the changes from this government, from Premier Ford.

The workers who are on those job sites, who are showing up every day to create those new facilities to expand our capacity in long-term care, those workers benefit from WSIB changes that mitigate the unintended consequences here and that help reduce that burden.

I know the Premier made a joke and talked about an 800-pound gorilla. Well, that 800-pound gorilla was in the form of the previous Liberal government, supported and enabled by the New Democratic members opposite, on the backs of our small workers and, by virtue of that, on the backs of our workers of Ontario.

We're lessening that burden. We're looking at long-term to create the conditions where we can have that social services safety net that I talked about earlier. Thanks to

investments by this government, by Premier Ford, we're rethinking homelessness in our riding. The voucher program that's bringing meals to those who need it, the 211 program integrating our digital services—that's actually benefitting the vulnerable and those who need it most. We're creating the conditions for economic opportunity.

I know it's rich for those watching amidst the global pandemic to talk about that, but we're tackling things from a variety of angles. Long-term care, I spoke to. Our hospital capacity—last March, when I spoke to Minister Elliott and Premier Ford about the medium-sized funding formula, the net result for NHH, for Campbellford Memorial in our riding, that meant that the in-patient units which had to be merged by the coalition government, by the NDP and the Liberals, where nurses were walking around the hospital just to decompress because they didn't provide the care for the patients that they felt those patients deserved, well, we've separated those in-patient units. We've given hospitals the financial flexibility. We're not incentivizing them to care for the sick; we're investing in programs like transitional bed funding that's getting acute care patients out of the emergency room and into the supportive rehabilitative care that they need to get them back on their feet. That's what this government's doing.

It's important that we talk about this because when we look to the WSIB deferred premium payments, when we look to the unintended consequences of COVID-19, we're addressing that as a government. But we've also addressed some structural issues prior to the pandemic that have put us in a better position today: the position we're in with the lowest case count.

1410

When we look to jurisdictions across North America, our manufacturers, without question—in the finance committee consultations that we had, on the recent budget consultations that I had, there are challenges, very real and present challenges, today. And we're responding. We're pivoting to deal with unintended consequences, like in the WSIB premiums that we're talking about, and to launching a micro-credential strategy in the previous budget, in budget 2020, to give workers pathways.

I think it's somewhat demeaning to stand up and constantly talk about workers in a manner that doesn't—I'm struggling to try to and find words for this, but we treat them as our equal, and by doing that we're empowering them. We're not just patting them on the head and saying, "Here, we're going to throw more money at it." We're saying, "Let's look at a couple of issues. Yes, compensation, without question"—which this government has done. "Let's look at education pathways. Let's look at maybe why PSWs are getting an education and then not entering the profession, or why they don't see laddering opportunities to become an RPN or an RN."

This government is addressing that with the micro-credentialing strategy. This government is looking at rural colleges in and around our ridings, like Loyalist. Instead of saying you have to partner with a university to become a nurse and you have to then ship them off to a university,

which is traditionally in larger city centres, we're giving them degree-granting authority so that these nurses can stay in rural Ontario.

We're investing in home and community care so that people aren't just ending up in hospitals.

We can have a discussion on a race to the bottom or we can do what Premier Ford and this government is doing, which is thinking outside the box, looking at education pathways, looking at compensation and looking at the structural facilities in which we care for our loved ones, but also at aging in place. I think also to measures in the budget that supported those aging in place with tax credits.

Then those general contractors—I'm tying it back to the WSIB premium of the general contractor who told me that it was easier to just close up shop. That's not an Ontario I want to be a part of.

I'm going to close by tying it back to that story of the contractor who thinks the WSIB premium hike, the overnight hike in minimum wage from reactionary, thoughtless policies of this place in yesteryears, to unintended and drastically out-of-reach electricity costs—it caused this general contractor to close their door, to go out of business, to collect unemployment insurance and to take under-the-table cash jobs. When we do that, workers lose, businesses lose, Ontarians lose. Madam Speaker, that's unacceptable for this government. We're going to work at creating the conditions for economic opportunity, and we're going to work at building a better Ontario for all of us.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: As you know, I have great respect for my friend from Northumberland–Peterborough South. I used to think that he went to acupuncture college, because he has the ability to stick it to friends across the aisle and get a reaction from them.

He talked about one taxpayer. He talked about a young contractor and everything the government is doing to protect one pocketbook, one contractor. I have a young landscaper in my riding. In the colder months, he puts a plow on his vehicle and he goes out and he clears snow. His insurance rate went up \$7,000 this year, even though he's never had a claim filed against him. So my question is, if you're going to lower and cap the workplace insurance premiums, why can't you take another step forward and do something to cap the increases that insurance companies are doing to the people in Ontario, the small business people? Because there is one taxpayer, there's one pocketbook, and we're just not doing enough.

Mr. David Piccini: I must say, I have great respect for the member opposite also. I think his comments on one taxpayer is not something we often hear from across the aisle, but it really speaks to some of the contrasts between the more urban and rural members in that party and the real divide and contrasts that we see.

I would stand with the member opposite and echo his comments. I respect that, that there is only one taxpayer. But I would say my colleague MPP Norm Miller has introduced legislation to help on that issue, and I know in

conversations I've had with snowmobilers and other employers that without a doubt, this is an issue. I think it starts with legislation, as with Norm Miller. I know through FSRA and other bodies, we are addressing this through the Ministry of Finance. I appreciate the comments from the member opposite, and without question, more needs to be done.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A reminder to all members that you can't refer to people by their name, only by their riding or their title. Thank you.

Further questions?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Madam Speaker, to the member from Northumberland–Peterborough South, I appreciate the fact that you have raised a number of examples of how our government is approaching the COVID-19 crisis. This is an unprecedented time for all of us; for Ontarians, for Canadians, for people around the world. We know that families are struggling. We know businesses are struggling. We know employees are struggling. And that is why our government is taking this comprehensive approach to try to provide support to people regardless of where they live in Ontario, regardless of what they do in this province.

You pointed out that this is just one step—one step of many that our government is taking, one program of many that our government is putting in place to help Ontarians. To the member, can you share with us why it is important to support Bill 238 and other measures this government is taking?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. Also, a reminder: Comments must be directed to and through the Chair.

Response?

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you very much, the member from Flamborough–Granbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Glanbrook.

Mr. David Piccini: Glanbrook—a tongue twister.

Through you, Madam Speaker, thank you. I think it is important that we look at it holistically. I think the member from Peterborough–Kawartha highlighted this, that often the dichotomy and confusion we hear from the other side of the House when we talk about large pieces of legislation, budget bills and others, which deal with a variety of issues affecting Ontarians, and then targeted approaches like this, with the WSIB premium—holistically, together, we build a better province. Through this measure here, these unintended consequences, I think it's important that government move quickly, that government act, and that government respond. That's exactly what this government is doing.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Mr. John Vanthof: I listened intently to the member from Northumberland–Peterborough South, particularly when he was speaking about the contractors in his riding and the small business people. We both come from a rural background and both from a small business background, and we've both spent a bit of time on the finance committee.

My office is getting calls from small business people regarding the Ontario Small Business Support Grant, and that the application is from April of one year and April of another year.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: Well, I hope you can explain this to me, because I have cottage operations who have no income in either April—in northeastern Ontario, you don't rent cottages in either April—and they have been refused. I am trying to find the answers here, because they have been refused. So if you could elaborate on that and help me help people get these grants, I would be very appreciative.

Mr. David Piccini: I'm so glad that we have that question, because it really ties into the need to not have duplicative programs, because in responding to the federal government and the shortcomings—you pointed out a very good point we heard: Through a number of the federal programs, people were being left behind, which is why the Ontario Small Business Support Grant really is that catch-all. It's not just April over April. We looked at January, we looked at new start-ups; basically, anybody who had a business.

I think of a young furniture store in my riding that opened at the beginning of December and then two weeks later, this province enters lockdown. Well, he's eligible. We walked him through.

And actually, as of today, when we talk about digitizing government—and I know I'm all over, but I want to tie that digitizing piece in here. There's now a portal where small businesses can go online to track their application status. I am hearing of monies being paid out in 10 days or less. I'm hearing businesses that are now going onto that portal, literally texting me live saying, "Dave, we've got the status. Money is expected in our account in the next"—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. Further questions?

Ms. Jane McKenna: I want to thank the member from Northumberland–Peterborough South. It was wonderful to hear you speak. I was grateful that when I gave you the call to ask if you'd support Bill 238 and be able to speak for 20 minutes—it was a very good choice that I was able to listen to.

I just want to say, we've talked about this numerous times in the House today, and obviously the other two days that we've been here before. In the Ministry of Labour, we're always about the employers and the employees and government all working together on a team.

1420

When we put this bill together, the employees said to us that they wanted to make sure that they could rely on WSIB, that they received the financial support they needed—so not having 7.8% going down to 2%—and the employers kept saying to us that they didn't want to be negatively impacted when it went higher, for the WSIB premiums for the uncertain times. Do you think we've put that in the bill?

Mr. David Piccini: In short, yes. That's in the bill.

I'll build on the comments that the member made when she talked about the importance of really working together for policies that benefit employers and workers alike. I know that the role of the opposition is to criticize on this. I would hope that we could find some common ground on this unintended-consequence piece and just have the support—I understand that doesn't support the politics of the characterizations that they're trying to paint on this side of the House. But putting all of that aside, that's not going to affect the work this government is doing. That's not going to affect our commitment to working with our municipalities, our commitment to working with the federal government, together, to better those programs. That's a commitment we made to the people of Ontario. I know it doesn't play into the characterizations and the caricatures of members on this side of this House that the opposition tries to paint. We're going to keep doing it. We're going to move beyond that noise, beyond the platitudes, to support Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's always a joy and an honour to stand on behalf of the good people of Algoma–Manitoulin.

On a regular, weekly basis, the calls that I get at my office from injured workers are constant and basically the same.

A lot of the messaging that has been coming from this side of the House to you has been about a lost opportunity from this government. People across the province were excited when they started hearing, "Hey, they're going to start talking about WSIB inside the Legislature."

Time and time again, this government has proven over the last couple of years that there has been a significant decrease—actually, the WSIB premiums have fallen by well over 40%, and that has benefited one side of the table, and that's great. However, there is a balance.

When will this government take steps to assist workers in this province?

Mr. David Piccini: I reject the entire premise and remarks that member made.

We heard two questions posed to the member opposite from the independent Liberal Party, supported by the members opposite, and they couldn't be answered—on the unintended consequences, and on the very real and poignant questions posed.

The bottom line is, we are supporting workers. In my speech, I spoke at length about the holistic measures we've put in place and a WSIB program that actually works for employers and employees alike, which is in stark contrast to a very problematic program—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. Further debate?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: It's always an honour to stand and speak in this place, and I think it has rarely been as important as it is now, as we're facing, deep into the second wave, looking perhaps at a looming third wave of this devastating pandemic that is wreaking havoc on communities across Ontario, whether they're urban or

rural, whether it's small businesses, whether it's migrant workers, as we were hearing, whether it's BIPOC communities—Black, Indigenous and other racialized people—whether it's low-income communities. It's really important to understand the way that this pandemic and its consequences, unintended or not, are devastating all of the groups of people I was talking about.

When a bill comes up that talks about workplace safety but doesn't actually mention workers, in the middle of a pandemic, there is an enormous lost opportunity, as my colleague from Manitoulin was saying just now. That happens in a number of ways. The one many of my colleagues have raised—and I'm going to raise it again, because it is just so glaring—that is the most obvious is the question of paid sick days. I want to really talk through how this ripples through all of these players.

All of us in this House have paid sick days. If we wake up one morning and we don't feel well, we simply stay home. If we're worried that the symptoms that we have are COVID symptoms, we just don't go out. We don't risk infecting other people around us. And we know that our bills are going to be paid at the end of the month. Our mortgage is going to be paid. Our rent is going to be paid. There's going to be food on the table. Our cellphone is still going to work. Our Internet that we need for Zoom is still going to work. We don't have to think about it.

The problem that we're facing at this moment is that for so many of our essential workers, so many of the folks who cannot work from home, who can't even come to a space like this that is relatively safe, who have to put themselves in danger every single day because they have to take crowded transit, because they know that they're going to be up close with people who may or may not have COVID, is that those essential workers—so many of them—do not have access to that knowledge and certainty of paid sick days.

It's really crucial to understand that when you are afraid that you may not have a roof over your head at the end of the month, you are going to get up and go to your job. You're going to do it, because you can't run that risk.

At the moment, I'm busy supporting dozens of tenants in my riding of Beaches—East York, who are in the process of eviction hearings at the Landlord and Tenant Board. The tenants have been arguing that the pandemic we're in creates unprecedented times that mean that the landlords need to come and meet them with meaningful negotiations, which they're expected to do by law, and that that has to take into account some form of rent and arrears relief as, by the way, has been suggested by the Federation of Rental-housing Providers of Ontario. The landlords are insisting that the only matter at hand is the question of whether these people owe money or not—nothing more than that.

Why does this matter? It means the landlords are not meaningfully negotiating as the Premier begged them to do. It means that they are not taking the pandemic into account. Now, when you know that that's happening and you're an essential front-line worker who has to go out there but you don't have benefits, you don't have paid sick

days and you're really worried that if you don't go out and make that amount of money, if you don't make that income, at the end of the month you're going to fall behind and you know that your landlord is going to come for you, what are you going to do? You're going to get out of bed, you're going to go to the grocery store, and you're going to work your shift stocking shelves or as a cashier. You're going to do it because it's the only way you can make sure that there's going to be a roof over your head.

A couple of weeks ago, I was on a call, an interview, with a local doctor in the east end of Toronto, who was talking about exactly this. She said, "I have patients coming into my office by Zoom who have COVID symptoms, and they say, 'I don't know what to do.'" She says, "Well, you need to stay home." And they say, "I can't stay home, because if I stay home, I don't get paid. And if I don't get paid, I can't eat. And if I can't eat, I can't keep a roof over my head." She said, "I know these people are going to work in your local grocery stores, and they're going to work sick."

That has multiple unintended consequences, to use the words of the member from—

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Northumberland.

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Thank you; Northumberland—Peterborough South.

It means that (1) we can't get this pandemic under control, because it's no use telling people to stay home if they are terrified that they are going to lose their homes; and (2) that we keep putting businesses and small businesses in danger because they're stuck in a cycle of lockdown, emerging from lockdown and lockdown. We are condemning them to these cycles of lockdowns by not ensuring that people can stay home when they're sick.

1430

A few weeks ago, I held a forum of women small business owners in Beaches—East York because, like across the province, women small business owners have been particularly affected by this economic mess that has come from the pandemic. So we held a sort of mutual support forum—this is the third one we've held now—women coming together to talk about what their particular challenges have been with COVID and with the lockdown, and then what kinds of lockdown hacks, if you will, they have developed to manage to keep their businesses going.

It turns out—and we know this from research around the world—that women don't network the same way that men do. That becomes a particular problem when there is a crisis like this, because they don't have the extensive networks that male entrepreneurs tend to have to help them figure out, "What are the ways that I can get through this?"

But women entrepreneurs are incredibly inventive and imaginative. Among the things that they've been doing—there's a cupcake store owner who actually drives her little car around and parks in driveways, and announces on Instagram which driveways she's going to be in and sells her wares out of the back of her car.

People have been thinking of inventive ways of doing, for instance, plants over Valentine's, because you couldn't get cut flowers in the same way, and for florists, that's

such an important time. So one of the entrepreneurs in my riding, who had just opened her flower shop, called Fern, before the pandemic, sold for Valentine's Day little potted plants with heart-shaped philodendra. People will do all of these very imaginative things. One local store, Old's Cool General, has specialized in jigsaw puzzles, since so many people are using them to calm their minds and get through these pandemic days.

So people are being very inventive. But one of the things that so many of these small business owners said, "One of the things that is killing us"—and yes, they're applying for the grants. It's not that they're not applying for the grants—"is this cycle of in and out and in and out, and the government's inability to get on top and stay on top of the pandemic." All of them called for what? For paid sick days. All of them called for paid sick days because they know that their small businesses will be better off without these ridiculous cycles that we're going through.

They understand, just as the public health doctors do who presented the modelling that the government used to send us into lockdown the last time—just as those public health doctors do, these small business owners understand that until and unless we are putting in place the social supports that people need, they can't stay home. They can't stay home when they're sick. So, I think that it's a lost opportunity to see a bill come out that is about workplace safety that doesn't, in fact, make workplaces safe.

It's frightening to know, as somebody who needs to go to a grocery store, that there are people who have to come to work sick. It's frightening to know, as a grocery store clerk, that other people are having to come to work sick, even if I'm not, as a for-instance. It's frightening to know that we are not, in fact, keeping workplaces safe, even though this government has the ability to do that. I think that so many lost opportunities are there—so many ways that we could be keeping people safe, so many ways that we could be facilitating small businesses to keep going, so many ways that we could be facilitating that she-covery, or at least helping small businesses owned by women to keep going so that they're there for us, so that Main Street doesn't collapse.

I want to talk a little bit about equity. My colleague from York South–Weston asked the government to pass an equity motion that would put in place measures to keep BIPOC communities and low-income communities safer during COVID. He asked that it be passed by unanimous consent, and the government House leader refused and said that maybe it would be considered.

I want the government members who are chatting among themselves to listen to what is behind that request for unanimous consent. When the government refuses to put in place paid sick days, the people and communities who are primarily affected by it are racialized communities. They are the Black, Indigenous and other racialized communities that are disproportionately hurt by COVID in the first place. These communities are being disproportionately devastated by COVID, and their workers are

being disproportionately hurt by measures that completely refuse to see that they even exist.

I want to say that that, my friends, is actually a form of how systemic racism perpetuates itself. When the government refuses to see that there are certain racialized communities that are disproportionately affected by a kind of massive event like the pandemic that we're experiencing and yet refuses to understand how their actions and their legislation affect those communities, that is an unintended consequence, but it is an unintended consequence that is completely foreseeable if you are aware of how systemic racism works.

I hope that someone on the government bench is thinking about this, because I am sick and tired of hearing the government stand up and say that it deplores racism while it's faced with a very obvious case of the way that racism plays out—because the lack of paid sick days does not affect all Ontarians equally, and it tends to particularly hurt people who live in and are from Black, Indigenous and other racialized communities.

So I just want that piece to hit home. I really want it to settle. I want us to think about it. These are the folks who are most likely to have to go to work sick. These are the folks who are most likely to become sick: because they have to go to work in places where other people are coming to work sick. These are the folks who are most likely to lose their housing, as is happening in Beaches–East York. It's not the folks in the majority-white areas of the riding that are in danger; it is, in fact, exactly those pockets of the riding where BIPOC communities are concentrated, which are also the pockets of the community that are lowest-income, where people are in danger of losing their housing because they have lost income to COVID.

This is not way back in March when we didn't know how this was going to play out. The studies have been done. We see the statistics, and they show us very clearly who is suffering. So there's an equity element to this that I don't see the government taking into account and which is really very heartbreaking.

1440

Finally, I do want to mention, in the last three minutes, this question of deeming, because if we are going to be opening up the WSIB, the very least we could do is to end this practice of deeming. I can't tell you how many workers I have spoken to who have explained to me the way that deeming has had devastating outcomes for them, devastating consequences—perhaps unintended, but devastating consequences nonetheless.

When a worker is injured on the job and is deemed capable of taking work that they are not capable of doing or are not trained to do or that doesn't exist—effectively a phantom job—and so they are denied WSIB, it sets in train a whole series of events that often ends up with them being on ODSP and/or in extreme poverty, and not just for a short period of time, but often for the rest of their lives. It has the result of pushing people into homelessness. It has the result of pushing people into horrible situations: family breakups, depression, often the kinds of opioid use and

drug use to deal with pain and depression that they would never have had had WSIB just supported them through the period that they needed that support.

It exacerbates all of these other societal issues that I've been talking about. It seems to me a terrible lost opportunity, if we're going to open WSIB, particularly in the middle of a pandemic, when people are hurting so badly anyway, that we're not taking this time to fix this glaring error, which is so obviously hurting workers, so obviously pushing injured workers into lifelong situations of agony and despair and sometimes early death. We could have fixed this. We could be taking advantage of this time to make society so much better, so much more equitable, so much more caring. We could be taking this time to begin that just recovery that everybody is talking about. Instead, what we have are tragic unintended consequences and a lot of lost opportunities.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions and comments?

Ms. Jane McKenna: All provinces, including your NDP cousins in BC, are not looking to duplicate the federal government's paid sick days program. In fact, we've seen two provinces end their sick day programs once the federal government launched their programs. The federal government, since 1940, has been responsible for employment insurance programs. The Ontario NDP has a record in government of policies that put 1.2 million people out of work and closed thousands of small businesses.

The NDP tries to have it both ways, praising Jagmeet Singh for negotiating 10 paid sick days for the federal government while at the same time refusing to share details of the federal program with the constituents who need it most. The member opposite said earlier that Bill 238 is the first piece of labour legislation that we've put forward in this pandemic. I just want to correct the record: The first piece of legislation this government passed days into the pandemic was labour legislation. My question: When will the NDP stop the ideologic rhetoric that even their NDP cousins don't believe or support?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: As the member opposite knows perfectly well and as has been explained—and I'm sure if the member opposite doesn't understand, it's easily Googleable—there is no duplication that would be there if the provincial paid sick days legislation—my colleague has a bill, Bill 239, which is paid sick days, which, if enacted, will solve the problem that needs to be solved and is not a duplication of the federal program. The federal program does not pay the same amount that people make in their jobs normally, and it has to be applied for, and it comes late. It's not the same thing as waking up one morning and realizing you can stay home if you're sick and you don't have to worry about it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Beaches–East York for her thoughtful and compassionate speech.

She indicates that this government refuses to put in place paid sick days and also indicates how the lack thereof impacts intersectional folks.

Again, we see this government siding with and protecting corporate landlords throughout this pandemic. They make polite noises about standing up for the little guy, but if we look at their legislation, they protect long-term-care owner-operators and refuse to offer rent relief to support struggling tenants as well as small landlords.

Small business owners, as you say, are inventive and creative, and they're better off without the never-ending cycle of inconsistency that has been handed down to them from this government.

Walmart and Costco have reaped enormous benefits while small businesses were forced to close. Walmart lobbyists managed to convince this government that they didn't have to cordon off sections on the floor.

What are some of the positive, proactive changes the NDP has suggested that will help regular families out of COVID-19?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: So many of the really wonderful, thoughtful propositions that the NDP have put together would indeed help families.

We would help families, for instance, with paid sick days, which, again, would give people the ability to stay home, which benefits absolutely everybody. It benefits those who are sick. It benefits businesses. It helps get on top of the pandemic. It's exactly what we need, and its lack causes these ongoing cycles, as I was saying.

We desperately need to help folks with their rent. If we were to actually help folks with their rent, then that helps small landlords who are also small business owners.

We have an equity proposal which helps BIPOC communities and other—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. Further questions?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciate the remarks from the member opposite on this incredibly important topic.

I note that there's quite a lot of stakeholder support out there for this initiative that was introduced by the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development, including the president of the YMCA, who supports the measures we're taking to help freeze WSIB rates and cap them. Of course, the YMCAs across our communities are doing tremendous work to support vulnerable populations in all of our ridings.

I wonder if the member opposite could let the YMCA know if she plans to vote in support of this incredibly important measure that will support many of our not-for-profits as well as our small businesses.

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: I've noticed that the government frequently does this: They will bring forward a piece of legislation that has massive gaps in it and a tidbit that is not a terrible tidbit, and then when we on this side of the House do our jobs by pointing out the massive gaps that are there, they'll say, "But what about the tidbit? You're not talking about the tidbit." The point here is not whether there's a tidbit that is useful for not-for-profits and charities. The point is that if you're going to bring

forward—in the middle of a global pandemic that is costing many lives and devastating communities, you don't deal with tidbits; you deal with the big purple elephants in the room.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Sara Singh: Thank you to the member from Beaches—East York for a really great overview of why this piece of legislation simply does not do anything to help protect workers—especially racialized, precariously employed workers.

In my community of Peel and in Brampton, we see outbreaks spreading like wildfire throughout our manufacturing and warehouse hubs. We know, and studies have very clearly indicated, that one in four of those workers are still going in to work because they simply do not have access to paid sick days.

1450

We've heard the government continue to defend their lack of action and a reliance on a federal program that simply doesn't go far enough. I would really love to hear from you why we need a provincially supported paid sick leave program and why the bill by our colleague, Peggy Sattler, the member from London West—the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act—is actually a piece of legislation that we should be debating, not Bill 238 here.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A reminder to all members, do not use people's names, strictly their riding or their ministry title.

Response?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Thank you so much to my colleague for that question. It's really important to understand that, in fact, as the pandemic has dragged on and more of us need to order our goods online, there needs to be even more workers in the distribution centres, in places like Brampton that my colleague was referencing. These are precarious jobs that do not come with benefits and do not come with paid sick days, so all the unintended and obvious consequences that come from that are then occurring.

The bill from my colleague from London West, Stay Home If You Are Sick, with its paid sick days is exactly the bill that we need. It is precisely the thing that will help us to get over this pandemic. It will deal with people's mental health because they will not be worried about whether or not they have to go to work sick. It's what we need.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): We have time for one quick back-and-forth. The member from Burlington.

Ms. Jane McKenna: The NDP's words don't match their actions. When I introduced my bill in November—Bill 152, the Occupational Safety and Health Day Act—the NDP voted against a bill that recognizes the importance of supporting a health and safety culture in every workplace. Yet today the NDP are saying they don't understand why we're not talking about workplace health. Today the NDP is saying that this is our government's first labour bill

since the start of the pandemic, yet we have had at least two labour bills before today.

My question is, which NDP do Ontarians believe: The one that voted against a bill that promoted workplace health and safety; the NDP that celebrated Jagmeet Singh's push for sick day pay as the federal government; or the NDP that now opposes the only NDP government in our country, the BC government, which stands with Ontario and is not supporting duplicating the federal paid sick day program? Can you answer that?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: The province of Ontario needs paid sick days. It needs paid sick days now. We need paid sick days to get over and through this pandemic. All of the government should be passing by unanimous consent the bill by my colleague, the member from London West, Stay Home If You Are Sick. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to participate in debate on Bill 238, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2021.

As this is my first debate of 2021, let me take a quick moment to thank all of the residents of Ottawa West—Nepean for their incredible hard work and co-operation in slowing the spread of COVID-19 through our communities. Not only does this protect the health and safety of Ontarians, which is always our government's top priority, but it also helps our businesses by aiding recovery efforts as we begin to see the light at the end of the tunnel through our vaccine rollouts and other efforts.

During my remarks today, I will be touching on a few areas, with a particular focus on why this legislation is needed, the broader context surrounding this bill and how these changes benefit not only residents in my riding of Ottawa West—Nepean but people all across Ontario.

I want to start by commending the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development, as well as his parliamentary assistant, the member from Burlington, for their incredible hard work on this bill, and for explaining this issue so thoroughly to the Legislature in their opening remarks and making the case for the sensible amendments that are here in Bill 238. While this act is a needed step, it is by no means the only concrete step taken by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development to protect employers and employees during this time of great challenge.

As parliamentary assistant to the Minister for Children, Community and Social Services, I will also be taking a few minutes in my remarks today to highlight how recent policy changes here assist some of our most vulnerable residents by lowering the operating costs of critical not-for-profits in our communities. Stability in WSIB premiums is incredibly important for all employers, and this is true whether that stability comes from decisions at the arm's-length WSIB to freeze premiums or legislative actions like those proposed in Bill 238.

It is important to understand the overall context of our government's efforts to stand with workers and employers during this incredibly difficult period of time. This issue

also speaks to the importance of our government's fiscal responsibility, as the steps taken within this bill are in part possible due to the elimination of the massive unfunded liability at the WSIB, which had ballooned in previous years under previous governments. Due to our government's responsible management of this file, costs of proposed amendments will not be placed on the backs of employers or employees.

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.

So what does this mean, and why does this matter? 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 service. In comparison, far more higher-wage earners retained employment during this difficult time. This has resulted in a spike in the average industrial wage of Ontario workers, because so many lower-wage jobs aren't in the workforce currently.

This year, the average industrial wage is 7.8% higher than last year, compared to the typical annual 2% to 3% increase. An unintended consequence of this spike is significant increases to Workplace Safety and Insurance Board premiums for some employers. That's because those premiums are capped, on a formula using Ontario's average industrial wage, the AIW. The premium payment is based on a cap of 175% of the AIW for each worker on the employer'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 AIW on an annual basis.

This is why our government has chosen to act and provide relief through this piece of legislation. It is another example to Ontario that we are with you each and every step of the way.

Bill 238 is only one part of a series of steps taken by our government to reduce costs for employers without impacting benefits available to employees. As has been mentioned, the WSIB has announced that premium rates will be frozen in 2021 at 2020 levels. This freeze, however, would not limit premium increases caused by the unexpected increase in the AIW. That is why we have proposed this legislative amendment.

The WSIB deferred premium payments for employers between March and August 2020. This gave employers \$1.9 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. This is money that employers can better utilize to retain staff or pivot to online sales, for example. When introducing a new rate framework in 2019, the WSIB cut premium rates for approximately three quarters of the employers who pay them.

1500

As parliamentary assistant to the Minister for Children, Community and Social Services, I would also like to

highlight another way assistance has been offered to vital service providers at a critical time. To further assist non-profits, the WSIB froze their premium rates for five years. What does this mean? This means stability for operating costs for many non-profits and even cost reductions for several of these important and incredibly vital organizations. These organizations include women's shelters, daycares, YMCAs, soup kitchens, art galleries, churches, addiction recovery centres, theatres, nursery schools, food banks, hospices, retirement homes, children's aid societies, animal shelters, legions and more. I could go on, Speaker.

One of my top priorities during the pandemic has been monthly meetings with United Way East Ontario's community response table, which has brought together 75 agencies serving vulnerable populations across Ottawa for monthly meetings to talk about how we can collaborate across the not-for-profit sector, with the private sector and with government partners. We have had all three levels of government at these conversations on a monthly basis to tackle issues ranging from gender-based violence to seniors' isolation and mental health. I'm incredibly proud that that table has just recently produced a briefing memo with a number of recommendations for government to consider on how we can continue to support vulnerable populations.

These United Way community response table meetings have underscored the importance of the measured approach taken by our government during this time to support some of our not-for-profits and the vulnerable populations that they serve. I know that many of these organizations are thankful for the freeze on WSIB premiums, which has supported their organizations at a time when they needed it most. To take even one worry away for non-profits at such an important time is absolutely, no question, worth it. Not only does it take a real concern off their plates; it saves them money that they can use to serve our communities.

This is why we need to pass Bill 238 and ensure stability in these insurance costs. We need to do all that we can to ensure employers can do all that they can to continue supporting their community by providing safe employment.

Leaders in the non-profit sector have also spoken to the importance of WSIB premiums and the impact of our government's policies. Cathy Taylor, executive director of the Ontario Nonprofit Network, had the following to say about the decision: "Non-profits and charities contribute \$50 billion to Ontario's economy, creating jobs and supporting meaningful volunteer opportunities. For non-profit employers that are registered with WSIB, premiums are a growing cost pressure. Ontario Nonprofit Network appreciates the government of Ontario and the WSIB freezing rate increases for non-profit employers, and recognizing the economic and social impact of non-profits and charities on communities."

Medhat Mahdy, president of YMCA Ontario, echoed these sentiments with his reaction to this step: "This announcement is positive for a number of YMCAs that

work tirelessly to deliver important services from child care to employment services across the province. We welcome this change which will help reduce operating costs for charities, including many regional YMCAs in Ontario." I'm sure many of us on both sides of this chamber know the important work that the YMCAs do in our various ridings and communities.

The Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues was quite right when she said at the time, "The non-profit sector has an overwhelmingly positive impact on Ontario. We're standing with these important organizations and acknowledging all their hard work and dedication. They deserve relief on an important business cost." I agree, Speaker. They absolutely deserve relief, and any step that delivers real results should be taken. These are exactly the sorts of steps we find here in Bill 238. Our proposed amendments will help businesses while making sure that we continue to support workers who are injured on the job. Speaker, we can see that Bill 238 is another example of our government trying to offer help, dealing with unprecedented circumstances in a way that prioritizes protecting the health and safety of workers.

In a similar way, this commitment was demonstrated recently in Ottawa. I was pleased that the city was included in a recent inspection blitz by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development to ensure that workers and consumers are properly protected from COVID-19. On January 25, CTV Ottawa reported that inspectors visited 114 workplaces in the city during the weekend blitz aimed at ensuring essential businesses that can continue to operate during the province-wide shutdown are following public health guidelines that are so essential for those workers and for our consumers. Twenty-four infractions were reported. The most common infractions were for inadequate screening, exceeding capacity limits and lacking a COVID-19 safety plan. Sixteen inspectors' orders were also issued, which instruct businesses to make changes in a certain time frame to make sure that we can rectify those issues and ensure that those businesses are safe places for their workers and for the consumers and residents who rely on them.

This work is being done well beyond Ottawa. 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. We are committed to ensuring that workers and consumers are safe when they visit local businesses. This keeps people healthy and allows us to continue to allow businesses to operate throughout these extraordinary times.

The province is also taking additional measures to protect farm workers during the pandemic by expanding province-wide inspections to farms, greenhouses and other agricultural operations to ensure health and safety measures are being followed. That is so critical as we work to protect our food supply chain as well.

The enforcement piece is critical, but the education piece is equally as important. Businesses are being educated so they can operate as safely as possible. To help businesses comply with the public health measures, the

Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development has developed more than 200 business guideline documents that are available to all of our businesses across Ontario.

This focus on both education and enforcement by our government is proving effective. 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 as well. This action will save lives and slow the spread of COVID-19. For many vulnerable Ontarians, whether they're a senior in my community or an immunocompromised individual of any age, this is especially good news.

Speaker, one of the issues that has been touched upon in debate is the impact of the unfunded liability that was accumulated under previous governments, putting a heavy strain on employers as well as the system that injured workers rely on in moments of need.

The WSIB eliminated its unfunded liability charge in January 2020, leading to a \$607-million reduction in costs to businesses. This was no small task. In his opening remarks to this bill, the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development thanked the leadership of the WSIB, Chair Elizabeth Witmer and the former Minister of Labour, now the Minister of Infrastructure, who brought in a sustainable WSIB system.

Thanks to our government's responsible fiscal management, Bill 238 would not impact any injured worker's entitlement to benefits or services. It is this sort of approach that is expected by the people, and it is the approach that we will continue to take for the people.

The costs associated with this measure will be absorbed by the WSIB. How will this be done? How can we cap costs for employers and maintain workers' benefits? The difference is 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 of 115.4%.

1510

It is 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 very latest. This regulatory flexibility is important as Ontario continues its recovery. All possible tools need to be at our disposal to help employers keep costs low and maintain protections for workers in a critical time. After that date, premium calculations will go back to being based on the maximum insurable earnings formula set out under the WSIA.

Helping employers survive this challenging period is an essential part of our government's response to COVID-19, and it builds on our government's broader supports to small businesses over the past number of months, including the recently introduced Ontario Small Business Support Grant, which provides a minimum of \$10,000 and up to \$20,000 in support for eligible small businesses forced to close or significantly restrict themselves. There is also the \$1,000 Main Street Relief Grant for PPE;

property tax and energy rebates; mental health supports for small business owners and their employees; and the seniors' renovation tax credit, which will both support vulnerable seniors while driving demand for our hard-working renovation sector.

These are incredibly challenging times for our small businesses, who have been asked to make huge sacrifices to help ensure that people are kept safe. We will continue to work to offer programs like these and introduce measures like Bill 238 that provide common-sense relief during these challenging times.

Speaker, as I begin to wrap up my remarks, I would like to reiterate my support for Bill 238 and the work of the minister and the parliamentary assistant on this file. It is the job of government to do what it can to ensure stability, and that is what the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act would do. Amendments found within this bill, if passed, will continue our government's efforts to support businesses and employers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Passing this bill will save money for many employers in Ontario while maintaining employee benefits, and that's something that we should all, in this chamber, be able to support. I hope that all members in this chamber will join me in supporting Bill 238 at second reading. Thank you, Speaker, for allowing me to rise on this topic.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: As politicians, some things we have under control, and other things we don't. Recently, the member from Burlington raised the NDP record of the government back in the 1990s, and that government took office just at the worst recession since the Great Depression, the dirty thirties. Now, history has yet to be written about this Conservative government during the pandemic. We know it's the largest deficit ever run up in Ontario. We know last year we lost 355,000 jobs. Another 765,000 people report working fewer hours than ever before.

My question to the member from Ottawa West–Nepean is, could you please compare the short-term costs of providing social supports versus the long-term costs of not providing much in the way of social supports at all?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. I'm incredibly proud of our government's response to COVID-19. This has been an extraordinary time for legislators and government officials right across the globe, and our government has risen to that challenge. Our approach, Speaker, is focused on three pillars: protecting our health care system, which has included massive investments in our hospital capacity and our medical capacity right across the province; it has included support for families and businesses, including \$510 million in social sector support—and I have seen first hand how that investment is going to support some of the most vulnerable in our communities; and lastly, it has included laying the foundation for our economic recovery.

This bill here today, Bill 238, is part of that third pillar. It will help ensure that costs remain low to businesses as much as they possibly can, to help them weather this storm—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you.

Further questions? The member for Whitby.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Earlier this week, the Honourable Monte McNaughton spoke on the second reading of Bill 238. A couple of aspects that he concentrated on, as you would have expected: How Bill 238 fits within the larger context of our government's efforts to stand with workers and employers during the challenging times of COVID—but he also talked about the ministry's mandate, as he should have, to support and protect workers and employers. Could the member from Ottawa West–Nepean speak a little bit more about how Bill 238 protects workers, through you, Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Just a reminder that we can't say people's proper names—strictly their riding or ministry title.

I return, for a response, to the member from Ottawa West–Nepean.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciate the question from the member for Whitby, who I know is a tireless advocate for workers in his riding and making sure that small businesses in his region of Durham get the support they need to weather this storm.

Bill 238 is part of a broader package of supports that our government is providing to small businesses right across the province. Of course, this bill, in particular, combined with the freeze on WSIB premiums, will help lower costs for many of those businesses that could help them perhaps hire another person, keep another person on the job, pivot to online services, whatever it might be. It's part of that larger patchwork that includes the Ontario Small Business Support Grant, the Main Street Relief Grant, our energy and property tax rebates and many more.

I know all of us on this side of the chamber are going to continue to fight to support our small businesses and make sure that those workers get the support they need during these challenging times.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I listened to the member for Ottawa West–Nepean during his remarks and also just now in his response to the question about how Bill 238 protects workers. I found his answer quite curious, Speaker, because he talked about an energy rebate and whatever he said, and none of that is what we, on this side of the House, are hearing is necessary to protect workers.

I want to ask the member, if the government was serious about making amendments to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act to better protect workers, why didn't they include presumptive coverage for COVID-19? Why didn't they end the practice of deeming, which continues to penalize injured workers? Why didn't they take that opportunity to actually introduce measures that would protect workers?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. Our government wants to make sure that workers are able to stay in their jobs, that workers are able to continue to rely on their employment so that they

can continue to take care of their families and take care of their needs. One of the best ways that we can do that is making sure that our small businesses get as much support as we're able to provide in the provincial government.

That's why measures like this, combined with many other measures that I've talked about previously, all come together to provide relief to small businesses, to allow them to keep those individuals employed, to make sure that those individuals still have a workplace to come in to, still have that opportunity to have their livelihoods and count on that employment. Again, that's why this measure here today is important: It's part of a broader package of supports that is supporting our workers and our small businesses.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I listened intently to the member from Ottawa West–Nepean's debate and some of the questions that are going back and forth. My question to the member is, given that this is a time-limited response and it is a direct response to the impact that small businesses and employers are suffering due to the pandemic, can you please reiterate and maybe clarify for the opposition members here how this is actually supporting not only employers, but also workers? Because as I understand it, the legislation limits insurance premiums; however, at the same time, it's not limiting any benefits for employees.

1520

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciate the question from the member from Carleton, my neighbour back in the Ottawa region. One of the things that our government tries to do in our response is make sure that we're able to pivot and adapt to changing circumstances. That's why, when we got elected, we took immediate action to deal with that unfunded liability at the WSIB, not because it was the easy thing to do, but because it was the right thing to do. Of course, back then, in 2018 and 2019, we didn't know that COVID-19 was right around the corner, but we took that action, and that allowed us to be able to pivot now, to introduce this temporary relief that will support those small businesses and workers by reducing those premiums at a time when businesses don't need increased costs; they need things to reduce those costs to allow them to adapt. That's the sort of thing that our government is going to continue to do, Speaker. We're going to be adaptable and nimble and make sure that we're taking the right approach—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. Further questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Ottawa West–Nepean for his comments. I believe he's correct when he says that the government is pivoting and adapting to changing circumstances. About an hour ago, we heard that this legislation was focused on employers, and yet now suddenly workers are starting to be sort of weaved into the debate here. In the legislation itself, "worker" comes up one time only, and it only comes up as a subsidiary to the employer. In fact, "employee" is never mentioned within this legislation. Even when the

chief government whip asked the member to clarify, he said that this legislation—which is supposedly narrow as part of this broader package—has this incidental benefit of maybe people will keep their jobs.

I would like to know from the member, in his own opinion, what does he think about the WSIB's well-known and much-derided process of deeming?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciate the question from the member for—London North Centre?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Yes.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Excellent.

The answer to that question, of course, as I mentioned in my response a moment ago, is that we want to make sure that folks still have jobs that they can go back to, that they can still get up in the morning and have that opportunity to go to their livelihood, to go to their job. By providing supports to businesses that reduce some of these pressures that are placed on them, whether it's their property taxes, whether it's their energy costs, whether it's their WSIB premiums—all of these reduced costs to businesses which allow them to deal with and adapt to some of these incredibly difficult situations—it's our hope that many of these businesses will use these funds to be able to continue to support their employees, pivot their business models and make sure they're able to continue to thrive.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Bhutila Karpoche: I rise today on behalf of the people of Parkdale–High Park to speak to this bill, Bill 238, Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2020. Before I begin, Speaker, I want to take a moment to express my condolences to the families and loved ones of all workers who have tragically lost their lives to COVID-19. I also want to take a moment to thank all essential workers, who have been at the front lines of this pandemic. For a year now, they have been risking their health, their family's health. Whether it's personal support workers in long-term-care homes, nurses in hospitals, janitors, building maintenance workers, grocery store workers, they have been working every day to keep things running, to keep the economy running, and they have been the reason why many of us were able to stay safe at home. They have been supporting us. They are real heroes.

As legislators, we have a duty, a responsibility to do everything we can to protect workers, to keep their workplaces safe and support them through the pandemic. We cannot be penny-pinching. We cannot be sitting on money. It's a public health emergency, and workers' lives are at risk. Now is the time to provide paid sick days so that, when a worker is sick, they're able to stay home and recover instead of still going to work because they simply cannot afford to lose their wages or their jobs, and in doing so, potentially infecting those around them as well. If we are serious about workplace safety, then this government would bring in paid sick days, which would not only protect front-line workers, essential workers, but it would also improve public health, get this pandemic under control, and be good for the economy.

This bill makes a few changes to the WSIB. Specifically, it legislates the freezing of WSIB premium rates paid by Ontario's employers for 2021, and it permits the minister to require the WSIB to report information within a set time.

When it comes to changes to the WSIB, successive governments, both Liberal and Conservative, have lowered employer premiums, but neither have made the critical changes that injured workers need in order for WSIB to actually serve their needs at a time of injury.

We know how the system works. When a worker is injured, it's quite difficult for them to be able to access the benefits they need to be able to recover. That worsens the injury of the worker. It adds mental health stresses. We've seen those stories reported in the media.

The kind of WSIB reform that is needed right now, during this pandemic, is the kind that my colleague from Niagara Falls proposed back in May. He has a bill before the House that would make COVID-19 infection a presumptive illness under the WSIB. That would help workers during this pandemic.

The kind of reform that the WSIB needs is to ensure that workers who are injured at the workplace don't have their benefits run out because they simply cannot return to the job as they fall under the high-risk category—workers like my constituent, who I will call J, who wrote to me. I'm going to read part of her letter. She wrote: "I am emailing today because I don't know what to do. I was injured on the job in July 2019 and am still very low-functioning. Within the parameters of WSIB's back-to-work program, I was to return to work the week of the shutdown in March. Now that we are in stage 2"—she wrote to me during the summer—"my place of employment is open again. WSIB wishes to recommence the back-to-work and have me return as I was going to before. My place of employment is a restaurant and I am a server/supervisor. I have two autoimmune diseases and I take two immunosuppressants. When I communicated that to them and inquired as to their policy regarding asking high-risk injured employees to return to a front-line job, they said that they do not have one. I was informed that if I do not return to work that the money that they give me, (which covers my bills only and is not even enough for groceries), will no longer be given to me. I cannot believe that they are ignoring the pandemic and making me return to a front-line job that I cannot even properly execute when I am at a higher risk of death and severe illness should I contract COVID-19. I am not even comfortable being a customer on a patio, let alone serving unmasked strangers. I haven't been physically close to my family and friends in my bubble, whom I know are taking the pandemic seriously, and they are asking me to be next to strangers. My doctor's appointments are carried out over video call instead of in person and they are asking me to risk myself to serve people beer and food that I can't even carry."

Keep in mind, my constituent has two autoimmune diseases. She takes two immunosuppressants. And she was asked to return to the front lines during a pandemic or her benefits would be cut.

Of course, I advocated on behalf of my constituent to the Minister of Labour, hoping that some action would be taken to make the changes to the WSIB back-to-work program. But the minister's office simply passed it back to the WSIB, which made no sense. The WSIB office wrote back, saying that the employer could provide modified work and that my constituent not being able to return to work with her employer is a "non-work-related health issue in conjunction with the pandemic." Can you imagine that, Speaker? It's as if the pandemic was irrelevant. The main issue is being completely ignored in this case.

1530

To make matters worse, J also did not qualify for CERB because, technically, she was turning down work. She was going to be appealing the case to the WSIB, but that's a months-long process, and, of course, it left her worried about paying for rent and buying food.

This is what people are experiencing during the pandemic. We need to be making necessary changes to make sure that no one is falling through the cracks, including with the WSIB.

The government's legislation, this bill that the government has brought: Not addressing the needs of workers shows that the government's priorities do not reflect the people's priorities. In fact, before the Legislature resumed this week, I asked my constituents what they wanted to see more action on, given that we're back in the House. What did they want their government to do? I want to share with the House what my constituents have said.

They said that they want real change that would actually make a difference in their lives and in their communities. They want to see action on paid sick days and a ban on evictions. They called for the appalling state of our long-term-care system to be fixed, for our schools to be made safer and to ramp up the vaccine rollout. They demanded universal health care—which we are so proud of as Canadians—be made truly universal. They asked for mental health care, addictions services; the overdose crisis is unprecedented at this stage. They asked for dental care, pharmacare and vision care so that when they have a mental health issue, need a dental surgery or require medication for their survival, they would not be denied health care simply because they don't have the money to pay for it. My constituents asked for universal and affordable child care, because they cannot afford the outrageous fees they need to pay just to ensure their children are looked after. My constituents also want to see meaningful action on the climate crisis, which is still the biggest threat that we're experiencing.

They want all of that and so much more. The list goes on: action on affordable housing; they called for student debt cancellation, for SIU reform and to raise the minimum wage; they demanded that social assistance rates be raised. Many of my constituents are on OW and ODSP, and they are tired. They are tired of being asked to live on far less than what is required for a decent life. Many workers who actually get injured on the job and often get limited benefits or no benefits, or their benefits run out—their injury, perhaps, may prevent them from being able to

work ever again, and many of these workers end up on ODSP.

I'm going to take a moment to talk about ODSP, because it's related to injured workers. I want to read from letters from constituents, because this government needs to hear directly from the people.

Nancy writes, "CERB was set at \$2,000 per month. This amount is what the Canadian government deemed as necessary for monthly living expenses. Meanwhile, disabled people have been expected for years to live with an income of" just over \$1,000 "per month despite"—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I'm sorry to interrupt the member.

Pursuant to standing order 50(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This bill will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader directs the debate to continue.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Continue.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Okay. Continue.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Thank you, Speaker. I'm almost done.

As I was saying, Nancy writes, "CERB was set at \$2,000 per month. This amount is what the Canadian government deemed as necessary for monthly living expenses. Meanwhile, disabled people have been expected for years to live with an income of" just over \$1,000 "per month despite rising living costs." She says, "Things are beyond grim right now for disabled" people, "with no money for groceries and other basic necessities."

Another constituent, Pauline, also wrote, asking for an increase to the rates. She says that when the pandemic first came to light, the Premier gave disabled Ontarians an additional \$100 a month to cope, but just for four months. It disappeared as quickly and quietly as it arrived, and it wasn't even automatically applied for each person. Folks had to ask the ODSP worker for it.

She goes on to say that disabled people are on the precipice of being added to the statistic of homelessness or a suicide statistic, and she asks this government for proper financial assistance, so that disabled people are able to live with dignity.

And so, I'm calling on this government to listen to the people of this province and take action on issues that actually make a difference to people's lives.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Questions.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Oh, yes, right. Sorry. Apologies—first day back.

Questions and comments?

Ms. Jane McKenna: I'm just going to ask this question again, because I asked it earlier: The NDP's words don't match their actions. When I introduced my bill in November, Bill 152, the Occupational Safety and Health Day Act, the NDP voted against a bill that recognizes the importance of supporting a health and safety culture in

every workplace. And yet, today the NDP are saying they don't understand why we're not talking about workplace health. Today, the NDP is saying that this is our government's first labour bill since the start on the pandemic, yet we have had at least two other bills.

My question is, which NDP do Ontarians believe: The one that voted against a bill that promoted workplace health and safety; the NDP that celebrated Jagmeet Singh's push for paid sick days to the federal government; or the NDP that now opposes the only NDP government in our country, the BC government, which stands with Ontario as not supporting duplicating the federal paid sick days?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I thank the member from Burlington for the question, and I want to say this: The NDP will always be on the side of workers, and we will always advocate to ensure that workplaces are made safe. During this pandemic, more than ever, we need to have paid sick days for workers. In fact, we advocated for paid sick days in Ontario even before the pandemic, but given that this is a public health emergency, it is more critical than ever to ensure that paid sick days are there for workers if they fall sick.

Speaker, it's very important to remember that paid sick days will have an impact on our economy. If the government claims that they are doing everything they can to help through a recovery, then one of the important pieces that they're not taking action on and that is critical is to ensure that workers are healthy. If you want workers to be healthy—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. Further questions?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: To those who question who the NDP are, I suppose I will just draw the comparison: When the member from Parkdale–High Park started off this afternoon, she offered her condolences to the family members who have lost relatives during this pandemic, and she thanked the workers who continue to provide personal support to those who have been impacted by COVID-19. Those aren't the words that we hear from the other side when they talk about cutting premiums on the WSIB.

She also spoke about the front-line heroes who are trying to make a difference every day, and people such as J, who want to go to work but in a safe workplace. So my question to the member is: What could be done with this bill, now that the door has been opened on the WSIB, to really do something to support the workforce in Ontario?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Thank you to my colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh for the question and comments. He's right: We have all thanked front-line workers for their work during the pandemic. We have banged pots and pans, we have clapped, we have called them heroes, but when it comes to making an actual difference in their lives, at their workplaces, we have come so far short in this province.

Now that we are discussing this bill that is going to have an impact on workers, that is going to open up the WSIB for changes, let's take this opportunity to do something that will actually make a difference. For instance, for years now, injured workers have called for an end to the practice of deeming. This is something that we could insert into this legislation.

1540

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Madam Speaker, I listened intently to the member's debate, and I just wanted to ask the member—well, first I want to share a story. I received an email from a constituent of mine back in mid-2020, and the constituent basically said that given the pandemic, they have been unable to make the normal amount of money that they would normally make, and because of that they are struggling to remain self-employed and to have their business, and they're struggling to pay their WSIB insurance premiums.

This constituent isn't the only one; there are people like this all across Ontario. So my question to the member is, will you support people like my constituent? Will you support people across Ontario by voting in favour of this bill, so that we can make sure that small businesses and employers can survive this pandemic?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Thank you to the member from Carleton for actually raising the issue of small businesses, because I didn't get an opportunity to do that in my remarks. Do you know what? Since the beginning of the pandemic, I have been in touch with many, many small businesses in my riding, and through the BIAs, the business improvement areas across Parkdale–High Park, through TABIA, the Toronto Association of BIAs. All of them have asked this government to take action to support small businesses, and what they have asked for, their biggest request of this government, was for immediate rent relief, because businesses were closed. They had to shut down. They were playing their part to keep everybody safe, but rent is expensive, and they have no business.

But this government did not provide any rent relief for small business owners. Small business owners were asking for a freeze to utility rates. They were asking—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. Further questions?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Coming out of the forest industry, one of the things you do, the first thing when you go in to work in the morning, is have a coffee with your colleagues, and you talk about what happened the day before. If somebody is hurt, if somebody's not feeling well, if somebody is injured, that's a break in the link, and that potentially could harm others at work, so we make that decision, consciously at that point in time, and say, "All right. You go to this area," or, "You go back home."

Sick days are a way of addressing a lot of those concerns, and granting those and providing those to individuals gives them that opportunity to be that link, that link that would stay at home so there is no harm that is coming into the workplace.

Why is this—again, it's a missed opportunity to really put in something with teeth, to put meat in this bill that would have assisted workers. How could we be more responsible? How could this government take charge in their priorities and make sure that a bill like this addresses sick days?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I thank my colleague from Algoma–Manitoulin. He's absolutely right: This is a complete missed opportunity when it comes to protecting workers in their workplaces. My suggestion to this government, if they really want to strengthen this bill, is to include what my colleague from London West has put forward in this House. Her bill would provide paid sick days for all Ontarians: seven paid sick days and an additional 14 during a public health emergency.

If we provide paid sick days, it not only helps the worker; it helps the workplace, which means it helps the employer and, as I said before, it's a good public health measure. It's good for the economy.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Parkdale–High Park for her presentation, especially for mentioning those folks who are struggling who are receiving ODSP.

Your mention of the discretionary benefit—I would like to politely disagree in that they didn't have to ask their worker for it; many people reached out to me and said they had to beg for it. They weren't allowed to send an email. They weren't allowed to leave a phone message. They actually had to talk to their worker, who wasn't always working in the office. It was a disgrace.

You know, we've seen this government—they had their piece of legislation, Bill 152, about a workplace health and safety day, but we saw that they've cut so many things in workplace health and safety, whether it was cutting \$16 million from the Chief Prevention Officer's budget or taking money away from injured workers by cutting WSIB payments by 30%.

I'd like to ask, if the government legitimately stood on the side of workers, would they pass the presumptive legislation from the member from Niagara Falls?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Quick response, the member from Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Yes, I would say to the member from London Centre, absolutely. This is something that is before the House. We can pass it, if the government is willing, and we can provide to workers who are exposed to COVID-19 the WSIB benefits, should they contract COVID-19.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member from Barrie–Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Speaker, if you seek it, you will find we have unanimous consent to see the clock at 6.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The government is seeking unanimous consent to see the clock at 6 p.m. Agreed? Agreed.

There being no business designated for debate under this ballot item, this House stands adjourned until Monday, February 22, at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1546.

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Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London—Fanshawe	
Arnott, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (PC)	Wellington—Halton Hills	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Arthur, Ian (NDP)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Baber, Roman (IND)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Babikian, Aris (PC)	Scarborough—Agincourt	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia—Lambton	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand—Norfolk	
Begum, Doly (NDP)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bell, Jessica (NDP)	University—Rosedale	
Berns-McGown, Rima (NDP)	Beaches—East York / Beaches—East York	
Bethlenfalvy, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (PC)	Pickering—Uxbridge	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances President of the Treasury Board / Président du Conseil du Trésor
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins	
Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)	Markham—Stouffville	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC)	Scarborough North / Scarborough-Nord	Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité
Cho, Stan (PC)	Willowdale	
Clark, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby	
Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	
Coteau, Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Crawford, Stephen (PC)	Oakville	
Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC)	Mississauga—Lakeshore	
Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues / Ministre associée déléguée au dossier de l'Enfance et à la Condition féminine Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Elliott, Hon. / L'hon. Christine (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce
Fee, Amy (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Fullerton, Hon. / L'hon. Merrilee (PC)	Kanata—Carleton	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
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	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
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
Hillier, Randy (IND)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Solicitor General / Solliciteuse générale
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Karahalios, Belinda C. (NBP)	Cambridge	
Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Ke, Vincent (PC)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
Khanjin, Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Kramp, Daryl (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	
Kusendova, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre	
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
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	
McDonnell, 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

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Park, Lindsey (PC)	Durham	
Parsa, Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Phillips, Rod (PC)	Ajax	
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
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
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, Gurratan (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	
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Associate Minister of Transportation (GTA) / Ministre associée des Transports (RGT) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Walker, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Associate Minister of Energy / Ministre associé de l'Énergie Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakubski, Hon. / L'hon. John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
Yurek, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Teresa J. Armstrong, Toby Barrett
Lorne Coe, Rudy Cuzzetto
Randy Hillier, Jane McKenna
Judith Monteith-Farrell, Michael Parsa
Randy Pettapiece, Donna Skelly
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs / Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques

Chair / Président: Amarjot Sandhu
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeremy Roberts
Ian Arthur, Stan Cho
Catherine Fife, Mitzie Hunter
Logan Kanapathi, Sol Mamakwa
David Piccini, Jeremy Roberts
Amarjot Sandhu, Dave Smith
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Julia Douglas

Standing Committee on General Government / Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales

Chair / Présidente: Goldie Ghamari
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Mike Schreiner
Jill Andrew, Robert Bailey
Guy Bourgouin, Stephen Crawford
Goldie Ghamari, Chris Glover
Mike Harris, Sheref Sabawy
Amarjot Sandhu, Mike Schreiner
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

Chair / Président: Vacant
Aris Babikian, Gilles Bisson
Will Bouma, Lorne Coe
Wayne Gates, Robin Martin
Norman Miller, Rick Nicholls
Billy Pang, Amanda Simard
Marit Stiles
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Julia Douglas

Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lucille Collard
Will Bouma, Lucille Collard
Parm Gill, Daryl Kramp
Natalia Kusendova, Suze Morrison
Lindsey Park, Gurratan Singh
Nina Tangri, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Kevin Yarde
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité permanent de l'Assemblée législative

Chair / Président: Kaleed Rasheed
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vijay Thanigasalam
Rima Berns-McGown, Michael Coteau
Faisal Hassan, Logan Kanapathi
Michael Mantha, Jim McDonell
Christina Maria Mitas, Sam Oosterhoff
Kaleed Rasheed, Donna Skelly
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

Chair / Président: Taras Natyshak
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Deepak Anand, Toby Barrett
Jessica Bell, Stephen Blais
Stephen Crawford, Rudy Cuzzetto
France Gélinas, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Taras Natyshak
Michael Parsa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

Chair / Président: Logan Kanapathi
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Fraser
Will Bouma, John Fraser
Logan Kanapathi, Vincent Ke
Laura Mae Lindo, Paul Miller
Billy Pang, Jeremy Roberts
Dave Smith, Daisy Wai
Jamie West
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de la politique sociale

Chair / Présidente: Natalia Kusendova
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Aris Babikian
Deepak Anand, Aris Babikian
Jeff Burch, Amy Fee
Michael Gravelle, Joel Harden
Mike Harris, Christine Hogarth
Belinda C. Karahalios, Bhutila Karpoche
Natalia Kusendova
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tanzima Khan

Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight / Comité spécial de la surveillance de la gestion des situations d'urgence

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Tom Rakocevic
Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson
John Fraser, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Robin Martin
Sam Oosterhoff, Lindsey Park
Tom Rakocevic, Sara Singh
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell