

Legislative  
Assembly  
of Ontario



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(Hansard)**

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Jeudi  
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Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott  
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House Publications and Language Services  
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building  
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Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement  
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park  
Toronto ON M7A 1A2  
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 1 April 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE  
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 1<sup>er</sup> avril 2021

*The House met at 0900.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Good morning. We'll begin this morning with a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

*Prières.*

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECTING THE PEOPLE  
OF ONTARIO ACT  
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2021  
LOI DE 2021 VISANT À PROTÉGER  
LA POPULATION ONTARIENNE  
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 31, 2021, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 269, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 269, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I understand that when we last debated Bill 269, the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane had the floor. I recognize him again to resume his remarks.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Good morning. It's always an honour to speak in the House, specifically. Often in the House we say, though, "Do you know what? We should be debating something else," but there's never a bad time to debate an issue. There are times when you would think we would be debating other things, but regardless, today, we're debating the budget bill.

I've been here for a while—some on the other side would say too long—but it has always been confusing to many and still, I think, certainly, to people who don't follow the process, the difference—that there's actually the motion and the bill, because there's quite a bit of fanfare around the motion. It's an important document. It lays out what the government is planning to do both short term, medium term and long term, and then you come to the bill.

I remember the first time that I looked at a motion and looked at the bill, and the two seemingly didn't have much correlation to each other, because when you look at the motion, you expect: "Okay, so here's the brochure, and the bill—here are the details on how to get it done." If you're going to buy a truck: "Here's the brochure, and here's the fine print." That's the way I've always thought. I'm not criticizing this government in particular—not at all—on

this issue. This is the way I always thought it was, and it has never been that way.

As an example, the motion has a title like "protecting the people." I understand the government wants to put their views in the best light possible. I don't begrudge them that. So, when I go through the bill, you would look for there to be issues that directly protect the people. That's how you would gauge.

If you go through the schedules, schedule 1 makes changes to the Credit Unions and Caisses Populaires Act—again, a worthwhile endeavour, something that they have been lobbying for, for a long time, specifically the caisses. On its own, is it a bad thing? Certainly not. Is it something that is protecting the people? Overall, perhaps, but now that we could potentially be going into another lockdown, I don't know if that's the priority for protecting the people right now.

Schedule 3: This section makes changes to the Electricity Act so dividends from Hydro One can now go directly to the current electricity rebate program. Again, that is a bona fide thing to do. It is not the 12% electricity decrease that was promised by the government, but they didn't talk about that in their budget either.

Schedule 4 makes changes to the Financial Professionals Title Protection Act, but again, not directly related to some of the things we've heard about in the budget motion. There are things we think are missing in the budget—let's be clear. But today, we're discussing the budget bill.

Schedule 5 makes changes to the Insurance Act. That one, if that had something to do with bringing the price of insurance down—and maybe it does, but it doesn't describe it directly, again.

Schedule 6 enacts the Invest Ontario Act, again a worthy issue to discuss but not directly related—I'm not going to go through every schedule here. The theme I'm trying to build here is that although they're mated, shall I say, the budget motion and the budget bill, to the people at home they don't seem to mesh, and it's always been confusing to me. The thing I guess is the budget bill is part—the motion lays out what the government wants to do; the bill is a small part of it. I think that's the part you have to understand. It's a bit confusing.

You would think that the first things that the government would do would actually lay out how they're going to achieve their glossy—the advertising part of the budget. Again, I'm not criticizing the government for doing that. I think any government wants to put their best foot forward. That's the role of the government. It's our job to hold the government to account, to make proposals that could help the people of Ontario.

As we're going forward, as we see now we're in a third wave, we continue to make a proposal, as an emergency measure, that people in Ontario who can't stay home when they're sick because they can't afford to should have paid sick days. That's something that is still not in the budget. The government will say, "Well, it's already a federal program." They know the federal program isn't the equivalent of paid sick days, and we all know that one of the biggest modes of transmission of COVID-19 is in workplaces. Agriculture is one of those; maybe not when I'm in the field on my tractor all by myself, but the beef that I raise and the milk that I used to produce, when those things are processed, often it's in close conditions.

Something that I notice here—and I tell my friends this at home—and something that we don't see at home: When I walk to my apartment—I live on Bay Street—I see all the people on bikes delivering food. Those people don't have paid sick days, they don't make big bucks and they can't work from home. We are creating—I don't know how to describe this. I wasn't planning on talking about this, but I don't know how to describe that class of the workforce, because precarious work just doesn't describe it. I see some of those people; they are just trying to get through to the next day. Those are the people that we have to watch out for. They don't have a choice on working from home. That's why we still continue to push for paid sick days, specifically in an emergency situation like we are in today.

0910

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Questions to the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane.

**Ms. Andrea Khanjin:** I wanted to ask the member—he spoke about many things that weren't in the budget. But when they were in the budget, both in 2019 and in 2020, the member voted against those measures. They did the right thing once before, voting with this government, voting for the people of Ontario for a lot of supports, but what the member is really telling me today is it doesn't matter what's in the budget; he'll just vote against it. That means investment in hospitals, supports for families, many other supports for businesses or front-line workers.

Why are you so opposed to helping so many of those people of Ontario who are really struggling right now? What we have put in this budget will be that little bit of hope and push that they really need to get through the day.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** I really appreciate the member's question. There are things in the budget that we think could be improved and there are things in the budget that are totally missing, and that's why we will vote against it.

The question I have for the member is, could she lay out one of the things in the budget bill that actually does those things for people? We're talking about the budget bill. Please show me the schedule in the budget bill that does those things. You're talking about the brochure; I'm talking about the details. Where in the budget bill are those things located?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The next question.

**Mr. Taras Natyshak:** It's always a pleasure to listen to my colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane. He is straightforward and always factual.

Despite our role as the official opposition and our criticism of this government and my individual criticism of the Premier and his actions over the years, I want him to succeed. I need him to succeed. We all need him to succeed and we need this government to succeed in quelling transmission of the virus. We need them to protect workers. We need them to bolster our economy and our small businesses that have suffered so heavily. Unfortunately, today we know that we are on the verge of another lockdown.

My question to my colleague from Timiskaming: He referenced energy rates and insurance rates. I'm getting a lot of calls from commercial owners and business owners about commercial insurance rates. Does this bill do anything to lower commercial insurance rates? Does it do anything to lower hydro rates for small businesses in our communities?

**Mr. John Vanthof:** I would like to thank the member from Essex. I'd like to focus on one part of his question, and that is commercial insurance rates. I have spoken to two of the past three finance ministers on this issue because I have, specifically, small trucking companies, owner-operators, mom-and-pops, who are being put out of business because they cannot afford to insure their vehicles. They just cannot afford it. I know there are people on the government side who I've also spoken to and who have experience in the insurance industry, and I respect that. The response is, "Well, there's always facility," but that just puts people out of business. I believe there's a workforce on the other side talking about insurance rates and I hope they come up with a solution, because we are losing businesses as we speak.

The winter is kind of over down here, but we still have a lot of people who couldn't get their yards plowed in northern Ontario this year, because a lot of companies who used to do snow plowing can't, because of insurance rates. Again, that is something that impacts everyday people today.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Mississauga–Streetsville.

**Mrs. Nina Tangri:** Good morning. I think we can all agree the pandemic has been devastating to families and to many, many businesses, some who may not make it through this pandemic. Now, we're on the verge of another lockdown perhaps, as the ICU rates are going up significantly, especially in younger people.

But just going back to businesses once again: I'd like to ask the member opposite, does he agree that our government is about to, should the budget pass, double the benefit for those business who have qualified before, so \$10,000 to \$20,000? Do you agree with that measure? Yes or no?

**Mr. John Vanthof:** I appreciate that question. There are many businesses in my riding that have applied and have received the initial payment and will receive the second one, and they needed it. But there are also many businesses in my riding and throughout Ontario that, because they weren't cookie-cutter, are having an incredibly hard time getting access to that program, and I have made the finance minister aware of that. I have sent a

couple of cases to his deputy. So, is that a worthwhile program? Yes. Should it be available to more businesses? Absolutely.

And again, it's not always ours to criticize. The fact that you've now opened it up to mom-and-pop tourism outfitters—we have been pushing for that since the pandemic started. We have pushed and pushed and pushed, but sadly—again, that is needed. But it was needed eight months ago, because I've lost several of those operators, a lot of those operators, because they're mom-and-pop businesses. They work for themselves. They don't have a pay schedule, and we've lost those people. We needed that program 10 months ago. We needed a targeted program for tourism's mom-and-pop months ago.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Next question?

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** I'm glad to ask a question of my colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane. I appreciate the way he laid out the difference between the budget motion and the budget bill. I think of it as when you go to a restaurant and you see the pretty picture on the menu, and what comes on the plate might leave something to be desired.

But I did want to echo what he said about no paid sick days. Those with no benefits, vulnerable workers—people need what they need to stay well, to protect their families, to be able to sleep at night without anxiety. What we didn't see in the budget bill: We don't see money for not-for-profits who do a lot of caring work and heavy lifting, for anti-poverty initiatives. It's really missing the money for folks and families and people who are reliant on ODSP and OW.

The member mentioned that there is no expanded eligibility for those small business grants for the small businesses. I've got at least four from the last weeks that still don't have the money from the first one. They've applied, they've been promised, and they're waiting and they're waiting. Come on, guys.

I guess my question to the member is, what kind of difference would those initiatives, were they in the budget bill, make to our communities?

**Mr. John Vanthof:** There was a lot in that question, but specifically on not-for-profits, food banks: We all focus on our own ridings, and they've got some big problems, and their use is going up incredibly.

For small business, when the pandemic first hit—and I'm not blaming anyone for this; no one could predict who was going to be hit the hardest and where the hurt was really going to hit, on the business side. I remember driving past one of my RV centres that sells trailers. I thought, "Oh, that poor guy just bought this place, and he's going to get wiped out." He has had the best year he has ever had, so you couldn't predict that. But a couple of months in, when the border was closed, we could predict that those mom-and-pop tourist outfitters were going to lose everything, and the government did not react quick enough to help them.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** There's time for a quick question.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** A very quick question: I listened intently to what the member said. If I get it straight, there's

not enough in the budget bill for him to vote in favour of the budget bill, and the motion doesn't go far enough either.

**0920**

I challenge the member then here: We listened, obviously. The budget bill is not an omnibus bill; it's a very clear set of intentions. Can the member then not vote in favour of the budget bill and against the budget motion, since they are two separate things? One is very strict and the other one is on a set of visions that you don't agree with. Why not vote in—

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Timiskaming–Cochrane to reply.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** That is a very interesting question. The government House leader, I appreciate, always asks very tough questions. He's a very astute gentleman. The budget bill does push forward part of the budget motion. Does it push forward all of the budget motion? No. But for the official opposition to vote for a budget measure that is deficient in many areas just would not be sufficient for our people.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Further debate?

**Ms. Andrea Khanjin:** I'm always very humbled to be able to represent the residents of Barrie–Innisfil. They put me here because they were sick and tired of what was happening for 15 years of inaction, and they were tired of other parties propping up 15 years of inaction that punished people who were trying to hire more people, who were trying to boost our economy and strengthen the fabric of our communities; that took over people's property rights and put things and projects where people didn't want them and didn't need them—literally, billboards put up and people screaming at the mattresses saying, "What about us? What about listening to the voice of the people and the little guy?"

In the last two years since this government got elected, it was heavy lifting, Speaker, but we did a lot, and this bill that we are discussing today will move the pendulum further. In 2019, we were able to help families and front-line workers, to build hospital capacity, schools and much more. In budget 2020, we built on that foundation and helped with the pandemic response. Now, we have budget 2021, Speaker, and with that, the momentum keeps going. I really hope the opposition changes their mind and stops going along with things that hinder our economy, hinder the people of Ontario, and actually votes for progress, for a change.

On that note, Speaker, I move that the question now be put.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I'm advised that there have been nine hours and 37 minutes of debate at this stage of the bill thus far, and the total number of members who have spoken on the bill is 22, so I will allow the question to be put.

Ms. Khanjin has moved that the question be now put. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, this vote will be deferred until after question period today.

*Vote deferred.*

SUPPORTING BROADBAND  
AND INFRASTRUCTURE EXPANSION  
ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SOUTENANT  
L'EXPANSION DE L'INTERNET  
ET DES INFRASTRUCTURES

Mr. Calandra, on behalf of Ms. Scott, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 257, An Act to enact the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021 and to make other amendments in respect of infrastructure and land use planning matters / Projet de loi 257, Loi édictant la Loi de 2021 sur la réalisation accélérée de projets d'Internet à haut débit et apportant d'autres modifications en ce qui concerne les infrastructures et des questions d'aménagement du territoire.

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

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think I have spoken enough on this one. With that, I will yield the floor.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Further debate?

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** I am pleased to have the opportunity again to stand in this House and get the official record of the official opposition on the official record for Bill 257. Speaker, this is the Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act that we had a lively debate about in second reading. We had a lively committee process. And Speaker, I know that you weren't able to attend, but it is up on my YouTube, if you'd like to see the official opposition's presentation for schedules 1 and 2. I think it's very important that folks know where the NDP stand on broadband. We have always stood up, not just in this House, but across our communities, for access to strong services, for broadband access for those in the rural, northern, remote, agricultural communities. To that point, we did introduce a few amendments and spoke at length and with passion, standing up for areas of the province that have always gotten the short end of the stick—and I would say that that stick is only because they grow them; it isn't because any government that I have seen has given them what they need or are due.

Broadband expansion: We certainly want to see the last mile—the unserved, the underserved folks across the province in northern, rural, remote areas—actually have broadband. While we've heard that that is the government's intention, I'll believe it when I see it. That's why we wanted it in writing in legislation. We put up a good fight, and the government defeated that. They say it's for all Ontarians, not just rural. We'll hear again about their intentions, I'm sure—but wishing it does not make it so. There's a lot that will remain ahead of us.

So we voted on the record for those schedules. We want to see broadband.

What I'm going to take the bulk of the time today to discuss is schedule 3. This should surprise no one. I represent Oshawa, but oftentimes the issues from across Durham region land in our inbox and folks reach out to our office.

A local issue in the broader Durham region is the wetland at Duffins Creek. There has been a lot of attention, a lot of conversation, and I'm not going to get into the weeds—get it—about the wetland and the importance of those weeds and phragmites and the wetland ecosystem that is so important in the province of Ontario, but globally speaking.

It's interesting that here in Ontario we had a wetland on the chopping block when we also have such concerns about flooding, when we have such concerns about blue-green algae, when wetlands serve an unbelievable purpose. Maybe that's the problem—because it's such an unbelievable thing that they accomplish, maybe that's why the government doesn't believe it; I don't know. If they did believe it, I can't imagine that they would have let it be in the sights of developers.

You look at Ohio, for example—something worth everyone's time. The H2Ohio initiative is creating wetlands, is strengthening wetlands, is investing truckloads of money, not truckloads of asphalt to pave one, but literally to create them and protect them.

It would be great if this government came forward with an "H2Ontario" program. I challenge them to do that.

Instead, we have a minister, the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, who is in charge of the flooding strategies in Ontario, and it was his signature on the permit to pave the wetland. I cannot reconcile those two things at all, and maybe he can't, either. I can't speak for him, but I was here when he said, if we don't like schedule 3—whatever the exact wording was—"Just pretend it's not there." That was the day that he physically, with great flourish, ripped out the schedule from the bill. Unfortunately, that was not foreshadowing anything; that was not a sign of what was to come. At committee, we gave them the opportunity, and the government did not remove schedule 3 from the bill. Had they done that, that would have been awesome, because a lot of folks are very concerned about schedule 3.

I'd like to break it down for the folks at home. It's fairly technical, so if I oversimplify, you'll have to forgive me.

The government is going to, likely—I could be wrong about this; we'll just see how debate goes. But from what we heard earlier in the debates and at committee, I imagine the government is going to stand and speak about MZOs, and either the value of MZOs—they'll talk about certain local examples of MZOs, and they'll talk about partnerships and municipalities and what have you about MZOs. This particular bill, in schedule 3, is not about the merit of MZO use. It is about the fact that if an MZO—a minister's zoning order—is indeed utilized by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, if he issues an MZO for whatever reason, at whoever's behest, schedule 3 makes it

like a supercharged weapon, more than, I would argue, an MZO already can be, depending on the circumstances. Now the MZO doesn't have to consider the provincial policy statement, the PPS.

**0930**

The provincial policy statement, I'm going to share with folks, is basically the building code for the Planning Act. If you think of the building code, it ensures that your home is safe and sound and that you know what you're getting and that you can sleep at night knowing that you've bought something that meets that standard. The PPS is essentially the building code for planning. It's not just about the environment; it's about all of the things. The most recent provincial policy statement came into effect May 1, 2020. That's not a long time ago. That's since we've had the folks across the way. The PPS reflects their druthers, so to speak. It's recent.

The PPS, the three sections here:

“Building strong healthy communities....”

“Ontario's long-term prosperity, environmental health and social well-being depend on wisely managing change and promoting efficient land use and development patterns.” It goes on.

Another section:

“Wise Use and Management of Resources

“Ontario's long-term prosperity, environmental health, and social well-being depend on conserving biodiversity, protecting ... the Great Lakes, and protecting natural heritage, water, agricultural, mineral and cultural heritage and archaeological resources for their economic, environmental and social benefits.” Ain't nothing wrong with any of that.

“3.0 Protecting Public Health and Safety

“Ontario's long-term prosperity, environmental health and social well-being depend on reducing the potential for public cost or risk to Ontario's residents from natural or human-made hazards.”

Okay, the PPS, we can all—I thought—get on board with that, and we have for a very long time. It's the foundation of planning. So what we have here—and I'm going to raise some issues that came up in committee, Speaker. If I have time, I'll speak a little bit more about how the committee process unfolded.

Ecojustice is representing Ontario Nature and Environmental Defence in a lawsuit against—wait for it—this government about the Duffins Creek situation, about their issuing of an MZO. They are arguing that that was unlawful because it basically went against the provincial policy statement. The provincial policy statement, or PPS, says, “Protect and don't do harm and factor things in,” and they're saying that the MZO issued at Duffins Creek violated that.

The folks from Ecojustice said, “The judicial review challenges the minister's issuance of an MZO in contravention of the requirements of the Planning Act in the Lower Duffins Creek provincially significant wetland,” like I said.

Here's how they explain schedule 3: “Schedule 3 of Bill 257 would purport to legitimate past unlawful decisions of

the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, including those raised in the above ongoing litigation. It does so by attempting to legitimize the unlawful approval of past MZOs under the Planning Act where those MZOs were not consistent with the PPS.

“By altering the rules to shield the minister's exercise of discretion to order an MZO after the fact, schedule 3 of Bill 257 operates to restrict access to the courts in respect of any past unlawful decisions of the minister.”

They go on to say, “Schedule 3 of Bill 257 would replace the rule of law with the rule of the minister. It would also purport to legislate the outcome of an ongoing court case. Access to the courts is, under the rule of law, one of the foundational pillars protecting the rights and freedoms of our citizens.” They provided us with a lot of good understanding.

I wonder what has driven this government to put this schedule in, because we heard from folks—and I'll raise some of their concerns. AMO, the OFA: They called for the government to withdraw schedule 3. Everybody wants a planning—I'll say “regime”; a planning situation that they can count on. Everybody wants to know what the rules are. This particular schedule says, “Okay, you know what? Yeah, it was a protected, provincially significant wetland. We can't change the classification”—or maybe that's too cumbersome. I don't know. That was the original plan, it seems like. They weren't able to change that it was protected, “So let's just say we don't have to protect it anymore. Yeah, okay, it's still provincially significant, but meh. So what?” The PPS doesn't apply if the minister uses an MZO. It doesn't have to. And those parts are deemed never to have applied. That is retroactive.

The thing is, we talk about changing the rules mid-game. What we have here is changing the rules after the game has been played. This is a clear example of mixing our systems. We have the legislative side of things—we're part of that—and the judicial side of things. We're not supposed to be a part of that, Speaker. Here, this is where the lawyers have laid out that it's very concerning that changing the law could change the outcome of a court case that we're in the middle of. That's not okay. That's not okay at all.

Speaker, another piece to this that the Ecojustice folks have said is that, “Bill 257 has other constitutionality problems too. It attempts to undermine both statutory and constitutional consultation duties owed to First Nations. These duties are confirmed in the PPS and Planning Act.” I'd say that the government is on shaky ground, except that they've got the pen and they're able to change the laws. It was shocking when we first read this, but then hearing from folks at committee and really understanding just how shocking it is, the potential here is not a small thing. There is a really big potential for harm to be done across the province, long-term harm.

I'm not going to belabour the point about the importance of wetlands. We all took biology in school. We should have the basics. We've heard it over and over again. People came and spoke eloquently at committee. We heard from Environmental Defence, from Ontario

Nature, that the value on the environmental side is massive.

Speaking to the constitutionality that Ecojustice raised, I wanted to share some words from Chief Kelly LaRocca of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation when she came before committee. She said, on behalf of the Williams Treaties First Nations, “These concerted attacks on long-standing planning principles transgress our rights as a First Nation and the rights of communities throughout Ontario. Schedule 3 of this proposed legislation shows that the province has chosen to yet again contravene its duty to uphold the honour of the crown through meaningful consultations with First Nations.... Schedule 3 would directly affect an MZO that impacts lands that fall within our traditional and treaty territories.... The Williams Treaties First Nations have and continue to exercise our constitutionally recognized treaty harvesting rights within the lands and waters of the Duffins Creek watershed. Despite these impacts, MSIFN and the Williams Treaties First Nations were not consulted prior to the tabling of this legislation. Through its actions, the ... government has made it unequivocally clear to us that it has no interest in respecting its constitutional duties as found in section 35. Instead, it views our concerns as something which can be disregarded and bypassed by legislation hidden in a broadband expansion bill.” We heard that a fair bit at committee, Speaker.

It was interesting; actually, I think it was the committee member from Peterborough South who had an involved conversation back and forth. One of the things that he said was that the duty to consult could be simplified and was sort of suggesting ways it might be simplified. That is not—not—for him or this government or anybody else connected to colonial power to decide, what should or shouldn’t be involved in the consultation process. It was offensive and highly problematic, if indicative of the values of this government, frankly.

0940

Anyway, I’m going to go on and let the words be from the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation: “Schedule 3 is a severe overreach of government powers, and a desperate attempt to avoid accountability after violating existing provincial policies. The retroactive nature of the proposed legislation is not designed to satisfy the needs of Ontarians, but instead, to allow the government to skirt responsibility for issuing an illegal MZO, which was contrary to a provincial policy statement.”

People came to committee and they showed up for the environment, for the province, for families, for the well-being of future generations. The Haudenosaunee Development Institute also presented at committee—a really excellent, full, comprehensive submission, but I’m just going to pull some highlights now. They represent the interests of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy Chiefs Council in land planning processes and the development of lands within Haudenosaunee’s jurisdiction. They called for this government to strike schedule 3: “Schedule 3 of Bill 257 poses a serious threat to Haudenosaunee rights and sovereignty and must be struck in its entirety from Bill

257.” They said, “As noted by the Supreme Court of Canada, the government ‘may not simply adopt an unstructured discretionary administrative regime which risks infringing [A]boriginal rights in a substantial number of applications in the absence of some explicit guidance.’”

But here we are, right? Here we are fighting after the fact for this government to withdraw schedule 3 because it’s wrong on every level. I get it: It’s a shield for the minister, for the government for the judicial review or lawsuit they’re facing. This would make it all like, “Shh, it never happened.” That’s a massive power.

When you turn on your tap, you expect the water to be safe, clean, inspected and all that stuff, right? When you buy a house, you expect it not to be on a flood plain—all of those things that have to do with a provincial policy statement, like I said, the building code of planning, the fundamentals. But now, if the minister says, “We want to fast-track a development. But don’t worry, we’re not going to consult. We don’t have to abide by the terms of the provincial policy statement. We don’t have to factor in flood mitigation. We don’t have to—shh, just get ’er done,” well, guess what? We’re going to be on shaky ground—or wet ground.

Speaker, we had two young people come before the committee, the last presentation of the day, Devin and Ally. They’ve been very active. I’m quite impressed by an 18- and now 19-year-old who—and not to diminish them based on their age, but they laid out that they’re juggling a lot and they are doing a lot, and it really matters. I’m not going to try to quote Devin right now, but they had made it clear that they are glad to do the work of advocacy, but they don’t think that they should have to. We have a government that’s supposed to be a leadership body, that’s supposed to make decisions in the best interests of the province, and they put clearly on the record that that is not what they think is happening.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** They were attacked.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** They had a very challenging time at committee. I’m hearing someone say that they were attacked. I will say that they defended themselves really, really, really well. They were an inspiration. The government was going pretty full force at them, I think, to take up the time, really. But anyway, the government can tell their side of that story.

It was a weird thing to watch. Here were these people who came before committee, not even young people, just people who came to committee to share their views, and ended up in a back and forth with “Whose life was tougher” and “Who has a longer resumé?” It was very strange. Anyway, I’m really impressed by them.

Speaker, they continue to do that work on behalf of their generation and neighbours. They laid out a lot of things that they would like to see from the government in terms of that green leadership, that environmental leadership.

Some of the things that I had referenced earlier: The Ontario Federation of Agriculture, as of March 29, put out a statement, and I’ll share it with the government. I know they’ve heard it, but I want the members in the House here

today who weren't at committee to know that the farmers, the municipalities have come out and said, "Don't do this."

"The OFA is unable to support amendments to the Planning Act that would give the minister or any other planning authority the ability to make planning decisions which are not consistent with the provincial policy statement."

OFA believes "the PPS does not go far enough in protecting our finite agricultural lands." OFA recommends "strengthening of the PPS in order to require fixed urban settlement boundaries and policies requiring mandatory intensification within the existing built urban areas as well as mandatory 'greenfield' density requirements."

OFA has concerns that giving "the minister the ability to issue MZOs that are not consistent with the PPS is short-sighted." I'm going to say that again for effect: short-sighted. And it could "foster bad planning that will cause either individuals or government to incur the cost of dealing with poor outcomes later."

But you guys need a shield for the minister right now, so come heck or high water—and there will be high water.

Speaker, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario talks about the MZO as a tool. They talk about it as a tool and kind of explain when it has been used historically, but they also note here that it excludes public consultation and is unappealable. So even on a good day, an MZO is hidden behind closed doors, away from the public—already a problem.

This is now quoting from AMO: "With this proposed amendment, Ontarians can no longer be assured of an outcome that reflects the balance of priorities that the PPS would require, and it may make some members of the public question the reasons behind declaring provincial interests in the statement in the first place. As a result, we would recommend that the province reconsider this schedule and choose to lead the planning process through example to ensure confidence in our planning system is maintained broadly." And the government said—oh, right, they said nothing. But they didn't do it, and they had that chance.

Speaker, all of this has been on the record time and time again. I made it clear in the Legislature. My colleagues eloquently spoke about this from the conservation standpoint, from the municipal affairs and housing standpoint.

In committee, we put it there again. We had folks come from all across Ontario, all ages. What I didn't read here today were all of the individual submissions. There were folks who are just folks who have been following along, which is encouraging but also worrying. They're tuning in, they're seeing this, and they were very concerned—just folks who know that this is an unbelievable overreach.

Speaker, I'm going to leave it there. I'm going to just leave this with a quote from Devin and Ally. In the letters they have written, they said, "On behalf of the future generations of Ontario, we ask that you change your ways before it is too late... Become leaders of sustainable change rather than leaders of concrete and sprawl. Time is running out. In order to ensure a livable future for ourselves, and generations to come, we need your

government to start prioritizing the environment and protecting Ontario's green spaces. After all, it's yours to discover, not yours to destroy."

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Further debate?

**Mr. John Fraser:** I was listening to the member from Oshawa about those young people who came to the meeting. To say it's unfortunate would be a little bit of an understatement. I don't think that's what we would expect if our children came here.

Look, Bill 257 has got something really good in it: expansion of broadband. It's a really good thing. It's about creating wealth for everybody, giving everybody access to education, access to the highways of business everywhere. It's not just in rural communities. There's an issue around access to that highway here in Toronto and in Ottawa. So it's a good thing.

But it's been coupled with a measure that's about creating wealth for a few.

**0950**

It's what, in business, they call a poison pill—we call it a poison pill in here—which is kind of a clever thing to make it unattractive to vote for the bill with something good in it. That's kind of clever and fun in here, and we do that partisan stuff. That's not what people expect. I would expect the government to take the second piece out, schedule 3, and debate that alone. That would be a little bit more courageous, because there hasn't been a lot of talk about schedule 3 on the other side. I'm sure there's probably no more than a couple hundred words.

As a matter of fact, the Minister of Natural Resources suggested to this side, "If you don't like it, just take it out of the bill." Well, that's what we've been asking for. It shouldn't be there. It doesn't need to be there. It's a poison pill. It's a poison pill for families. It's a poison pill for communities. It's a poison pill for wetlands. It's a poison pill for the environment. It's a poison pill for the future. It's a poison pill for our municipalities.

Here's the thing—the member from Oshawa hit the nail on the head today and in committee. Strip all of that stuff away about what we're going to effect by letting schedule 3 pass: It's about power. It gives the minister absolute power to allow building anything, anywhere—no rules, no right of appeal, retroactively. There is no check on that power.

Twenty years from now, that bill might be here. We won't be here. But maybe we'll be in our communities, and the minister of the day, who we don't know, somewhere in the future—I wish it was like Terminator where you can see who he is if he came back. The risk there is, they're going to do something. They're going to build something. They're going to build a highway. They're going to build a warehouse. They're going to pave over some wetland or an important part of your community or mess up a floodplain, and you're not going to be happy. None of us—whatever side, any of us.

It's not just about giving power to the minister. It's the flip side. You're taking power away from yourselves, from all of us, from families in your community, from municipalities, from the courts. You're taking power away. There

is no check and balance. That's why we're all here. We're part of that check and balance. The courts are part of that check and balance. The provincial policy statement is part of that check and balance. If we keep doing this kind of thing willy-nilly everywhere, there will be no check and balance, and things that we don't want to happen now and in the future are going to happen, I guarantee you.

I'm not going to belabour the point, but I'm going to say one last thing. You've heard me say that it's a poison pill for families, for the environment, for wetlands, for municipalities, for the courts; a poison pill for the opposition. It's not just the opposition. It's a poison pill for you, because you know what's been said and what I'm saying right now is true, and you have to vote for it. I've been on that side. I know the pressure. I know your team tells you, "You've got to do this, guys. We've got to do this. You've got to do this." You can't give in to that pressure, because it's not right. It's a poison pill. It's a poison pill for members of the government, for backbench MPPs, for ministers. It's a poison pill.

I urge you to vote against Bill 257. Reintroduce it without schedule 3. Introduce schedule 3 and let's have a debate where you'll actually talk about it, because your silence is not something that the people who elected you expect on this.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I'll remind members to make their comments through the Chair.

Further debate?

**Mr. Parm Gill:** I want to thank my colleagues on the other side for really enlightening us this morning in terms of what this bill does and doesn't do. That was very much appreciated.

It is always a pleasure to rise in this House any time I get an opportunity to represent my constituents in the great riding of Milton, and especially to speak to this important piece of legislation that we're debating this morning. I will start with speaking to the portion of the legislation that deals with the MZOs, but first I would like to start by clearing up some confusion that the members opposite appear to have with MZOs. Every single MZO issued on non-provincially owned lands has been at the request of the local municipality, full stop. Let's just make that clear, to start with: Municipalities are in the driver's seat, not us. Our government does not consider municipalities to be donors or insiders; we consider them as our partners, which is why we work with them to accelerate local priority projects.

For example, in the Leader of the Opposition's riding in the city of Hamilton, the city of Hamilton requested an MZO to help speed up the approval process for 15 new affordable housing units, because having good quality and stable housing for our most vulnerable is a priority for their community. You can't blame them.

Last summer, in the former Liberal Premier's riding in the city of Toronto, the city of Toronto also requested an MZO to help expand Sunnybrook Hospital, to create more capacity during a once-in-a-century pandemic, and the city of Toronto's widely successful CaféTO program was done through an MZO to provide an economic boost to our restaurant sector.

Some of the other projects our MZOs are helping to accelerate are 3,700 long-term care beds, hundreds of affordable houses and supportive housing units, a new hospice facility and a made-in-Ontario PPE facility. These are government priorities, and they are local priorities.

These MZOs are playing a key role in the province's economic recovery, but don't take my word for it; take it from a recent third-party study that was conducted by Deloitte, which found that some projects we helped with an MZO are contributing up to \$3.1 billion to Ontario's GDP and are helping to create up to 26,000 full-time jobs.

Let me be clear: MZOs are not new. In fact they've been used since 1972. The previous Liberal government issued 19 MZOs. In addition, it was the previous Liberal government that exempted MZOs from appeals under the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal. Let me also clarify some misconceptions over the process of issuing an MZO. A municipal request for an MZO simply starts the process for us, and we then do our due diligence.

For example, we have been clear that we will not permit development in the greenbelt, period. That's why the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing denied nine MZO requests from municipalities that would have permitted development inside the greenbelt: because our government is committed to protecting the greenbelt for future generations, unlike the previous Liberal government that carved up the greenbelt 17 different times to help their friends, to help the insiders when it was convenient for them. We've been clear that we will not permit development on the greenbelt, full stop.

Earlier this year, we made good on our budget commitment to expand the greenbelt by launching a 60-day public consultation. This consultation asks Ontario for feedback on expanding the size and quality of our protected lands. This includes the Paris Galt moraine, which is an area home to critical groundwater resources. We're also looking at expanding, protecting and further enhancing urban river valleys into high-density urban areas, including Toronto's Don River. This consultation is setting the foundation for its largest expansion since the greenbelt was created back in 2005. And I hope that the members in the opposition will join us on this significant environmental protection journey.

**1000**

We have also been clear that we are expanding the greenbelt and will not develop or remove any part of it, unlike the previous Liberal government, as I pointed out, who carved up the greenbelt 17 times and removed 370 acres of the greenbelt lands under their leadership. This bill in front of you today explicitly does not apply to lands in the greenbelt.

Our proposed changes will ensure that there are no unnecessary delays or barriers to accelerate local priority projects. Our government has always been clear that we are committed to working with our municipal partners to advance their local priorities.

That brings me to the second portion of this bill.

Since we first took office, our government has invested \$143 billion in Ontario's infrastructure. This includes

investments in broadband connectivity, transit, highways, schools and hospitals.

Although broadband delivery is the federal government's responsibility, we simply cannot wait any longer for them to take action. We've stepped up to the plate with our 2019 broadband and cellular action plan that includes a historic investment of nearly \$1 billion over six years and is already improving connectivity across our great province. This investment also includes doubling our funding to \$300 million for our Improving Connectivity for Ontario program, also known as ICON, which we launched last summer.

We've partnered with the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus to fund the Eastern Ontario Regional Network's Cell Gap Project to improve cellular service in eastern Ontario. When the project is complete, residents in eastern Ontario will get near-complete cellular voice coverage and increased access to mobile broadband in areas where they work, live or travel.

We're also helping to bring high-speed broadband to homes and businesses in southwestern Ontario by investing in the Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology project, also known as SWIFT. Construction is under way in some of those communities already, and residents are starting to receive improved broadband service.

We're also investing in various projects throughout northern Ontario to bring high-speed broadband to residents in towns and First Nations communities.

Now, more than ever, we need to build better infrastructure faster, laying the foundation for growth, renewal and long-term economic recovery. We need an Ontario-made plan to build infrastructure cost-effectively, to create good jobs and to connect communities to what matters most.

Our proposed legislation comes at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has shined a light on the digital divide. There are as many as 700,000 households across our province that lack access to reliable broadband. That means there are hundreds of thousands of people who are struggling to work remotely during COVID-19 or learn as we shift to more online learning. This also means there are hundreds of thousands of people struggling to connect with their loved ones over FaceTime or Zoom calls.

Speaker, as the member for Milton, my constituents and local businesses are also calling for better and more reliable access to broadband to better connect one another across this province and abroad. I'm sure everyone in this House knows that my riding of Milton is defined as being within the GTA. But we still have significant sections that do not have reliable Internet, and many homes don't have access to Internet at all.

We on this side of the House are taking action to fix that. In the coming weeks, thanks to investments from our government, Miltonians in some northern rural parts of my riding of Milton will be getting online. They will now be able to stream their child's classes. They will now be able to FaceTime with loved ones. They will now be able to bring their businesses online, Mr. Speaker.

This past year has taught us how important reliable high-speed Internet is. As I outlined during the debate on the budget yesterday, Miltonians and many others in this

province have known how important the service is for years. With this bill, we are well on our way to providing reliable service to those who have been forgotten by previous governments, mainly a decade and a half of a Liberal government.

I stand here also as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and I understand how important having reliable access to broadband is to Ontario's 444 municipalities in our great province. Earlier this year, I took part in the annual ROMA conference, which represents the interests of 405 small and rural municipalities. There were over 300 municipal delegations, and our government heard loud and clear that municipalities need faster and more reliable access to Internet.

I've also heard from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, Mr. Speaker. They are pleased that our government is taking action to provide more reliable high-speed access to broadband across Ontario. This is and has been one of their top priorities as well. In today's 21st-century digital world, we need to ensure people have access to reliable Internet, so people don't fall behind and can adjust to new, modern ways to work from home, to learn from home, and to connect and reach out to one another as smoothly and as effectively as possible.

This is why this bill in front of us today is so critical, because we are proposing to take bold action through these legislative changes to help connect communities to reliable high-speed Internet sooner by accelerating the development of provincially significant broadband infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. This would include the ability to ensure municipalities and utility companies provide timely access to their infrastructure, such as municipal rights-of-way and hydro utility poles. The legislation would also, if passed, allow the government to help reduce the time it takes to prepare electricity infrastructure, such as hydro utility poles, for new wireline attachments on provincially significant projects.

I hope that the members opposite will join us on this side of the House in supporting this important piece of legislation that will benefit many, many Ontarians who feel they have been left behind, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

**The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls):** Further debate? The member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay.

**M. Guy Bourgouin:** Merci, monsieur le Président, et bon matin.

It's always an honour to rise in this House to speak on behalf of the people in the community of Mushkegowuk–James Bay. Speaker, usually when it comes to government legislation, and most particularly about this Conservative government, we say that the devil is in the details. We say that a piece of legislation may seem rather simple or transparent and straightforward, until we consider the small elements and the wording and sections.

In the case of Bill 257, we don't need to go to the details. In Bill 257, the devil is literally everywhere, but particularly in schedule 3.

As a member of the general government committee, I had the opportunity to participate in the hearings last week

and in the clause-by-clause debate just a couple of days ago. I was particularly shocked by the fact that the government members of the committee had zero interest and zero concern about the dangers of schedule 3. Schedule 3 is the devil in plain daylight. It is completely unrelated to the rest of the bill and it shows the true colours of the members of this Conservative government.

**1010**

Participants at committee hearings last week were all clear about schedule 3. It is an affront to the environmental challenges that members of the government seem to deny. It is an affront to the constitutional duty to consult with Indigenous people. It is an affront to the territorial claims and the environmental stewardship of Indigenous people. It is an affront to the future of young Ontarians and of our children. Schedule 3 is an affront to the legislative competence of the provincial Legislature. It disregards independent judicial powers and it challenges the rule of law.

As Ecojustice put it last Friday, “Schedule 3 of Bill 257 would replace the rule of law with the rule of the minister.... It would represent a rejection of fundamental constitutional conventions that are core to the democratic institutions of Ontario and Canada.”

The Conservative members of the general government committee had time to reflect on schedule 3 and multiple occasions to withdraw the schedule during clause-by-clause a couple of days ago. The government members deflected each question about the constitutional, environmental and ethical problems underlying the schedule. They’ve even defended the Premier’s outrageous call for “more MZOs.” The government members asked whether my colleagues and I are against economic development, as if challenging the rule of law, the independence of judicial power, and bypassing the constitutional duty to consult with Indigenous peoples had anything to do with whether we want an Amazon warehouse built on a wetland.

Speaker, I have read, spoken to and listened to a lot of people about schedule 3 of this bill. It simply should not be there.

I remind the members on the other side of the aisle that you have a duty to represent your constituents. As a member of the government party, you have a duty to listen to and represent the voices of all Ontarians. I truly hope that the members of the government side will remember the principles of representation, that they are elected officials of the Legislative Assembly, not the dictators of Ontario’s future.

Mais, si vous me le permettez, monsieur le Président, j’aimerais vous parler de deux autres annexes du projet de loi 257. Je vais parler des deux annexes qui adressent l’intention du gouvernement de mettre en place un programme pour élargir l’accès à l’Internet haute vitesse en Ontario.

En tant que député de Mushkegowuk–Baie James, un des deux comtés du Grand Nord, je pourrais vous parler pendant des heures par rapport à l’accès aux réseaux de télécommunication. D’ailleurs, 15 % des résidents du Nord—120 000 personnes—n’ont pas accès à l’Internet haute vitesse. Encore plus troublant, alors que l’Ontario

est placé troisième au Canada par rapport à la vitesse recommandée par le CRTC, en ville on est placé dans le septième rang parmi les provinces quand on parle d’accès à la vitesse du CRTC en milieu rural—

**Le Président (L’hon. Ted Arnott):** Merci beaucoup.  
*Third reading debate deemed adjourned.*

## MEMBERS’ STATEMENTS

### YOUTH JUSTICE CENTRES

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I recognize the member for London–Fanshawe.

**Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong:** I have to take my mask off for you to recognize me, Speaker.

I’d like to bring attention to this government’s mishandling of the youth justice centre closure in my city of London. Within six short hours on March 1, the staff and youth at King Street Detention centre were told the program was closed, everyone was without a job and all the youth were to be transferred to Hamilton. These vulnerable youth have been ripped away from their families and support networks and robbed of the opportunity to integrate back into their home communities.

I spoke to a former worker, and he told me that when he went in to work on March 1 at 3 p.m., he had no clue that it would be his last day. Imagine that: losing your job in the middle of a pandemic and while working with a vulnerable population. He and his colleagues feel disrespected by this decision. There was no direction or support from the ministry. Everyone I’ve talked to has had the same question: Why was this done without a transition time for the youth, the staff and the communities of London and Hamilton?

This wasn’t an isolated incident: 26 centres across Ontario have been abruptly closed. I applaud the Ontario Ombudsman’s decision to investigate these closures and I look forward to reading his report. This could have been done so much differently to respect both the children and the workers in those communities.

ANDRIES VIERSSEN

JAKE OOSTERHOFF

**Mr. Sam Oosterhoff:** I rise today to pay tribute to the lives and faithfulness of two remarkable men: my pake, Andy Viersen, and my opa, Jake Oosterhoff.

My pake, Andries Viersen, was born in the hamlet of Anjum, Friesland, in the Netherlands and immigrated to Smithers, BC, at the age of 22. He met and married the love of his life, my beppe, Fettje, in 1955. They were blessed with 10 children in Smithers, BC, and Neerlandia, Alberta. A lumberjack, bush clearer, community builder, farmer and avid political watcher, my pake was first and foremost a man of God whose deep faith defined him. He went to rest with his Saviour after a short illness on December 6, 2020.

My opa, Jake Oosterhoff, was born in Laaghalerveen, Drenthe, and emigrated to Chatham, Ontario, at the age of

15, where he met and married the love of his life, my oma, Nel, in 1959. Together, they raised eight children. A life-long farmer, in later years opa could be found biking all over the Niagara region or volunteering with oma for the church, Meals on Wheels or local causes. Opa joined his beloved Saviour on January 30, 2021.

My grandfathers were truly remarkable men whose families were part of the underground resistance in the Netherlands, immigrated to Canada with pennies to their name after the Second World War, and worked hard to build up successful businesses and raise families in this new country of Canada they loved so much.

Despite their success and accomplishments, they were both humble and godly men who would be the first to confess that they were not their own, but belonged, body and soul, both in life and in death, to their faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ.

I join their many children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren in giving thanks for the lives of Andy Viersen and Jake Oosterhoff.

#### SMALL BUSINESS

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I rise to speak to the Ontario small business grant. Quite frankly, it's been a great disappointment for many of the businesses in Niagara.

After waiting 11 months to provide any form of support for small businesses affected by COVID-19, this government introduced the small business grant. It came as welcome news to many local businesses in Niagara. However, many of them quickly learned they couldn't even apply. Some found problems with the application process and had difficulty getting information when they had questions on that process.

My office worked hard to help those businesses. However, now we have numerous businesses in Niagara that have been approved for the grant they applied for six weeks ago, but haven't received any money—businesses like Chip n Charlie's, Reg's Candy Kitchen and the Fort Erie golf course, all locally owned businesses with local customers. They need the grant to survive; it's money that these businesses desperately need. They faced a second province-wide lockdown, shut their doors at no fault of their own to keep our communities safe.

My office has worked to get information for these businesses to provide them with actual timelines, and they have heard nothing from this government—numerous emails to the minister's office left unanswered, week after week after week. To not get back to MPP's offices when local businesses have questions is shameful.

I call on this government: Take some time to respond to your emails. Allow us to help small businesses in our communities that so desperately need assistance. You promised them the money. Now, actually follow through.

1020

#### LONG-TERM CARE

**Mr. Billy Pang:** The number of people in Markham–Unionville who need long-term care is expected to rise

over the next decade. That's why, earlier this month, I was thrilled when our government made an historic investment in 80 new long-term-care projects across Ontario, including one in my riding of Markham–Unionville. The Mon Sheong Markham project is being allocated 160 new spaces in creating a net new home through the construction of a new building as part of a campus of care.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the Mon Sheong Foundation, all care homes and health care workers across Ontario for continuing to provide dedicated care to our seniors throughout the pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, protecting our loved ones and ensuring they receive the care they deserve is at the centre of everything we do. The investment of \$933 million to 80 new long-term-care projects is on top of the \$1.75 billion already earmarked for our government's commitment to deliver 30,000 new long-term-care spaces in 10 years. With this new allocation, Ontario now has 20,161 new spaces and 15,918 redevelopment spaces in the development pipeline, bringing our government closer to our goal of building new long-term-care spaces for our beloved seniors.

As Ontario continues to tackle COVID-19, our government will continue to take steps forward to creating a 21st-century long-term-care sector and provide the highest quality of care for our most vulnerable people where and when they need it.

#### HOSPITAL FUNDING

**Mrs. Lisa Gretzky:** I applaud the outstanding work of my community in securing the funding for a new hospital in Windsor-Essex that was mentioned in this year's budget. My MPP colleagues Percy Hatfield, Taras Natyshak and I, along with hospital CEO David Musy, the board, local mayors, city council, town councils and community members worked collaboratively across party lines for many years to secure this funding for our community and will continue to do so to ensure the hospital project moves forward.

While this funding is welcome news, the budget omissions show that this government doesn't prioritize helping the majority of Ontarians recover from this pandemic. Nearly \$800 million in funding cut from education leaves our students and education workers at risk. No increase for ODSP or OW will mean many families in my riding will continue to live in deep poverty, without access to affordable housing. There are 5,400 people on the wait-list for housing in Windsor. Workers will still have to choose between staying home if sick with COVID-19 or being able to pay rent or buy groceries, because this government won't support a provincial paid sick days plan. The restrictive business grant means local small businesses will continue to struggle or permanently close. Casino workers and front-line health care heroes have been left out too.

MPPs don't vote on a budget based on one issue alone. This was an opportunity to address the struggles of families in my riding, yet the government's budget falls

much too short and fails far too many. I will continue to advocate for my constituents on the issues important to them, like those I just raised, while working collaboratively with this government, local politicians and community members to move the hospital project forward. Speaker, I hope the government will do the same.

#### ORGAN DONATION

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** It's an absolute honour to rise today, on the first day of BeADonor Month, to raise awareness about the importance of organ and tissue donation.

In Ontario today, there are over 1,600 people waiting for a life-saving transplant, one of whom will die every three days. In my riding of Orléans, there are 18 people on the waiting list for this life-saving transplant, and yet, only 35% of eligible Ontarians have registered to consent to be a donor.

The Trillium Gift of Life Network is doing an amazing job at promoting and supporting organ and issue donations across the province. They also work tirelessly to improve the system so that more lives can be saved. Today, I want to do my part to raise awareness and challenge my colleagues here in the Legislature and my constituents back at home to take two minutes to register to be a donor, at [beadonor.ca](http://beadonor.ca).

This last year has challenged us in ways many thought were impossible. We've demonstrated how much we care for each other. We've come together to protect our collective health by staying home and wearing a mask. Now it's time for us to do that again, show our care for our neighbours and register to be an organ and tissue donor at [beadonor.ca](http://beadonor.ca).

#### SENIORS' SERVICES

**Ms. Lindsey Park:** The Oshawa Senior Community Centres, Bowmanville Older Adults Association and seniors centres across the province have been playing an essential role in the lives of our seniors during this pandemic. During this time—over more than a year now—many have provided virtual programming and activities to help keep seniors connected during the pandemic.

On March 8, I announced locally an investment of \$250,000 from our government for 2020-21 as part of our government's funding for seniors active living centres. The executive director of the OSCC, Sandy Black, shared with me the importance of this continued funding for their centre and shared with me a testimony from one of the family members of a participant, who said, "Your program has been such a great help to us for the last two years and especially throughout this hard time with COVID. Father misses your program, your team, and his friends at the centre so much. We have our good and bad days but for sure look forward to the daily calls with the group at 11 a.m. I notice such a difference in his outlook when he gets off the phone calls.... Thank you so much ... for all of the thoughtful one on one calls, newsletters, gifts, group calls, and tablets. He is enjoying all so much."

I want to thank the OSCC for helping our seniors stay safe and connected during this pandemic.

#### COVID-19

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** There's nothing like a call from a family member that brings the pandemic and the crisis that we're in home to you. Last week, my son called me and said, "Dad, I got a COVID-positive test." He informed me that he was doing fine; he had a little bit of tenderness under his eyes, but he was relatively good. We've been in contact with him, watching him and just making sure that he's okay.

Last night he called me and he says, "Dad, I'm really feeling bad." I said, "Ah, April Fool's on you." It wasn't an April Fool's. He was telling me how his chest was hurting and how it was difficult for him to get oriented in getting up in the morning and that things were really starting to hurt. That really brings it home to you. When you can't go out and help your boy, it's tough. His mom called him as well, and she wants to go out and help him, but she can't. The best advice that I gave him, and we both agreed over the call, is to tell your mom to stay at home. We'll see how you get through this.

It really brings it home because you always think it's going to be somebody else. I don't have grandparents, and I don't have people in a long-term-care home, but you finally see what others are experiencing.

I want to tell my boy, "You're going to be fine. We're going to get through this. Your Easter eggs are going to be waiting for you when we can get together at home, and Dad's going to have a huge hug for you, boy."

I want to wish everybody across Ontario and Algoma-Manitoulin to stay safe this weekend. Let's be mindful of what we're doing. Use social media and gather with your family as best you can. Be smart. Be safe. Be wise. Take care. Happy Easter, everyone.

#### KEN MAYNARD

**Mr. Michael Parsa:** I'm rising in the Legislature today to pay tribute to Mr. Ken Maynard of the Rotary Club of Woodbridge, located in the riding of Ontario's Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. Tragically, Mr. Maynard recently passed away on his 87th birthday.

In 1955, immediately following Hurricane Hazel, the Rotary Club of Woodbridge was first chartered. Following this, Ken became a member of the club in 1962, to be more active within the community. Ken's family arrived in Woodbridge in the 1850s when Woodbridge was just known as a cottage destination for those living in Toronto.

Speaker, I also want to add that Ken's family also has a connection to this Legislature. His father-in-law was a Conservative MPP from 1945 to 1948, representing the riding of York South.

Ken's knowledge around the history of Woodbridge left many people speechless. If you ask anyone who knew him, they would tell you exactly the same thing.

In 2013, Ken was awarded the Lieutenant Governor's lifetime award for contributions to heritage. He lived life believing in service above all.

1030

In his 59 years of Rotary service, Ken never missed a meeting. Even while on vacation—which only happened once a year, to attend the Rotary International Convention—he made sure to attend the local meetings of the host city.

On behalf of the government and all Rotarians, we remember the legacy that Ken Maynard left behind. Our province and our entire world is a better place because of him.

### HOSPITAL FUNDING

**Mr. Kaleed Rasheed:** I'm so pleased that the Premier and the Minister of Finance included Trillium Health Partners Mississauga site rebuild in this year's budget. This is great news for the people of Mississauga and especially the residents of Mississauga East–Cooksville. All five of my children were born at Trillium Health Partners in Mississauga. This world-class health care facility has provided constant and exemplary service to not only my family but the families of Mississauga. Under the leadership of CEO Michelle DiEmanuele and her exceptional team, it continues to serve the people of Peel region and Mississauga throughout the pandemic and beyond.

Our government is investing in expansion projects in the region of Peel through collaboration with Trillium Health Partners. These investments will support historic hospital expansion and construction projects. This expansion not only creates an in-patient care tower at the Queensway site in Etobicoke but also completely rebuilds the Mississauga Hospital to increase capacity and address growth needs.

I'm very glad that, with the support of our government, the people and growing families of Mississauga, especially Mississauga East–Cooksville and Peel region, can count on continued excellence and service from Trillium Health Partners.

### WEARING OF RIBBONS

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Orléans has expressed an interest in raising a point of order.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** I'm seeking unanimous consent for members to be permitted to wear the green ribbon today in recognition of organ donation month.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Orléans is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to permit the members to wear a green ribbon today. Agreed? Agreed.

### COVID-19 DEATHS

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I've been advised the Leader of the Opposition has a point of order as well.

**Ms. Andrea Horwath:** I seek unanimous consent for the House to observe a moment of silence to pay tribute to the 86 Ontarians who have succumbed to COVID-19 in the past week—perhaps 23 more as of today.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The Leader of the Opposition is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to observe a moment's silence to pay tribute to the 86 Ontarians who have succumbed to COVID-19 in the past week. Agreed? Agreed.

Members, please rise.

*The House observed a moment's silence.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Thank you very much. Members will please take their seats.

### QUESTION PERIOD

#### COVID-19 RESPONSE

**Ms. Andrea Horwath:** My first question today is for the Premier. Today there are 430 people in Ontario's hospitals in ICUs; 43 more were admitted yesterday. This is the highest number so far through the entire pandemic of patients in the ICUs from COVID-19.

The Premier was warned that this was going to happen, that the numbers were going to rise, but he chose not to take the advice of the public health experts, of the doctors, of the nurses, of the front-line health care workers. The question simply is, why?

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

**Hon. Christine Elliott:** Since the beginning of this pandemic, our government has taken focused action to respond to this unprecedented public health crisis.

I think it's also important that we note that this is not just happening in Ontario. This is happening across Canada. We've seen a rise in case numbers because of the variants of concern. It's happening across the world.

We've been dealing with this every step along the way. We have been listening to our health experts—Dr. Williams; the Public Health Measures Table; the Ontario Hospital Association, with whom we're in very close contact; the CEOs of the hospitals. We are in contact with them. And we have been building capacity since this pandemic began—over 3,100 new beds, the size of six community hospitals. We've been building our intensive care capacity, as well. We've put \$5 billion into our hospitals since the beginning of this pandemic.

We will do more. We will do whatever we need to do to protect the health and safety of all Ontarians.

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

**Ms. Andrea Horwath:** Speaker, the doctors—the very people the minister is talking about—warned the government that the variants of concern were going to be problematic, that they were going to spread very, very quickly, that we couldn't let them get out of control, that they would cause a third wave. But the government didn't take

the action necessary to slow that process down, to prevent that from happening—quite the opposite, as a matter of fact. The government did exactly the opposite of what was being recommended back in February.

And so what do we see today? There are 430 people in ICUs in Ontario. And 23 more people lost their lives to COVID-19, just since yesterday. These are avoidable deaths.

The government could have avoided the announcement that's coming today in terms of another lockdown had they only acted in the way that they should have with the advice they were given by the experts. They chose not to take that advice. They chose not to take the necessary action.

Why did the Premier and his government decide to walk us right into another lockdown with eyes wide open?

**Hon. Christine Elliott:** In fact, we have taken steps every step along the way, based on the scientific advice and the recommendations of our health advisers—Dr. Williams and his team, Ontario Health, working with the local public health measures tables and other groups.

We have not hesitated, when we've needed to, to take action, which we did just this past week when we moved London-Middlesex into red. We have also put on the emergency brake, as we've had to in Sudbury and in other locations.

So if it's necessary in order to stop the spread of COVID-19 and these variants, we have taken steps based on the medical advice that we've received every step along the way, and we will continue to do that.

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

**Ms. Andrea Horwath:** Speaker, there is a tragic, tragic human cost to the decisions that this government has made: 430 people struggling in the ICUs; 23 more people lost their lives just since yesterday to COVID-19. There are over 250,000 Ontarians waiting for surgeries and procedures that have been put off because of the pressure that's currently on the hospitals.

They were warned by doctors, by experts, by their own science table back in February that this very thing that's happening now would happen if they didn't take the necessary action.

Why has the government led us here? Why have we ended up in this tragic, tragic place?

**Hon. Christine Elliott:** Any loss of life due to COVID-19 is tragic.

We have taken numerous steps along the way to build up our hospital capacity to make sure that any Ontarian who needs to be in hospital is going to be able to receive the care that they need. We have invested millions of dollars in building capacity. We have also invested in building up our health human resources to be able to care for people.

More than that, we've been moving actively into vaccinations, which, of course, is our best case for dealing with COVID-19 and these variants of concern. We've actually completed over 2,276,000 vaccinations.

The news that we've received today is that we are receiving the AstraZeneca vaccines. We should receive them today. They will be shipped tomorrow. They will be

available to be put into people's arms as of Saturday in communities across Ontario, in at least three pharmacies in each public health unit as well as in primary care offices.

**1040**  
We are moving quickly in order to deal with these variants of concern, but also providing the capacity we need in our hospitals. I'm not sure what else the leader of the official opposition expects we should be doing in this circumstance.

#### COVID-19 RESPONSE

**Ms. Andrea Horwath:** My next question is also for the Premier. It is very clear now that the Premier ignored the advice that was provided back in February, rolled the dice on the vaccines and led us to exactly where we are today. In fact, the Minister of Health is again repeating that their whole plan is to let people get sick; just let them get sick, because there's hospital capacity.

Well, here's what the ICU doctors across Ontario are saying, over 150 of whom sent a letter to the Premier, to the Minister of Health and to the chief medical officer just today: "Even if we had unlimited ICU capacity, allowing these" COVID-19 variants "to spread exponentially is unethical." Why did the government let this happen?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Minister of Health.

**Hon. Christine Elliott:** Our primary goal since the beginning of this pandemic was to safeguard the health and safety of every Ontarian, wherever it is that they live in the province. We have taken steps in order to do that by, first of all, building up our capacity in our health systems, by making sure that we make the investments necessary to build that capacity in our intensive care units. We've also bought 10,000 ventilators, because we know many patients have to be vented. We've created over 3,100 new beds. We've also enabled the Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital to open as quickly as possible to carry some of the overflow from some of the other hospitals.

We're ready to create field hospitals. One in Sunnybrook is ready to go, with over 80 spaces for patients. We have another hospital that we will be mobilizing in Hamilton as well. We are creating spaces that we have available, and we've asked hospitals to participate in that. We're also building up the health human resources in order to be able to deal with that, in addition to our vaccination efforts.

We are moving on all fronts to protect the health and safety of all Ontarians.

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

**Ms. Andrea Horwath:** Speaker, it is horrifying that the Minister of Health is acknowledging that the government's plan is just to let people get sick and see what happens. This should not have been the case here in Ontario.

Here's why these 153 doctors are raising the alarm bells in the province. Here's why they said that the decisions the government is making are unethical. I'm going to read the quote from that same letter: "Four in 10 patients who come to the ICU with COVID will die." Four in 10: I guess that's

one of the odds that the government's okay with. "More than half of patients requiring mechanical ventilation due to COVID will die."

Why does the Premier, why does the health minister, why do these folks, why does the government think that this is okay?

**Hon. Christine Elliott:** I'd like to say to the Leader of the Opposition, through you, Mr. Speaker, that what I find shocking and horrifying are the words that you're trying to put into my mouth. Any suggestion that we are prepared to let people get sick and not worry is absolutely incorrect.

We are here to protect the health and safety of all Ontarians, and we are taking every step that we can. We are in daily contact with the Ontario Hospital Association, with the critical care command centre as well. While the situation in Ontario's hospitals is concerning, it is under control. We are working with them constantly to build capacity and to make sure that people, if they need ventilators, if they need extra care—that we are there to protect them and to provide for them.

That has been our goal since the beginning and will always be our goal: to protect the health and safety of every single Ontarian.

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

**Ms. Andrea Horwath:** The Premier was warned by the experts that their framework was not going to work. That's what they were told by the experts. In fact, they're being told the same thing again, but they are not listening and they are not acting.

Here's what the ICU doctors say: "We cannot rely on the public health measures framework. It did not contain the less infectious, less deadly original variant in wave 2 and it will not be enough to protect us ... in wave 3."

Speaker, how can it be that with the advice of the experts, with the warning bells that they've been ringing, we still ended up here again?

**Hon. Christine Elliott:** Well, I can tell the leader of the official opposition that we have been relying on the recommendations of the medical experts since the beginning. Somehow the leader of the official opposition seems to be suggesting that we're just making this up as we go along—not at all. We have been listening to the medical experts at every step along the way: Dr. Williams, the doctors on the preventative health measures table, Public Health Ontario, Ontario Health, the Ontario Hospital Association, the heads of the hospitals, and the doctors who are the local medical health experts in all the 34 public health unit regions. We have been constantly listening to them, consulting with them, and listening to the recommendations and abiding by their recommendations. That has been the case every step along the way since the beginning of this pandemic and will continue to be our response. We will continue to listen to them and act on their recommendations, as we always have.

#### SMALL BUSINESS

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** My question is to the Premier. In the last year, Ontario lost over 74,000 businesses. That's

tens of thousands of families who lost their livelihoods. That's thousands of main streets that have lost their hearts. This government promised support that never came. Many businesses are still ineligible for support while others, like Davenport business owner Brandon Celi, have been waiting for 34 days for his grant.

Speaker, on the eve of another shutdown, one in six businesses are considering closing their doors for good. If this government isn't going to actually step up with the supports that businesses and workers need, this third shutdown will close thousands of businesses forever in the province of Ontario.

Premier, how can you stand by while businesses close? At the very least, will you expand the eligibility criteria for the small business grant so that they have a fighting chance to get through this third wave?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** To respond, the Minister of Finance and President of the Treasury Board.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Mr. Speaker, last week I tabled budget 2021: protecting everyone's health and protecting jobs and our economy in this province. Within that, I announced that we would double the amount that small businesses—over 100,000 businesses. That's 100,000 businesses who have successfully applied. But we also continued that by expanding eligibility to the tourism, to the hospitality, to the accommodation-type sectors who have been hardest hit in this province, to the tune of another \$100-million new grant program, plus a \$100-million recovery program for the tourism sector. The business education property tax is in place, the electricity supports are in place and the property tax supports. So Mr. Speaker, this government is protecting the small businesses of Ontario and will continue to do that.

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

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** In that same budget, you left out thousands of businesses. You did not change the criteria so that they can apply for the small business grant. You doubled down on a flawed plan for small businesses.

This government seems to be going out of their way to make life harder for business owners across the province. Restaurant owners just shelled out thousands of dollars, frantically getting organized to open their patios this week. Salons, gyms, personal care businesses were staffing up, buying new safety equipment and booking appointments. But today, once again, they're left scrambling to shut things back down again. The only answer from this government when it comes to support, other than a broken grant program that most businesses don't qualify for, is that they're out of luck; they're on their own.

Speaker, again to the Premier: What does he have to say to the thousands of business owners who won't get a cent of support from this government during this shutdown? How do you expect them to survive? It's a very simple question.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Thank you again to the member opposite for that question. Of course, I wouldn't want to be the member opposite telling all the restaurants

in this great province who have benefited from the small business grant program. I wouldn't want to tell all the hairdressers and barbers and all the personal service shops that have benefited from the small business program.

Mr. Speaker, over 100,000 businesses have successfully applied, and we've expanded it. I'll say that again: We've expanded the program so that tourism, travel agents, accommodation, small parks and camps can benefit, because they've been hardest hit. They've been able to operate, they haven't been locked down, but they have no revenue.

Mr. Speaker, we are helping those in need. We'll continue to help those in need. Do you know why? Because small businesses are the economic engine of this province, and beyond that, the small businesses of this province are often the identity of our community. That's why this Premier and this government will continue to stand up for small businesses right across the province.

1050

#### LONG-TERM CARE

**Mr. Rick Nicholls:** My question is to the Minister of Long-Term Care.

Speaker, for the past decade, our long-term-care sector has been sadly neglected. Many of our homes were built to now outdated standards. The previous Liberal government built 611 spaces from 2011 to 2018. That is an abysmal 0.8%—translated, that's eight-tenths of 1%—increase while the population of those 75 and over grew by over 20%. More than 40,000 people across the province were on the wait-list for long-term care as of December 2020. The investments the previous government made were simply not enough.

We need to build modernized spaces in our long-term-care homes—something the Liberals failed to do.

Would the Minister of Long-Term Care please tell this House what this government is doing to fix these capacity issues?

**Hon. Merrilee Fullerton:** Thank you to the member from Chatham-Kent–Leamington for the question and for his good work on behalf of his constituents.

The member is right when he identifies the neglect of the long-term-care sector under the previous government, from 2011 to 2018.

It's our government that is working around the clock to rebuild and repair the long-term-care sector.

On March 18, I was pleased to announce 80 new long-term-care projects across the province, which will lead to an additional 7,510 new and 4,197 upgraded long-term-care spaces. This is the single largest allocation in Ontario's history. Our government is investing \$933 million in these projects on top of the \$1.75 billion already dedicated to the delivery of 30,000 new spaces over 10 years. Combined with the previous allocations, this brings us up to 20,161 new and 15,918 upgraded spaces in progress.

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

**Mr. Rick Nicholls:** Thank you, Minister, for your highly informative response. This is great news for all seniors across our province.

I know that my constituents will be happy to hear about all the great work our government is doing to modernize the long-term-care sector, including our progress on the long-standing staffing issues, crowding issues, capacity issues and issues with the wait-list. This work will address many of the challenges our province faced entering the pandemic and that were only made worse by it.

While this great news for the whole province is wonderful, my constituents would like to know what progress is being made for them, specifically. Would the minister please tell the House what this progress does for my constituents in Chatham-Kent?

**Hon. Merrilee Fullerton:** Thank you again to the member from Chatham-Kent–Leamington.

In Chatham-Kent–Leamington, Arch long-term care is being allocated 40 new spaces and 120 upgraded spaces. The project will result in a 160-bed home through the construction of a new building in Leamington.

In this tranche of allocations alone, our government will create more long-term-care spaces than the previous government did.

After decades of neglect, it's a Conservative government that will repair and rebuild long-term care.

Our government is addressing staffing. Our government is upgrading older spaces to modern design standards. And our government is building new spaces that have been needed for many, many years.

It is a Conservative government that is repairing, rebuilding and advancing long-term care for Ontarians.

#### EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** My question is to the Premier. On the verge of another province-wide lockdown, everyday Ontarians are once again wondering how this government managed to mess up so badly.

At the same time, everyone except for the Premier and his cabinet seems to understand exactly why we are in this position once again: The government refused to give workers the support they needed to stay safe and the support they needed to stay home if they were sick or if they needed a COVID-19 test.

When is the government finally going to listen to the health experts, the business leaders, the workers, the mayors and councils, the boards of health—literally everyone who isn't a Conservative MPP—and give people the paid time off they need to stay home so we can finally end this pandemic?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** To reply on behalf of the government? The government House leader.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** I've answered this on a number of occasions and I'll do it again: I will continue to stand up for those workers who are getting 20 sick days right now through a plan that this Premier, Premier Ford, negotiated with the federal government. I simply will not, and I know nobody on this side will, support the NDP plan

to reduce those sick days from 20 down to 14. It is irresponsible. We will not do it. We will hold firm on giving the workers of this province access to 20 paid sick days.

Only the NDP are suggesting that we should reduce it from 20 down to 14. We won't do it. We'll continue to stand up for workers.

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

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** It's not only the NDP. Dr. Peter Jüni from the science advisory table just today has reiterated the need for paid sick days at a provincial level in this province.

**Ms. Andrea Horwath:** Made in Ontario.

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** Yes. Without a provincial program of paid sick days, without paid time off to get vaccinated, without any help from this government, workers won't have any other choice but to keep going in to work, where they will keep getting sick.

How many more times are we going to do this? Is the government going to wait for a fourth or a fifth lockdown before they finally recognize the urgent need for paid sick days for Ontario workers?

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Members will please take their seats.

Government House leader.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** We did recognize and we have recognized how important workers are to the province of Ontario. It is because of the hard work of people across this province that we have had the resources we have needed to invest in health care, to invest in long-term care, to have a return to school that has been so successful. It is these workers that we will rely on to rebuild an economy that will be even stronger than it was before the pandemic.

That is why it was this Premier and this government that were so forceful in ensuring that there were 20 sick days available to the people and the workers of the province of Ontario. That was negotiated by this Premier and all Premiers so that there could be a program across the country for our workers.

The NDP are asking us to reduce that to 14 days. We simply will not do that. We will stand firm: 20 sick days for the people of the province of Ontario and for all the Canadian workers.

#### COVID-19 RESPONSE

**Mr. John Fraser:** Today, there are 430 COVID patients in the ICU, the highest level in this pandemic, and that number is rising. Today, we'll likely hear that there will be a third lockdown in this province, to begin on Saturday.

For weeks, the Ontario science table has been warning the Premier about the risks of the new variants and the third wave. Dr. Peter Jüni described the situation as "completely out of control." Yet the Premier's priority last week was to get on the radio in Windsor and go to Brampton and ask people to vote for his candidates.

Ontarians deserve a Premier who is giving his undivided attention and focus to this pandemic and the public health measures, not a Premier who is content with business as usual. Through you, Mr. Speaker: Can the Premier explain to Ontarians why he's taken so long to take the advice of his advisers and to do what's necessary to protect them?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** To reply? Government House leader.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** It's just the opposite: In fact, since day one, this Premier and this government have been working hard to keep the people of the province of Ontario safe.

When it comes to the third wave, I'll remind the honourable gentleman that it was this government and this Premier that were begging the federal government to close the airports so that we could control the variants of concern, which were out of control. It was the federal Liberal government that refused to do it, and this government was forced to act unilaterally.

The reason why we have the toughest—the toughest—public health measures in this country is because, for 15 long years, the Liberals did nothing to improve ICU capacity. They did nothing to improve critical care capacity. They did nothing for long-term care. They did nothing for a strategy for workers and our PSWs. We have had to catch up every step of the way.

It is because of the hard work of this Premier, this Minister of Health, the long-term care minister, the Minister of Finance and all of our caucus members that we have been able to lead the country, Mr. Speaker. The job is not done, and we will not let up until we see the back of this pandemic once and for all.

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Stop the clock. Order.

Restart the clock. The supplementary question.

1100

**Mr. John Fraser:** I'd like to remind the House leader the contact rate is 1.1%, so the Premier and his House leader need to stop blaming other people for a problem that's of their own making. We're always two weeks behind, right? And what's evident now is that the Premier and his cabinet banked on the vaccine rollout to prevent the third wave. Yet since day one, this government has struggled to get vaccines into the right arms and the right places in Ontario—quickly. That's this government's job, and they need to step up.

Now, when the pandemic is once again raging, when we're facing our biggest battle against COVID, with new variants—okay, the head of the task force leaves, with no one to replace him. As the House leader said, the job is not done. So through you, Mr. Speaker, can the Premier explain or tell us who is now going to head the task force as we head into our biggest battle with COVID-19?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Minister of Health.

**Hon. Christine Elliott:** I'm really proud to say that Dr. Homer Tien is going to be the head of the task force, going forward, the head of Ornge who has done such a

remarkable job with Operation Remote Immunity, dealing with our fly-in communities and making sure that our First Nations partners are receiving the vaccine. Dr. Tien has done a remarkable job with Ornge and with Operation Remote Immunity, and I have no doubt that he is going to do a remarkable job as the new head of the task force.

#### SPECIAL-NEEDS CHILDREN

**Mr. Rick Nicholls:** My question is to the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. Now, this past year has been difficult for everyone. Ontarians have stepped up, made sacrifices and worked hard to curb the spread of COVID-19. But doing so has challenged families across the province, especially those caring for children with special needs. Even before COVID-19, families in some regions faced challenges to accessing care for their children, such as outdated facilities or clinical services that were scattered and disjointed. This difficulty has only been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Speaker, would the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services explain what our government is doing to address these challenges that families of children with special needs are facing?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The parliamentary assistant and member for Ottawa West–Nepean.

**Mr. Jeremy Roberts:** Thank you to the member from Chatham-Kent–Leamington for this important question. Speaker, supporting children with special needs and their families is a top priority for our government. For these families, having a safe, accessible and modern facility to access services and treatment is crucial. In many regions, service is limited by aging and inaccessible buildings. In my own riding of Ottawa West–Nepean, my constituents have dealt with the added difficulty of accessing clinical services from locations scattered across Ottawa.

That's why I am extremely happy to say that last week our government announced that we are supporting the construction of new purpose-built facilities at the Children's Treatment Centre of Chatham-Kent and at CHEO in Ottawa. I know that the member from Chatham-Kent–Leamington has been a strong advocate for this new facility in his community.

Speaker, I will have more to say in the supplementary.

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

**Mr. Rick Nicholls:** I am very glad to hear that our government has announced these new capital projects, including a major investment in my own riding of Chatham-Kent–Leamington to establish a modern purpose-built and accessible 55,000-square-foot facility. When completed, this new CTC will serve nearly 30,000 families in Chatham-Kent and its surrounding communities while creating more than 300 new jobs. This is great news for the families with children with special needs across the province, as well as their communities as a whole.

Speaker, would the PA to the minister be able to provide this House with more details on how these new facilities will improve available services for these families?

**Mr. Jeremy Roberts:** Thank you again—Speaker, through you—to the member from Chatham-Kent–Leamington for that great question. I know first-hand just how difficult this pandemic has been for families with children with special needs, particularly of course in the Ottawa region.

Our government is committed to making access to these critical services more accessible and seamless for families. This new investment through Ontario's action plan will reduce wait times and improve care. In the case of CHEO's 1Door4Care project—a project close to my heart—services from seven different locations will be brought together under one modern, purpose-built roof that will make it easier for parents and families to access care for their child. As well, this infrastructure project will benefit my community and the Ottawa community as a whole by creating a staggering 3,000 new jobs. This is a game-changer for Ottawa.

Speaker, our government is never going to stop working to improve services and make life easier for families of children with special needs, and we will continue to do so.

#### COVID-19 RESPONSE

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** My question is to the Premier. Speaker, families woke up to news this morning that more restrictions are on their way for much of the province, but when it comes to schools, it's just more confusion and uncertainty. Earlier this week we saw conflicting messages about whether the spring break would be moved again or cancelled outright; now, more conflicting messages about whether schools will be open next week or closed. If folks happened to be catching the minister's tweet this hour, he says schools will remain open. I guess that's what we have to do now as students and staff: stay on Twitter all day. I don't know.

Mr. Speaker, which is it? Can the Premier tell us if schools will in fact remain open, and if they are, how he intends to keep them that way when more are being forced to close every single day because of outbreaks?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Minister of Education.

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** We believe that students deserve to be in class. On the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ontario schools will remain open in this province. April break will proceed. For students' mental health and development, and for their learning, students will be in class today, exactly where they belong.

We've built a comprehensive plan, fully supported by the Chief Medical Officer of Health: cohorting, better-quality masks and enhanced cleaning, screening and testing—all of which has helped ensure that, while we deal with the third wave and these variants of concern, nearly 99% of schools are open today. Nearly three out of four schools have no active cases at all.

I want to thank Ontario educators, the students and parents themselves for coming together at this critical time. We will continue to monitor the community rates, in

partnership with the Chief Medical Officer of Health and the Minister of Health. We will not hesitate to act to protect students, staff and our families. We are grateful that students are in class, where they belong, in this province.

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

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** The minister is great at spinning numbers, but right now what students and education workers and their families need is leadership and certainty. What they're getting instead is dwindling supports. These so-called enhanced supports: Where are they? Supports are dwindling. The testing plan is a mess. One in four schools has a COVID case in this province; 63 schools are closed right now; today alone, 249 new cases—children—of COVID-19; and it's happening with the minister's so-called enhanced protections.

I'm going to give the Premier another chance here. Will he put a stop to the half measures, the confusion and the mixed messaging and take immediate steps to ensure that our schools are safe?

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** I will provide a few numbers to the member opposite. First off, 99% of schools in the province of Ontario are open. In the member's community of Toronto—which is a hot spot, as we all can agree—98% of schools are open today as well.

We appreciate this is a global pandemic, a challenge that is not unique to Ontario, recognizing that in British Columbia the New Democrats have imposed restrictions and lockdowns, likewise in Quebec. This is a global challenge we are contending with.

But we are proud on this side of the House. We're proud of our students and the system of education that has worked so well to keep COVID out of our schools. The fact that three out of four schools in Ontario have no active cases at all underscores one truth: that our parents and our educators and kids are working together and our comprehensive protocol is working every step of the way.

We'll continue to consult and work with the Chief Medical Officer of Health to achieve one objective, which is to keep schools safe and open in the province of Ontario.

#### COVID-19 RESPONSE

**Mr. Roman Baber:** My question is to the Minister of Health. A year later we have learned so much about this virus, but this government continues to ruin millions of lives. Instead of protecting the vulnerable in long-term-care homes, this minister locks down 15 million Ontarians and makes them sick. A quarter million surgeries postponed; a million cancer screenings that didn't happen; 60% to 70% of Ontarians are experiencing mental health issues; our children anxious and regressing; CFIB says that one in three small businesses may close—and for what reason?

1110

We're told that this lockdown is to prevent ICUs from being overwhelmed, but today in Toronto, the COVID hot

spot, ICU occupancy is 80%, 10% below the goal of 90%. Province-wide ICU occupancy is also 80%.

A surge in COVID patients can be managed with transfers. Instead, the lockdown is in response to modelling by Steini Brown, which always over-factors the number of ICU patients. He meets the case projection, but the ICU factor is off by two to four times.

My question to the minister: Capacity is fine. Will you please look at the ICU data in front of you, acknowledge the ICU modelling errors, and stop ruining millions of lives? Please.

**Hon. Christine Elliott:** In fact, the modelling that has been done by Dr. Brown and his colleagues has informed many of the actions that we've taken to date. We will continue to follow both the modelling as well as the medical recommendations from Dr. Williams, the public health measures table, Public Health Ontario and the other medical advisers who have been providing us with their recommendations.

The fact of the matter is that we are facing some concerns in our intensive care units, but they are under control. But that is something that we need to continue to work on. We will have more to say about our response to some of these recommendations later today.

However, we are continuing to listen to the doctors. We are continuing to listen to their medical recommendations. We've already made changes. We've already put over \$1.8 billion, just in this budget alone, in order to support the extra beds that we've created, to make sure that we can deal with some of the backlogs in surgeries—\$300 million. As we're dealing with the increasing cases of COVID, we're also trying to work on the backlog of surgeries. We're doing all of this plus increasing—

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

**Mr. Roman Baber:** Speaker, to the Minister of Finance: The third lockdown is a continuation of the same lockdown we've had in the GTA since October, but now province-wide. It's grey, which the Premier loosened in response to pressure, not science. None of this is about science. It's about re-election. It's about polling. It's about not disagreeing with the medical officer because, to quote the Premier, that would be like tying a noose around your neck and going off a bridge.

But the measures imposed are completely absurd. The Costco in my riding allows 500 customers, but gyms, restaurants, the beauty industry, dance studios and kids' sports are closed? Why? We have so much data now. These destitute businesses are not a major source of outbreaks. They don't lead to deaths or hospitalizations. Gyms, dance and sports are safe and good for people's health. Restaurants and salons are safe and good for mental health.

The MPPs are collecting a paycheque. Some of them laughed at the prospect of collecting the CERB, but they ruined and decimated millions of lives.

Will the minister have the courage to look into the camera and tell these small businesses they're not essential even though they're safe?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Minister of Health.

**Hon. Christine Elliott:** As I've indicated earlier, the health and safety of the people of Ontario has always been our paramount goal and always will be. We know that we can't have a healthy economy without healthy people. That is what we are working very hard on in terms of creating more space for people to be cared for in hospital, if they need to be hospitalized, whether that's for COVID or any other issues—heart attacks, traffic accidents or whatever it happens to be.

We're also working on the vaccination side. The good news is today we are receiving the 583,400 AstraZeneca vaccines that are going to be distributed, as soon as we receive them, to all parts of Ontario, including in at least three pharmacies in every public health unit region, and to primary care offices.

We are doing whatever we can to protect the health and safety of the people of Ontario. That has been, and always will be, our primary and first and foremost concern.

#### BROADBAND ACCESS

**Mr. Rick Nicholls:** My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Last Wednesday, March 24, the Ontario government presented its 2021 budget, Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy. It is here where I learned, "The 2021 budget commits a historic new investment of \$2.8 billion in broadband infrastructure to ensure that every region in the province has access to reliable broadband services by 2025. This proactive approach is the largest single investment in broadband, in any province, by any government in Canadian history and will be pivotal to Ontario's long-term economic growth."

Speaker, I can't tell you just how important it is to the people of my riding and for so many others throughout Ontario to know that they will have high-speed Internet connected to their homes.

Will the Minister of Infrastructure please tell us how the government came to this monumental decision?

**Hon. Laurie Scott:** Thank you to the member for the question.

Last week's Ontario budget 2021 showed that this government is serious about getting things done for the betterment of all Ontarians.

We are well aware of the pressure COVID-19 has placed on us, and we have seen the shift in the way we live and the way we do things, emphasizing our reliance on being digitally connected to the world.

I am proud to say that our government is committing an additional \$2.8 billion, for a near total of \$4 billion, to accelerate broadband expansion, ensuring that all regions of this province will know they can count on us to deliver high-speed Internet to their homes and to their communities.

This also benefits:

- regional economies;
- farmers who can connect and use new technologies for their industry;

- mining and forestry companies and their communities;

- entrepreneurs and many more businesses;

- communities and municipalities as they expand digital integrations.

And it gives support to greening our economies, with less commute times and emissions.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear, Ontario's decision to do so speaks for itself.

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

**Mr. Rick Nicholls:** Thank you to the minister for that very informative response.

Speaker, this pandemic has shown us exactly why broadband is so important to the people of Ontario.

I've had constituents write and even phone me asking, "When will I get reliable Internet service to my home or to my business?" That's why I was thrilled to learn of the close-to-\$4-billion investment to connect my community and the rest of Ontario.

As the minister has said, investments alone can't connect all of Ontario. Can the minister please tell this House about the other issues we face as we work to get 100% of Ontario reliable access, regardless of where they live?

**Hon. Laurie Scott:** Thank you for the question.

Like the member opposite mentioned earlier, we've all heard the stories, and these challenges have only been magnified by the pandemic.

There are very real barriers to expanding broadband in Ontario, including costs and delays when attaching to hydro poles, delays in access to municipal rights-of-way, and Ontario's rate for hydro pole attachments and other costs.

But we can't afford to let unnecessary barriers and cumbersome processes stand in the way of achieving access to broadband for all.

That's why we introduced the Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act, 2021. If passed, this legislation would help connect communities to reliable high-speed Internet sooner by accelerating the deployment of provincially significant broadband infrastructure projects across Ontario.

Later today, we will continue third reading debate on this bill. We need the support of every member in this House to connect Ontario. I am counting on you.

#### AUTISM TREATMENT

**Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong:** My question is to the Premier.

Since the Premier has taken office, the wait-list for families waiting to access services through the Ontario Autism Program has ballooned to 42,000. That's 42,000 kids whose lives have been put on hold because of the government's actions. For over two years, families have been forced to go into debt, to remortgage their homes or to work multiple jobs to ensure their kids don't fall behind.

Yesterday, I spoke to Natalie, a London mom. Her son has been on the wait-list since April 2017.

Your government has shown time and again that you do not intend to support families like hers. What else are they supposed to think when there's no mention of autism in your latest budget?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The parliamentary assistant, the member for Ottawa West–Nepean.

**Mr. Jeremy Roberts:** Of course, making sure that we are supporting our families with children with special needs is a key priority for our government, both during this pandemic and throughout our term in government.

Implementation of the new needs-based Ontario Autism Program is well under way. We've begun issuing letters, inviting families to move into the new program's core clinical services. At this stage, we are focused on gathering important feedback from these first participants as we continue to invite more families into core clinical services.

1120

I can tell you that we are continuing to follow the over 100 recommendations of the Ontario Autism Program Advisory Panel as we roll out the new program, including their recommendation that we rely on the clinical and research experts on the implementation working group who are providing key input on key elements of the new program. We are also—

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

**Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong:** It's a little too late for—after two years, the best they can do is 600 kids, when there are 42,000 kids on the wait-list.

The OAP pilot project was announced over two months ago. Why does the ministry still have no specifics about it? There are no metrics for success. There's no northern strategy, no appeals process, no staff, no families. Invitations are not enrolments. You called together an advisory panel and ignored the recommendations.

In honour of world autism day tomorrow, can you commit to listening and actually learning and implementing from the people who have lived those experiences? Will you accept your responsibility to ensure Ontarians with autism have access to the services they need to succeed? Will the Premier commit to public reporting on the pilot program's successes and failures, rejecting unfair age caps, ensuring that clinicians and not untrained bureaucrats get the final say in funding and allocations, and continue interim funding for all those families who are still on the wait-list?

**Mr. Jeremy Roberts:** As the member opposite knows, I do have lived experience in this area, and I know how important it is that we get this right. That's why I'm proud that our government is implementing all of the recommendations of our Ontario autism panel's report.

More than 34,000 families are receiving support through their existing behaviour plans, through childhood budgets and interim one-time funding as we continue to implement our new needs-based autism program. That's three times more children receiving support than at any other point during the previous government.

We have also been working hard on the other key elements of the panel's recommendations, including the launch of foundational family services, which include family and peer mentoring, caregiver workshops and coaching so families can support their child's ongoing learning and development, and a variety of early years supports focused on younger children to help them build skills in social communication, engagement, speech and language and—

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

## COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** My question is to the Premier. We just heard from the health table that Ontarians at high risk and vulnerable people living in hot spot neighbourhoods are not getting vaccinated at the same rate as Ontarians in lower-COVID communities. Homebound and disabled residents in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood are waiting for mobile teams to receive a life-saving vaccine. These residents turn to my office every day to look for assistance—assistance that they are not getting from their government. Some struggle to get to clinics on their own. It's really shameful.

Toronto Public Health is going to launch a limited pilot program for these residents who are in need. Why have they been forgotten from this government's plan? Justice Rosalie Abella pleads with us that we should view society through the lens of the vulnerable.

Speaker, will this government appoint a person whose sole focus and responsibility is managing the coordination of life-saving vaccines to people with disabilities and homebound across this province?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The Minister of Health.

**Hon. Christine Elliott:** I thank the member very much for the question. This is a very important issue. I can assure the member that we have, in setting up our vaccine distribution plan, viewed it through the eyes of our most vulnerable, making sure that we will have a variety of options for people to receive the vaccine.

We know that the mass vaccination clinics are not going to work for a large number of people, but we also have now—we're expanding into pharmacies. We're expanding into primary care facilities, where some people with disabilities or with comorbidities would rather receive the vaccine. But I can also advise that our paramedics are now doing home visits to see people who are homebound and disabled, to ensure that they receive the vaccines as well. That plan is already under way. The teams are already working on it.

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

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** I just spoke to a person with a disability who had a very poor experience when he got himself to a clinic, because he did not have a LHIN code that he was supposed to have to receive this vaccine. More needs to be done in that respect.

Speaker, Ontarians are reading and watching the reports of vaccination clinics sitting underutilized. Worse is the report of large amounts of vaccines sitting in Premier Ford's freezers—over 600,000. The rollout of this vaccination program has been frustrating for Ontarians to navigate, with many barriers to incentivizing people to get the vaccine.

Younger workers, especially low-paid, public-facing workers and front-line medical staff, are now at greater risk from the variants. They risk their lives each and every day. Many of these workers cannot afford to take time off work to wait in lines to get vaccinated or to see if they have any adverse side effects. Jurisdictions like Saskatchewan have introduced special vaccination leave. I'm asking this government today to provide a paid vaccination leave for these at-risk workers so that they can get vaccinated and—

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Thank you.  
Minister of Health.

**Hon. Christine Elliott:** There are two points, I believe, that need to be answered here. One is any suggestion that there are hundreds of thousands of vaccines just sitting in freezers: That is absolutely not the case. Every single vaccine has already been spoken for. It has already been booked for someone's mother, father, grandparent. They are allocated. They are going to be given.

With respect to the AstraZeneca vaccines that expire as of April 2, the 194,500 that we had, I can advise that as of today, there are 300 left. So they will be used before their expiry date. Not one vaccine is going to be misused or wasted. We want to make sure we can get every vaccine that we have into someone's arm.

With respect to people who are vulnerable, who are not able to take time off, the answer isn't always giving them paid time off to do that. Another answer is to take the vaccines into the communities where they are, which is what we are going to do with some of our community vaccines and the hot spots where we know that there are people who are having trouble because of work issues, language issues, being homebound, for example—

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

#### COVID-19 RESPONSE

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** My question is for the Premier.

The ongoing COVID-19 crisis in Thunder Bay has led to the suspension of in-class learning, and that has gone on for a couple of months now. Currently, there are only two child care centres open for our front-line and essential workers.

What is this government going to do to help those families, those essential workers who need child care in Thunder Bay?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Minister of Education.

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** We are obviously aware of the decision made by the medical officer of health to close

schools on a temporary basis due to rising community case numbers in the region of Thunder Bay. Likewise, that decision was made based on the best science, given that schools were not overwhelmingly places of transmission, but the medical officer of health believed it was best to close schools for that period of time.

We have worked hard to make sure child care remains available to all families in all regions of the province, recognizing in the most recent budget additional supports for child care spaces as well as for child care fees—a 20% top-up of CARE.

With respect to what is permitted to be open in your public health unit, that is dictated by the public health authority. We're following their advice. We accept the recommendations they make. But at the government level, from a funding perspective, we provided a significant increase of supports for child care. The overwhelming majority, 96%, are open today. There is an additional 20% top-up of the CARE tax credit announced by the Minister of Finance. It gives, on average, \$1,500 of savings per family.

We'll continue to be there for the family, for the operator and for children in Ontario.

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

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** Back to the Premier: What I heard in that answer is there's no help for those families of essential workers in Thunder Bay, and that's a sad thing.

But I have another problem. Hundreds of constituents are very upset that they cannot get a vaccine in Thunder Bay. As soon as the lines are open, those appointments are booked. People are desperate. They watch while others in southern Ontario have far broader access. Even this morning, the medical officer of health didn't know about the vaccine rollout. When asked a question by a reporter, she said, "Well, we're not sure how that's going to work."

People in my riding are begging for vaccines. What are we going to do? What is the government's plan? What is the clear and transparent plan to get vaccines in the correct numbers to Thunder Bay, and when is this going to happen?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Minister of Health.

**Hon. Christine Elliott:** We do have a clear plan for vaccinations. The vaccines are being allocated equitably across the public health unit regions, all 34 of them, based on population and based on risk factors. We are very fortunate now that we've received a significant supply of the AstraZeneca vaccines, which will allow us to open up more widely across the province. Three pharmacies at least in each public health unit will be carrying them, as well as primary care providers. There are 583,400 of them coming. They will be available vaccines to distribute and to start being put into people's arms as of Saturday. The Pfizer vaccines are still coming in as well. They are going into the mass vaccination units.

1130

There's a variety of ways that people will be able to allocate and access vaccines across the province, but

certainly, it's very good news that we have received those AstraZeneca vaccines, which will be available this week-end for people.

#### AUTISM TREATMENT

**M<sup>lle</sup> Amanda Simard:** My question is to the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. Tomorrow is world autism day, and it's an important time to remember the challenges that families with children with autism face.

We have a government that has actually put up more barriers to support. The government should be supporting and making life easier, not delaying and dithering while literally a generation of children go unhelped.

Mr. Speaker, will the government use this opportunity to change course, take these challenges seriously and provide parents with the support they need?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Response, the member for Ottawa West–Nepean.

**Mr. Jeremy Roberts:** As I mentioned in a previous response this morning, implementation of the new needs-based Ontario Autism Program is well under way, and we've begun issuing letters inviting families to move into the new program's core clinical services. At this stage, we are focused on gathering the important feedback from these first participants as we continue to invite more families into core clinical services. This is through the determination-of-needs process, which was a recommendation of the autism advisory panel, that a determination-of-needs process be implemented by a care coordinator, who will work with families to understand their child's strengths, needs and priority goals.

This process, which was developed on the input of the clinical experts on the implementation working group, will result in funding allocation for core clinical services. We're excited about the work that was done by these experts on this world-class determination-of-needs process. I'll be pleased to speak further in—

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

**M<sup>lle</sup> Amanda Simard:** Mr. Speaker, the government's slow progress when it comes to fulfilling their promises is shameful. Ontario was one of the fastest-growing jurisdictions in the world for ABA, but due to the careless and, frankly, cruel decisions made by the previous minister, capacity has been decimated.

The government has raised hopes, let parents down, then raised hopes again and let parents down again. Parents are rightly fed up. Will the minister commit to actually spending the whole budget this year and rolling out a needs-based system that serves all families, not just a select few?

**Mr. Jeremy Roberts:** Let me be crystal clear, Speaker: Our government is absolutely committed to our increased investment of \$600 million per year in services and supports for children and youth on the autism spectrum. We are excited to launch core services under the new

program, and we will continue to work to get funding into the hands of families as quickly as possible.

To date, to reiterate, more than 34,000 children are receiving support through existing behaviour plans, childhood budgets and interim one-time funding—more than three times the number of children receiving support than under any previous government.

We're going to continue to work to get this right so that children with autism and their families get the support that they need in this province.

#### FRONT-LINE WORKERS

**Miss Monique Taylor:** My question is to the Premier. No matter what sector they're in, essential workers have faced immense pressure, stress and anxiety over the past year. Tammy, a long-term care worker at Grace Villa in my riding, has PTSD from her time working during the horrible outbreak. Josie, a grocery store worker from Toronto, caught COVID-19 at her workplace and now is experiencing symptoms of PTSD as well. Both Tammy and Josie shared that their co-workers are experiencing similar mental health challenges from working during this pandemic.

These are our front-line heroes, and they need your support. My bill, the access to mental health support for essential workers act, would provide Tammy, Josie and other essential workers presumptive access to WSIB mental health benefits. Will the government support my bill and help take care of the workers who have taken care of us?

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

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Look, we will certainly take a look at that bill. I'm surprised to have the question from the member, given the fact that the bill was scheduled to be debated last night in this chamber, but, as you recall, Mr. Speaker, the NDP forced the early adjournment of the House, thereby wiping out the opportunity for the member to present her bill yesterday. So I'm surprised to hear that it remains a priority with the NDP, given that they were unexcited to hear about it yesterday, Mr. Speaker.

We will of course do what responsible members of Parliament do, and use the opportunity for private members' business to reflect on it. If it is a good bill, as we have always done, we'll support it. If it is not a good bill, then we won't support it.

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

**Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong:** The member for London–Fanshawe has a point of order. You said London West accidentally. It's okay—or at least I heard that.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** London–Fanshawe.

**Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong:** Thank you.

Tomorrow is April 2, World Autism Awareness Day. I call on the Premier and all elected representatives, on World Autism Awareness Day, to renew our commitment

and responsibility so that Ontarians with autism have access to the services they need to succeed—

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** That is not a valid point of order.

#### BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Point of order.

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

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** I rise in accordance with standing order 59, to lay out the business for the week after the break week.

Let me just take a moment to wish all members a happy Easter. And, if they would, I really encourage all members both here and at home to listen to the member's statement from the member for Algoma–Manitoulin. I think, in his words, it reflects just how important it is that we are all safe. I congratulate him for that, and I really do encourage all members to take a look at that.

I also want to just briefly thank, if I can, the opposition House leaders and whips. Since they have come into their positions, they've certainly made my job a lot easier and I do appreciate that. I really enjoy working with them.

The business during the routine proceedings: I will commit to get back to the opposition House leader early next week with what the order of the business is.

I wanted to just briefly go over private members' business because, as you know, Mr. Speaker, the NDP forced the early adjournment of the House, which causes a change in the ballot orders for when we come back.

On Monday, April 12, we will be dealing with ballot item number 67, standing in the name of the member for Scarborough–Agincourt.

On Tuesday, April 13, ballot item number 68, from the member for St. Catharines. We still are unaware of what that bill is, but I suspect that we will hear shortly from the opposition.

On the 14th, ballot item 69, from the member for Markham–Unionville, which is Bill 270, Senior Volunteer Appreciation Week Act.

And on Thursday, April 15, ballot item number 70, Bill 176, standing in the name of the member for Parkdale–High Park, who, if I can congratulate you, was recently elected as the Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee on Social Policy. I want to congratulate her on that achievement. On the 15th we will be debating her Bill 176, Maternal Mental Health Act.

#### PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I beg to inform the House that pursuant to standing order 101(c), a change has been made in the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business, such that Mr. Pang assumes ballot item number 69 and Ms. Triantafilopoulos assumes ballot item number 73.

#### DEFERRED VOTES

##### PROTECTING THE PEOPLE OF ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2021

##### LOI DE 2021 VISANT À PROTÉGER LA POPULATION ONTARIENNE (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Deferred vote on the motion that the question now be put on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 269, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 269, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Next, we have a deferred vote on a motion for closure on the motion for second reading of Bill 269, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes.

On March 29, 2021, Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved second reading of Bill 269, and on March 31, 2021, Ms. Khanjin moved that the question be now put.

The bells will ring for 30 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes on Ms. Khanjin's motion that the question be now put. I will ask the Clerks to prepare the lobbies.

*The division bells rang from 1140 to 1210.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The vote on the motion for closure on the motion for second reading of Bill 269, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes, has been held.

**The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker):** The ayes are 57; the nays are 23.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I declare the motion carried.

Mr. Bethlenfalvy has moved second reading of Bill 269, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard some noes.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

The bells will now ring for 15 minutes—

**Interjection:** Same vote.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Same vote? Same vote.

**The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker):** The ayes are 57; the nays are 23.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I declare the motion carried.

*Second reading agreed to.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** I refer it to the standing committee on finance.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The bill is referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

There being no further business at this time, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

*The House recessed from 1212 to 1300.*

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

### INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE DISCLOSURE ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021

### SUR LA DIVULGATION DE LA VIOLENCE ENTRE PARTENAIRES INTIMES

Mrs. Stevens moved first reading of the following bill:  
Bill 274, An Act respecting the disclosure of information related to intimate partner violence / Projet de loi 274, Loi concernant la divulgation de renseignements liés à la violence entre partenaires intimes.

**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 like to explain her bill?

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** The bill enacts the Intimate Partner Violence Disclosure Act, 2021. The act allows individuals to apply for information regarding whether their intimate partner has a history of committing intimate partner violence. The act also allows police to provide this information to a person at risk, even if the person has not applied for it.

## PETITIONS

### OPTOMETRY SERVICES

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** “Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I agree with this petition. I will sign it and send it down to the table.

## SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** This is a petition to the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to approve funding, space and change for adults with autism languishing in hospitals.

“Whereas at the end of 2017-18, there were approximately 18,200 adults with developmental disabilities who requested supportive housing ... Housing Task Force Ontario Developmental Services Final Report 2018:

“Whereas the wait-list for supportive housing is 23 years...;

“Whereas Ontario is providing \$2.32 billion in annual funding toward developmental services and \$1.46 billion of that goes toward residential services;

“Families are being encouraged to buy and staff their own houses (this means purchasing an additional home and compensating trained staff year-round);

“Whereas, according to a spokesperson for the ministry, autistic persons are not accommodated on a first-come, first-served basis but rather persons who are determined to be most in need are prioritized for available resources...;

“Whereas the current system of crisis intervention in regard to developmental disabilities is inaccessible, unsafe and undignified;”

“We, the undersigned, call on the government to allocate additional funding for more housing and training courses open to the community and be required for professionals in specific fields of work, as this course of action is in compliance with the AODA.”

Over 28,000 have signed the online petition, and I’ll sign my name to it and give it to the Clerk.

### OPTOMETRY SERVICES

**Mr. Percy Hatfield:** Speaker, I’ll let you know I have a petition from the optometrists as well. By the way, we’ve all received a letter from them saying there was nothing in the budget, so they’re going to withdraw their OHIP-subsidized eye exams as of the 1st of September if they don’t get back to the bargaining table with the government.

“Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I agree, Speaker. I’m going to sign it and make sure it gets down to the table so the government will be aware of it.

#### CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I would like to thank a number of residents of 2 Cadeau Terrace in London West for signing a petition about conservation authorities. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s 36 conservation authorities have developed a deep understanding of local ecosystems and how to best protect them; and

“Whereas restricting the powers of conservation authorities weakens environmental protections, puts more power into the hands of private developers, and leaves Ontarians at risk; and

“Whereas we are deeply concerned that stopping non-mandatory conservation authority programs will adversely affect the health of our environment;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the vital role of conservation authorities in local land use planning and permitting, and to support the continued delivery of a broad range of programs as directed by conservation authorities.”

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

#### SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

**Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong:** “Petition to the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to Approve Funding, Space and Changes for Adults with Autism Languishing in Hospitals.

“Whereas at the end of 2017-18, there were approximately 18,200 adults with developmental disabilities who requested supportive housing (up significantly from 12,000 in 2013) Housing Task Force Ontario Developmental Services final report 2018;

“Whereas the wait-list for supportive housing is 23 years...;

“Whereas Ontario is providing \$2.32 billion in annual funding towards developmental services and \$1.46 billion of that goes toward residential services;

“Families are being encouraged to buy and staff their own houses (this means purchasing an additional home and compensating trained staff year-round);

“Whereas, according to a spokesperson for the ministry, autistic persons are not accommodated on a first-come, first-served basis but rather persons who are determined to be most in need are prioritized for available resources. Parker Curran fits this criteria;

“Whereas the current system of crisis intervention in regard to developmental disabilities is inaccessible, unsafe and undignified.

“We, the undersigned, call on the government to allocate additional funding for more housing and training courses open to the community and be required for professionals in specific fields of work, as this course of action is in compliance with the AODA.”

Over 28,000 have signed an online petition. Thank you, Speaker.

1310

#### SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** This “Petition to the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services” is to approve funding space and changes for adults with autism languishing in hospitals:

“Whereas at the end of 2017-18, there were approximately 18,200 adults with developmental disabilities who requested supportive housing (up significantly from 12,000 in 2013) Housing Task Force Ontario Developmental Services final report 2018;

“Whereas the wait-list for supportive housing is 23 years...;

“Whereas Ontario is providing \$2.32 billion in annual funding toward developmental services and \$1.46 billion of that goes toward residential services;

“Families are being encouraged to buy and staff their own houses (this means purchasing an additional home and compensating trained staff year-round);

“Whereas, according to a spokesperson for the ministry, autistic persons are not accommodated on a first-come, first-served basis but rather persons who are determined to be most in need are prioritized for available resources. Parker Curran fits this criteria;

“Whereas the current system of crisis intervention in regard to developmental disabilities is inaccessible, unsafe and undignified;

“We, the undersigned, call on the government to allocate additional funding for more housing and training courses open to the community and be required for professionals in specific fields of work, as this course of action is in compliance with the AODA.”

Over 28,000 have signed an online petition. I’m going to affix my name and send it down to the table. I fully agree with this petition.

#### SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

**Mr. Percy Hatfield:** Good afternoon, Speaker. I have a petition as well to the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to approve funding space and changes for adults with autism languishing in hospitals.

“Whereas at the end of 2017-18, there were approximately 18,200 adults with developmental disabilities who requested supportive housing (up significantly from

12,000 in 2013) Housing Task Force Ontario Developmental Services final report 2018.”

The petition reads further: “Whereas the wait-list for supportive housing is 23 years...;

“Whereas Ontario is providing \$2.32 billion in annual funding toward developmental services and \$1.46 billion of that goes toward residential services;

“Families are being encouraged to buy and staff their own houses (this means purchasing an additional home and compensating trained staff year-round);

“Whereas, according to a spokesperson for the ministry, autistic persons are not accommodated on a first-come, first-served basis but rather persons who are determined to be most in need are prioritized for available resources. Parker Curran fits this criteria;

“Whereas the current system of crisis intervention in regard to developmental disabilities is inaccessible, unsafe and undignified;

“We, the undersigned, call on the government to allocate additional funding for more housing and training courses open to the community and be required for professionals in specific fields of work, as this course of action is in compliance with the AODA.”

Over 28,000 people have signed an online petition, and this petition, Speaker, is what I’ve just read. I fully support it. I’m going to sign it, and the Clerk will have it in about a minute and a half.

#### SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** “Petition to the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services” to approve funding space and changes for adults with autism languishing in hospitals:

“Whereas at the end of 2017-18, there were approximately 18,200 adults with developmental disabilities who requested supportive housing (up significantly from 12,000 in 2013) Housing Task Force Ontario Developmental Services final report 2018;

“Whereas the wait-list for supportive housing is 23 years...;

“Whereas Ontario is providing \$2.32 billion in annual funding towards developmental services and \$1.46 billion of that goes towards residential services;

“Families are being encouraged to buy and staff their own houses (this means purchasing an additional home and compensating trained staff year-round);

“Whereas, according to a spokesperson for the ministry, autistic persons are not accommodated on a first-come, first-served basis but rather persons who are determined to be most in need are prioritized for available resources. Parker Curran fits this criteria;

“Whereas, the current system of crisis intervention in regard to developmental disabilities is inaccessible, unsafe and undignified;

“We, the undersigned, call on the government to allocate additional funding for more housing and training courses open to the community, and be required for

professionals in specific fields of work. This course of action is in compliance with the AODA.”

Over 28,000 have signed an online petition. I will affix my name to this and give it to the Clerk.

#### ORDERS OF THE DAY

##### SUPPORTING BROADBAND AND INFRASTRUCTURE EXPANSION ACT, 2021

##### LOI DE 2021 SOUTENANT L’EXPANSION DE L’INTERNET ET DES INFRASTRUCTURES

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 1, 2021, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 257, An Act to enact the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021 and to make other amendments in respect of infrastructure and land use planning matters / Projet de loi 257, Loi édictant la Loi de 2021 sur la réalisation accélérée de projets d’Internet à haut débit et apportant d’autres modifications en ce qui concerne les infrastructures et des questions d’aménagement du territoire.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Further debate? I recognize the—I’m just checking; New Democrats had the floor. All right. You had the floor? Therefore, I recognize the member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay, who had the floor.

**M. Guy Bourgouin:** Merci, monsieur le Président. Ça doit être parce que je suis tout petit. C’est dur; personne ne me voit, là. Mais je dois admettre que c’est la première fois que je fais un discours, puis d’être obligé d’arrêter puis de recommencer, c’est un peu déboussolant.

Ceci dit, on est là pour adresser la connectivité à l’Internet. D’ailleurs, 15 % des résidents du Nord, 120 000 personnes, n’ont pas accès à l’Internet à haute vitesse. Encore plus troublant, alors que l’Ontario est placé troisième au Canada par rapport à la vitesse recommandée par le CRTC, en ville, on est placé dans le septième rang parmi les provinces quand on parle de l’accès à la vitesse du CRTC en milieu rural.

Étant donné cette situation, cette disparité, ce qui est vraiment choquant est le fait que le projet de loi ne mentionne ni le nord de l’Ontario ni les régions rurales comme régions d’importance afin de mettre fin à la disparité existante.

Let me repeat that in English: Despite the fact that Bill 257 designates broadband projects of provincial significance, nowhere in the bill does it say that projects to close the gap in northern or rural Ontario are to be considered of provincial significance.

Speaker, the technology divide is also an affordability divide in northern Ontario. I was pleased to support my colleague from Algoma–Manitoulin’s motion on internet affordability and cost relief. The problem that we face in northern Ontario, time and again, is the last-mile problem,

as my colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane calls it: Large companies that own the cable are unwilling to build access to those most isolated and those who need it the most.

Monsieur le Président, pour vous donner un exemple, dans le nord de l'Ontario, on sait que quand le gaz naturel est passé, il y a beaucoup de communautés qui l'ont eu, mais les places comme Lac-Ste-Thérèse, près de Hearst, ou encore d'autres rangs, parce qu'il y a beaucoup de « concessions »—des « rangs » comme on les appelle en français—qui n'ont pas eu le gaz naturel. Ils voudraient avoir le gaz naturel, puisque le propane, le bois de chauffage et d'autres moyens de se chauffer coûtent beaucoup d'argent.

1320

Mais on a peur que la situation se répète, parce que dans le nord de l'Ontario, on le vit souvent. On est les enfants oubliés de la province. On voit aussi qu'il y a des communautés du nord, des communautés de la Baie James. C'est pour ça qu'on a demandé des amendements, pour refléter ça, pour faire certain que cette fois-ci, on ne manque pas le bateau, que le gouvernement ne nous oublie pas, qu'on ne soit pas les enfants oubliés quand ça vient à l'Internet—parce que c'est rendu essentiel. Ce n'est pas juste un besoin; c'est rendu une essentialité dans la vie de tous les jours.

So, unless the significance aspect of the bill is specified, how can we ensure that the province will give priority to the project in underserved areas of the north, and not to a new housing development in the greater Toronto area? Yesterday, during clause-by-clause, my colleague from Oshawa brought forward an amendment to request to include wording in section 1 of schedule 1 of the bill about northern Ontario, rural Ontario and remote parts of the province.

Monsieur le Président, je vais le répéter en français, pour faire certain que le monde comprenne. Ma collègue d'Oshawa a amené un amendement à la section 1, puis la « schedule 1 » du projet de loi, qu'on identifie le nord de l'Ontario, l'Ontario rural, mais aussi les régions éloignées de la province, comme les communautés de la Baie James. Mais encore, le gouvernement a voté contre.

Some of the responses we received from the government members of the committee were borderline to being shameful, Speaker. For instance, a member of the government indicated that it's difficult to define what northern Ontario is. Seriously, Speaker? I'd be happy to take you for a ride to Hearst, to Mattice-Val Côté, and then take you on the train to Moosonee and Moose Factory. Then you'll understand what northern Ontario is all about.

Quand un des députés du gouvernement dit : « C'est dur à définir, le nord de l'Ontario »—comme j'ai dit au Président de la Chambre : il n'est pas sérieux quand il a dit ça? Sérieusement? Je vais l'emmener, moi, prendre une « ride » dans le nord de l'Ontario, venir à Hearst. Je vais l'emmener à Val Rita, à Val Côté. Je vais l'emmener dans nos régions. Je vais l'emmener à Moosonee. On va prendre le train. On fait cinq heures de train pour se rendre à Moosonee, puis après ça, on va prendre un taxi sur la

rivière, traverser de l'autre bord puis on va lui montrer la réalité, ce qu'est le nord de l'Ontario, le vrai nord de l'Ontario—pour qu'on ne soit pas oublié encore, quand ça vient à la réalité de ce gouvernement-là. It doesn't know what northern Ontario is. That is not my constituents' fault, and it's not a reason for not doing the right thing.

Instead, relativizing regional differences, relativizing the digital gap that is harmful for our communities, whether fly-in, northern, rural.

Je vais finir ma présentation en incluant un petit mot par rapport aux petits opérateurs des coopératives, des regroupements communautaires qui travaillent pour mettre fin au manque d'accès à l'Internet haute vitesse dans Mushkegowuk–Baie James et le nord de l'Ontario en général.

Speaker, as I said at the beginning, if I am to define schedule 3 of this bill, I can tell you that the devil is all over it. It should be removed, and the government should listen to the people of Ontario. They should do the right thing and put an end to this schedule and what will look like a stain on the history of this province.

Je ne vais rien que de vous donner un autre exemple avant que je termine, monsieur le Président. Quand l'industrie forestière a « collapsé » avec l'économie, les libéraux dans le temps avaient donné du pouvoir au ministre. Avant, dans l'industrie forestière, la forêt était attachée aux usines. Dans le temps, j'avais un autre rôle à jouer et j'avais amené la province en cour. On avait eu du succès là, probablement parce qu'il n'y avait pas eu de consultations publiques. À cause que le gouvernement n'avait pas suivi ses propres règlements, ils ont été obligés de prendre un recul.

Mais ce que le gouvernement a appris, par exemple, c'est que le ministre avait un pouvoir. Son pouvoir était qu'il pouvait détacher le bois de l'industrie ou du moulin ou de la communauté. Ça, ça veut dire pour nous dans l'Ontario qu'on a des usines forestières, comme à Hearst—on peut penser à Opatatika, qui l'ont perdue. Ça veut dire qu'ils ferment une usine, ils prennent le bois de cette région-là et ils l'envoient dans une autre région. Ça, c'est ce qui est dangereux avec la « schedule 3 ».

That is what's dangerous about schedule 3: giving super power to a minister. Giving that minister that power, like I explained in French, like what the Liberals did when it came to the forest industry, untying the forests from the communities and the sawmills, taking that one-industry town—taking that industry and sending it to another community, that forest following it, and giving the multi-nationals the latitude to do what they want, to the detriment of a community.

That's what schedule 3 will do when you give that power to a minister. It will give the similar—what we lived in Ontario, taking that community and industry. We had buyers for that industry; we could have fixed it. We could have saved a few industries when they collapsed, of the industries that were there. Employers were willing to do their part, but the ministry overruled all that. And that's the danger with schedule 3.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Further debate?

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I rise to speak to third reading of Bill 257, a bill to expand broadband capacity across the province and essentially to give the government the power to pave over wetlands, farmland and green space.

Speaker, I want to begin by just saying that I'm a strong supporter of expanding broadband access across the province. I believe broadband should be an essential service. In many respects, broadband is the electricity wires of the 21st century. You can't access education; you can't access health care in some cases. Some days you can't do business if you don't have access to broadband. Every corner of this province should have access to broadband.

That's exactly why I put forward an amendment to change some of the wording in this bill, to make sure that it was clear that provincially significant projects especially included rural, remote and northern areas, underserved and underserved areas, because it is vital that, yes, we serve all areas. There are some suburban regions—there are some regions, I think, actually in your own riding, Speaker, in Halton Hills that don't have access to good broadband, which are within a half-hour drive of the city of Toronto. But there are many spots, as the member just said, in northern Ontario that don't have access at all—even dial-up access. We need to be very clear, to set the record, that we need to make sure broadband is available everywhere.

I was disappointed that the government members voted down those amendments. I want to be very clear and be on the record that I still voted in favour of schedules 1 and 2 at committee, because even though they're not perfect, they're a step forward.

I want to be very clear and put this on the record as well: There were people who came to committee who raised some concerns about some of the public safety elements of the bill. I was pleased that the government put forward some amendments to address those concerns. But I still think it's important for MPPs to put on the record, as this bill moves forward, that no project should compromise public safety.

If there's one thing that became very clear as people came to committee, whether they were talking about schedules 1, 2 or 3, is that good planning is vital to public safety—to protecting people, property and communities.

**1330**

That brings me to schedule 3. I can support schedules 1 and 2, but I could never vote for a bill that puts the public at risk the way schedule 3 puts the public of this province at risk.

We have planning laws for a reason: to avoid reckless and irresponsible developments in the wrong places. The provincial policy statement, in many respects, is a floor, the minimum that we need to do to make sure that we protect people, the places we love, our communities, our infrastructure.

The government has essentially given themselves the ability to have one minister completely override the provincial policy statement with the stroke of a pen. By pushing through legislation that allows MZOs to be exempt

from the provincial policy statement, the government is giving a signal that it's open season on environmental protections, good planning laws and farmland protection in this province. There's a saying for something that is so extreme like this: "the nuclear option." That's essentially what this is—the option to override decades of planning rules in this province.

Every now and then we have events that are one of those "let's never let this happen again" events. We've certainly gone through that with COVID-19 and long-term-care homes—that we could never allow a tragedy like this to ever happen again.

Well, in 1954, Ontario had such a tragedy. It was called Hurricane Hazel. Speaker, 81 people lost their lives and 2,000 families lost their homes. It did over a billion dollars' worth of damage. And people said, "Never again." That's why conservation authorities and planning laws were strengthened in Ontario—because people said never again would we allow that to happen.

What has happened in Ontario over the last few months? The ability of conservation authorities to protect us from those kinds of extreme flooding events has been reduced and gutted.

And now we have schedule 3 that basically says, "Let's throw out planning laws if the minister chooses to do so."

This is happening at a time when scientists are forecasting a tripling of flood costs in Canada by 2030. Insurance companies are warning us that we have to act to protect people's homes, businesses, communities and public infrastructure.

The fact that 75% of the wetlands in southern Ontario are already paved over puts our communities at even more risk. We simply can't afford to pave over any more wetlands.

No matter how much the government talks about spending some money to restore wetlands, the bottom line is, the fiscally responsible approach is to not pave over the wetlands in the first place, to allow them to do the work they do for us free of charge.

Speaker, for 11 out of the last 12 years in Canada we've experienced over a billion dollars a year in insurable flood risk damage, and the estimates are that the cost to public infrastructure is three times that amount. The most expensive flood event in Ontario's history was in 2013, in Toronto—\$1.3 billion worth of damage. Who would forget the August night in 2018 when, in three hours, Toronto experienced \$84 million worth of flood damage? Part of that is because we've paved over the lower Don wetlands, which all three levels of government are now spending \$1.3 billion to rehabilitate and, hopefully, protect us from flooding.

So you ask, why is the government taking such extreme measures to put us at risk? For an Amazon warehouse? I guess that's the answer: to build an Amazon warehouse in Duffins Creek and to put other communities at risk.

I find it ironic that we're spending \$1.3 billion to rehabilitate the lower Don Lands wetlands in Toronto; meanwhile, in Ajax and Pickering, they want to pave over similar wetlands. I wonder how much it would cost to

rehabilitate that in the future after the kind of flood damage we've experienced here.

Amazon has realized this is a bad idea, Pickering Developments has realized it's a bad idea, the city of Pickering has realized it's a bad idea, but schedule 3 is still in this bill. As a matter of fact, it's the third attempt now that the government has tried to change the law to be able to give themselves the power to ram this MZO through for this warehouse. But the bottom line is that even though everyone has pulled away from this particular development, schedule 3 gives the government the power to do this in any community in Ontario.

I know the government says, "You know what? We need MZOs to build long-term-care homes or affordable housing or what have you," but the bottom line is, if you build a long-term-care home or an affordable housing project in the wrong location, where it could be flooded and experience significant damage, is that really the right place to build something like that? That's why we need to have MZOs—and I'm not saying all MZOs are bad, but that's why they need to be in compliance with our planning laws.

We've had MZOs that have done some useful things. A lot of times, people talk about the grocery store in Elliot Lake after the tragedy there. One I like to talk about is the MZO that cancelled the St. Marys Cement quarry in Flamborough and protected the greenbelt. But this isn't about MZOs; this is about giving the minister unprecedented power.

I just want to quote quickly from AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, which said, "Under the existing legislation there has been assurance"—this is in relation to MZOs—"that while the outcome would be faster than the standard planning process, the outcome would reflect the principles of the standard planning process. In other words, a faster process but with the same outcome had it gone through the standard planning process." They go on to say that they recommend getting rid of schedule 3 because it actually violates the planning process.

That's the point here. MZOs that are part of a planning process for a project that everyone agrees with and that would comply with the planning process to speed it up: There can be some arguments for that. But to actually obliterate and violate the planning process is wrong. It's why people are losing confidence, from the way in which MZOs are being misused and abused and done in irresponsible ways, and that includes the Ontario Federation of Agriculture.

I want to quote from the OFA in relation to schedule 3 of Bill 257:

"The subsequent requirement of local planning authorities to follow the PPS mandate have really begun the work of managing sprawl and allowing development in Ontario to proceed in a thoughtful and logical way. The amendments to the Planning Act proposed in schedule 3 risks undoing that good work."

Risks undoing that work: That's exactly why David Crombie and numerous members of the Greenbelt Council

all resigned late last year, because of what this government is doing to weaken the ability of conservation authorities to protect us. I want to quote from David Crombie's letter—who, by the way, was a Conservative federal cabinet minister. This is from his resignation letter:

"Now with the grossly expanded use of ministerial zoning orders ... and other procedural revisions, essential public discussion and debate will be stifled or shut down.

"This is not policy and institutional reform. This is high-level bombing and needs to be resisted."

Schedule 3 of Bill 257 takes that to an extreme level.

I want to finally close—well, not completely close, but I want to make a final point. Not only is schedule 3 of Bill 257 detrimental to protecting communities, protecting our environment, protecting us from flooding, but it also violates our constitutional rights. I want to quote from the Haudenosaunee Development Institute, which came to committee and talked about schedule 3 of this bill:

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"Schedule 3 purports to give the minister free licence—a seemingly constitutional free zone—for the minister to act unilaterally, ignore Haudenosaunee rights and endorse land uses that may be inimical to Haudenosaunee rights and interests. The deeming provision in schedule 3 which would make the non-application of PPS to MZOs retroactive is indicative of a provincial crown that considers itself above the law and is aware that the minister has already enacted MZOs inconsistent with the PPS and the crown's duty to engage and consult on section 35 rights." Speaker, those are Indigenous treaty rights: the duty to consult.

Chief LaRocca from the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation came to committee and made the exact same point:

"Schedule 3 of this proposed legislation shows that the province has chosen to yet again contravene its duty to uphold the honour of the crown through meaningful consultations with First Nations.

"Through its actions, the Ford government has made it unequivocally clear to us that it has no interest in respecting its constitutional duties as found in section 35. Instead, it views our concerns as something which can be disregarded and bypassed by legislation hidden in a broadband expansion bill."

Speaker, not only is this schedule 3 constitutionally questionable when it comes to the duty to consult and negotiate with First Nations, but it also violates the constitutional right of Ontarians to seek a judicial review in the planning process—their constitutional right to do that—and, according to Ecojustice, it violates the constitutional separation of powers. So I can pretty much—I can't guarantee, but I can strongly suggest that there will be constitutional challenges to schedule 3 of Bill 257—not that this government is any stranger to dealing with constitutional challenges at the Supreme Court.

I want to quote what Ecojustice has to say: "Schedule 3 of Bill 257 would replace the rule of law with the rule of the minister. It would also purport to legislate the outcome of an ongoing court case. Access to the courts is, under the

rule of law, one of the fundamental pillars protecting the rights and freedoms of our citizens.”

Speaker, what do we have with this schedule? We have a government that’s willing to take extreme and extraordinary measures to put absolute power in the hands of a minister to override decades of planning laws and rules in this province, laws and rules that were developed in consultation with numerous stakeholders, municipalities, farmers, citizens’ groups etc.; willing to take extreme measures to violate our constitutional rights; willing to take extreme measures to violate the duty to consult and the treaty rights of Indigenous peoples in this province. For what? An Amazon warehouse, maybe a few other developments; I don’t know. We’re still going through some of these other MZO’s to see what types of protections they violate.

It’s no wonder so many citizens have spoken against schedule 3 of this bill, and I want to thank each and every one of them. I want to thank the young people who came to committee—who should have been more respected—who talked about the rights of young people to have a livable future. I want to thank First Nations who came to committee and talked about not only the duty to consult, but the moral obligation we have to protect the places we love in this province, for present and future generations. And I want to thank the hundreds of people who, in the middle of a pandemic, came to a socially distant masked protest to say, “Don’t pave over our wetlands. Don’t put our homes, communities and businesses at risk.”

I ask the government, is this really the legacy you want to leave behind? This is an opportunity to say, “You know what? We’re here to defend the people of this province, to defend the places we love, to ensure that we protect our communities from the risks associated with extreme weather events caused by the climate crisis.”

I ask the members opposite to think about the legacy they want to leave behind, and when an event like Hurricane Hazel happens again and people say, “How did we allow this to happen?”, to remember the vote this day on this bill.

I ask you, before we take a final third reading vote on this bill, let’s all agree on a unanimous consent motion and let’s get rid of schedule 3, and then I’m sure you could get all of us to support expanding broadband across this province.

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

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** It’s a pleasure to speak here, as always, and good to see everybody with their green ribbons on, April being organ donation month. I just want to put in a plug in for that and I’d like to encourage everybody to go to [beadonor.ca](http://beadonor.ca) to fill out your consent form for organ donation. It’s badly needed here in the province of Ontario.

With that, it’s an honour to rise here today to add my voice to the debate on Bill 257. I’m proud to be speaking on Bill 257, introduced by my great colleague the Honourable Laurie Scott, Minister of Infrastructure.

I believe this bill will truly change the lives of Ontarians. Now more than ever, the people of Ontario who live in communities that we in this House here represent, in literally every single riding, need reliable broadband to participate and succeed in today’s digital economy. I heard this over and over again as the number one issue in meeting with mayors and councillors. In ROMA and AMO, which are the municipal conferences that we’ve had, this is the number one issue, bar none.

Speaker, through you, I’d like to ask the members of the House: Did they know that 700,000 households in our province do not have reliable access to broadband? That’s nearly 1.4 million people who can’t work or learn from home, or even connect with their loved ones. On this side of the House, that’s 1.4 million people too many.

I’m proud to say that Ontario is stepping up and we’re putting people and communities first. Our government is working on this important file and taking concrete action to bring all of Ontario, for the first time, into the digital age. In our budget, we committed an additional \$2.8 billion to help ensure that by the end of 2025 every region in this province will have access to reliable broadband. That brings our province’s total investment to a historic \$4 billion. We’re taking the bold and necessary steps to help bring access to every individual, family and business here in Ontario. Our transformative investment and approach will help ensure no one is left behind when it comes to access to broadband.

This proposed bill being debated today is necessary. Over the next decade, broadband will be one of the most important infrastructure projects in the history of this province. There are two hallmarks of proper broadband: first, reliability; and second, speed. These two essential qualities allow for effective connectivity.

In the region of Halton, there are many rural areas that do not have access to a reliable and fast Internet connection. The lack of access extends to nearby Hamilton and Waterloo regions. I could go into great detail about northern and remote areas as well as southern Ontario. I meet with communities all the time in my role, and broadband, as I mentioned, is reiterated over and over and over again.

We know, and we’ve heard from industry first-hand, that investments alone will not connect all Ontarians. In a white paper on unlocking growth in Ontario’s rural and northern communities entitled *Small Towns, Big Opportunities*, the Ontario Real Estate Association said, “The province has already bestowed substantial money that is desperately needed; its delivery to rural communities in the form of broadband connectivity should not be held up by regulatory barriers or internal financial hurdles.” The report goes on to recommend that Ontario eliminate barriers to broadband expansion and address utility pole access.

They are right by saying that this is not just about the money. They know for rural communities to succeed and to be a place where people want to live, work and raise a family, proper broadband infrastructure needs to be in place, and that means removing the unnecessary barriers

and cumbersome processes that prevent that from happening. That's why we introduced the Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act, 2021.

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During public hearings at committee meetings last week, the Canadian Communication Systems Alliance also explained why we need to reduce those barriers for companies to deploy broadband faster. CEO Jay Thomson said, "Those cost and time challenges can be enough to discourage them from undertaking worthy new network-building projects. For those reasons, CCSA's Ontario members regard Bill 257 as a hugely positive and important development. We congratulate Ontario for its initiative in recognizing the barriers that exist to rolling out new broadband networks, and for taking concrete steps to taking those barriers head-on." That's what our proposed legislation will do—it will take concrete steps to help expand and deploy broadband faster to unserved and underserved communities here in Ontario.

Mr. Thomson also explained how it can take a very long time, in some cases up to two years, to get the necessary permits to attach wireless onto poles—two years of just waiting. We know this legislation will help accelerate access to those poles and streamline processes that have delayed or discouraged broadband infrastructure development to date, so that everyone will have access to reliable broadband Internet services, no matter where they live in this great province.

I want to thank all the interested parties who took time out of their busy schedules to provide us with valuable feedback during committee. These include groups like the Canadian Communication Systems Alliance, the Canadian Gas Association, Ontario One Call, the Ontario Energy Association and the Independent Telecommunications Providers Association, to name a few.

One of the more interesting presentations that day came at the end of the day, when two university students from the Waterloo area attended and gave testimony. First, I do want to correct, Speaker, for the record—I know there was some discussion this morning about that particular discussion. I certainly want to note it on the record that the member from Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas was interfering quite often in the committee hearings, to the point where she was called out of order by the Chair for being very unparliamentary in her words and actions at that time, which disrupted the hearings, unfortunately.

Having said that, I want to commend the students for taking the time from their day—I know they work part-time and they're studying—to participate in the legislative process, and I certainly encourage them to do so. It's refreshing to see young people take an interest in the way government and the Legislature works. I want to thank them for their feedback and perspective.

Most importantly, both of those students did acknowledge the severe inequity faced by their classmates who do not have access to reliable Internet. It's not fair that some students face failing classes and not graduating simply because they can't access online learning and supportive resources they need to succeed in their studies.

We appreciate everybody who spoke at the committee, and we appreciate all the suggestions that were brought forward to improve this bill. And we were encouraged that even the members opposite have expressed their support for the overall broadband objectives of this bill.

Our ministry has also heard feedback directly from the telecommunications sectors about this bill.

Bell Canada said, "These measures by the government of Ontario will help us reach more locations in Ontario faster, bringing the benefits of next-generation connections to homes and businesses in communities throughout the province."

Rogers Communications also had some commentary: "More than ever, digital infrastructure plays a critical role in our lives and Rogers applauds the government of Ontario's efforts to support expansion of broadband services in both urban and rural and remote areas to benefit consumers and businesses in Ontario. This is an important step and we look forward to continuing to partner with them to reach additional communities across the province."

Lastly, Cogeco, which serves many communities in rural regions throughout this great province, said, "Connecting more communities in Ontario to fast, reliable broadband relies primarily on two factors: investment and the removal of barriers that limit the impact of that investment. Following the province's recent increase in broadband funding, we're delighted that the government of Ontario is now also taking steps to reduce barriers to deployment." It's evident that we all share the same goal, and that goal is very simple: to get Ontario connected to broadband faster.

There's no question that many of you in this room have heard frustrations from your own constituents about the lack of reliable broadband services. You may have also experienced these issues yourself as well. As parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Infrastructure, I certainly hear about them all the time. There's the story of the resident in the greater Sudbury area who can barely get two megabits a second from his Internet connection. He has had to rent office space for his business, commuting there every day and paying for Internet service, costing him \$12,000 per year. We heard about the family in Oliver Paipouge in northwestern Ontario and how their poor Internet connection has resulted in so much frustration that it's led the family to tears.

Meanwhile, residents in the same area have told us that as each day passes, they find themselves more and more excluded from the opportunities extended to other residents in more populated and urban areas of this province. These residents say there are families whose children cannot access lessons at home, businesses that cannot reach out to customers and people with disabilities who are isolated. A local landlord said that even with upgraded and expensive routers, connectivity is still slow, making it very difficult for the landlord's tenants to work from home.

Speaker, in this House, we've heard from members who represent all regions of this province with similar stories

of individuals, families, entire industries that are being left behind. I thank the members of this House for representing their voices when they cannot be here to tell their stories. They ask:

“When am I going to finally be able to get a decent Internet connection?”

“When will I be able to connect with my clients?”

“When will I be able to access virtual calls with a medical specialist across the country?”

“When will I be able to watch my grandchild grow up and take their first steps?”

As the Minister of Infrastructure explained, we need to properly invest in broadband and remove the unnecessary barriers that get in the way. Our province is going all in on its financial commitment. But the barriers remain.

What does it take for us to tackle those barriers? It takes action. It takes collaborative action and a collective will to move forward on deploying reliable broadband to every community that needs it. It can happen. It will happen, if we work together. That’s why I’m calling on the members opposite to vote in support of this bill so that communities can get access to broadband sooner.

Speaker, I want to take some time to address some confusion that I keep hearing, which is whether this approach will help northern or rural communities. The members opposite continue to point out that the bill does not mention the word “rural” or the word “northern.” There’s even an amendment that the opposition put forward during the committee. But let me be clear: Our government’s plan will get all of Ontario—all Ontario, from Manitoba to the north, to the Quebec border—connected by 2025, no matter where they live. That includes unserved and underserved communities in rural, northern and remote parts of this great province.

When you look at the broadband coverage map, you’ll clearly see where most of these areas are. Our track record of investment proves that we’re focused on getting these communities connected when they need it the most. For example, earlier this month we joined our partners to announce several more contracts signed in rural, remote and underserved areas in southwestern Ontario. Our combined investments will help deploy improved, modern broadband networks in Middlesex county, Perth county and Elgin county. These projects were delivered by SWIFT, the Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology project.

Our province is also gearing up to announce the first wave of projects under our \$300-million Improving Connectivity for Ontario Program, which aims to connect areas in need, especially rural and northern communities.

Earlier this year, we announced investments to improve access to reliable broadband to many northern communities. These include:

—nearly \$3 million to help install infrastructure that helps access to high-speed Internet for many households and businesses in rural Thunder Bay;

—\$4.2 million to help bring access to faster broadband to Marathon and Terrace Bay;

—\$1 million to construct a 22-kilometre fibre backbone network connecting six First Nation communities to high-speed broadband; and

—investments that were made to upgrade broadband infrastructure in Chisholm, along with networks that serve more than 80 First Nation communities.

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We’ve also invested over \$2 million for faster Internet in Oliver Paipoonge, which will address many of the concerns we have heard from residents there.

It’s very clear that we’re putting our money where our mouth is. We know that improved access to broadband will also provide our province with economic development opportunities in rural, remote and northern communities right across this province; for example, in the agricultural and agri-food sector that’s responsible for job creation, trade and for keeping our province well fed. The Minister of Agriculture said it best: “The most important thing that’s going to help the general population and our farmers is the largest expansion in our history for broadband across Ontario.” That’s something the folks in rural Ontario can celebrate.

In a survey earlier this month from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, nearly two thirds of respondents said Internet outages are causing an inability to conduct normal business activities. Farmers need to be able to use digital technology to increase productivity and remain competitive in global markets. We know that broadband access can, for example, support precision agriculture techniques, including smart sensors to measure soil conditions and tracking devices for livestock. But 57% of respondents say unreliable connectivity has meant delays in or rejection of investments in precision technology.

The OFA continues by saying, “Our sector grows job, contributes to economic productivity and produces prosperity for the province and the country. Our province cannot afford to cap the growth potential of farms, agri-businesses and our rural communities due to a lack of broadband infrastructure.”

The lack of reliable broadband hurts the productivity of thousands of farmers, and their bottom line. I’m sure the members opposite can attest to this. It hurts the livelihood of their workers, along with the regional economies and communities they feed. We need to ensure that the farms in every region of this province can compete in the 21st-century digital economy. That’s what our historic investment will help achieve, and that’s why this legislation is so critically important.

We look forward to working with the agricultural sector as we work to achieve 100% connectivity. We also look forward to working with municipalities, and we thank them for their support. We’ve received support for this bill from municipal partners in southwestern Ontario through SWIFT, whose chair said, “Expanding broadband access in Southwestern Ontario is essential to the economic recovery and long-term prosperity of our region,” and also through the Eastern Ontario Regional Network, whose chair, J. Murray Jones, warden of the county of Peterborough, said, “The government’s commitment ... has the

potential to finally bridge the digital divide and give people across Ontario the critical connectivity we need to succeed” and drive forward.

From the chair of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the mayor of Bracebridge, Graydon Smith: “The need for better rural and northern connectivity is clear. Speeding up provincially funded broadband projects will connect more people, faster. AMO looks forward to working with the province to make real improvements that benefit people and their communities.”

If we move forward together, we no longer have to just imagine the difference that universal standard broadband access can make: the difference it would make to rural and northern communities, as well as First Nations communities; the difference it would make in improving the quality of life and promoting vibrant communities; the difference it would make in access to education, training and skills development and business opportunities to help our communities compete in the global economy; the differences it would make to communities and individuals who will be able to tell their stories to the world. We will have finally bridged the digital divide.

Having better digital infrastructure will mean increased investments into those communities, and attracting new employers and residents. It will mean enhanced government services, from virtual health to better emergency services. Entire institutions will benefit, especially those in remote and fly-in communities, such as schools, airports, police stations and band offices.

In today’s day and age, being able to have a health consultation or appointment online is critically important. Many won’t have to travel long distances just to see a specialist on the other side of the province or country, because we know the last thing someone who is going through a medical crisis needs is more stress. It will also give nursing stations in the north access to more resources and emergency life-saving treatments in real time.

It will provide access to jobs that are part of the digital economy and allow many to work remotely, employing more people. Not being able to accept a job that you’re qualified for because of a slow or non-existent Internet connection is simply unacceptable; not if we want Ontario to be competitive in this increasingly digital economy.

We know many people in rural and remote and northern areas just want what those in urban areas take for granted: the same ability to watch your grandchildren take their first steps, to enjoy a movie night with the family through a streaming service on weekends, to be able to have the same educational and economic opportunities as everyone else and to be able to thrive, if only they had the tools to succeed.

As my colleague in the House Associate Minister Walker has said, for rural communities to access reliable broadband will be a game-changer. It will be a game-changer in many communities that we all represent. And there is no limit to the new opportunities that this will create for hundreds of thousands of individuals and families. We cannot and will not leave those families behind. We will continue to advocate on behalf of Ontario families

and communities so that everybody can participate in this digital economy.

Thank you for the time.

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

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** It’s a real pleasure, as always, to rise in this House to speak on behalf of my constituents in the great riding of Davenport. Today we are debating Bill 257, which is called the Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act. I want to outline, really, what this legislation does for my constituents and for others watching.

The first thing it does is that it gives the provincial government some new powers to mandate that municipalities and utility companies co-operate with broadband developers, including allowing such developers to have use of or access to required infrastructure. It also, however, includes a completely unrelated schedule that retroactively makes an unlawful minister’s zoning order lawful in order to block an ongoing lawsuit, arguably, etc. In fact, what this schedule—we’ll call it schedule 3. There’s schedules 1, 2 and 3, and schedule 3 exempts minister’s zoning orders retroactively from the requirement to be consistent with the provincial policy statement; in other words, the foundational set of planning rules for this province.

I also want to note, just as an aside, which I really appreciate the researchers in our caucus noting, that broadband infrastructure is actually federally regulated and isn’t subject to those provincial policy statements, the PPS, and so actually isn’t impacted by this piece of that legislation—in case there was any confusion.

So what is schedule 3? It’s really the poison pill of this bill. Others here today have talked quite a bit, including the previous speaker from the opposition, about some of the amendments that were suggested at committee. I want to run through those, because I think it’s really important to set the table right now for where we’re at.

In the committee—and I wasn’t on the committee, but I really appreciated our critic, in particular, sharing with me both video and a lot of the submissions that were made. I took a lot of time to go through them, because I’ve certainly received many, many, many letters to my constituency office from my community, many calls, from many people very deeply concerned about schedule 3. And I want to be clear about what we in the opposition have attempted to do here, in the official opposition, because we’ve made it clear we would support those other schedules. The issue for us is, they need to pull schedule 3. We cannot support this legislation with this completely unrelated piece included that has such a potentially devastating impact on our environment.

The government rejected attempts to remove schedule 3 from the legislation. They also rejected, and it’s also being discussed here, our attempts to include wording about northern and rural Ontario, words that are actually strangely missing from this bill. I really want to thank the member for Mushkegowuk—James Bay for his comments here a few moments ago about trying to explain to the

members opposite why that matters to people in northern and rural and, particularly, in remote communities.

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We heard here in this chamber, just yesterday or the day before, one of the members opposite actually say, “We don’t distinguish, as a government, between the north and the south; it’s all Ontario.” And I thought, “Wow. You really don’t get it.” I grew up in rural Newfoundland. I understand remote communities—not to the extent of some of my colleagues here, who work and live in very remote areas of this province. The idea that this government would deem to say that it’s all the same shows a complete lack of regard for the diversity of this province and also the very distinct issues that people in different parts of our province contend with.

I represent a riding in downtown, west-end Toronto. The reality in my riding is very, very different than the reality of many of my colleagues.

Of course, we strongly support the expansion of broadband across this province, so it’s really disappointing to see the government playing such political games in a moment like this, when we should all be rising above that, one would think, in the middle of a pandemic—to try to slip these things, this poison pill, this Trojan Horse, into this legislation. It’s deeply disappointing, I think, to many Ontarians, and I’ve certainly heard from many of them.

Before I move on to talk a bit more about schedule 3, I want to acknowledge that building broadband infrastructure is vital for our students, both in the classroom and at home. It’s important for their continuous learning and development, whether or not you agree with the government’s plan to move everybody online full-time. Just in terms of how we function today, generally, it’s a very important part of our education, and it is especially so when we look at broadband in rural areas of this province. It is important that we bridge that gap that exists between students with and without adequate access to the Internet. I wanted to make that point, because I don’t want anybody to be of the impression that we don’t support that piece of this bill. I have no trouble in my riding, or anybody I’ve spoken to—everybody gets that that’s not what this is all really about, and that what this legislation is really about is schedule 3 and what this government is trying to do there.

I want to be very clear that we believe, as New Democrats and the official opposition, that improving the economy doesn’t have to come at the expense of the environment. These two are not mutually exclusive, despite what the government seems to believe. I think that our Green New Democratic Deal is a perfect example of that, and I’ll talk a bit more about that later.

I also want to point out that there were many, many submissions on this bill from organizations like AMO, saying, “We’d like to see schedule 3 withdrawn from this, separated out.” There has been acknowledgment from all quarters that this doesn’t make sense and is actually harmful on so many levels.

I want to share with you some of the comments that I have received from folks in my community.

I’m going to read a letter from Kaitlin Chidley, who wrote to me a little while ago. She said, “I understand that you are the MPP that speaks on behalf of the Davenport area. I’m writing to you as I am very concerned with the news of what is happening with Ontario’s protected wetlands in Pickering and Bill 257.

“These past 12 months have been devastating due to the pandemic, but I know that we cannot ignore our dwindling wildlife and the climate crisis we are headed towards. I don’t normally write to the government but I was hoping to understand if you are aware or have any response to this development/Bill 257. This unprecedented legal mandate is outrageous. Scientists and epidemiologists have traced the destruction of lands/natural habitats to being a cause behind these zoologic viruses we continue to see more and more of. What will the future pandemics do to us considering how deadly COVID-19 has been? Our natural lands are a true part of Canada’s beauty but there are more long-term implications to consider here in my opinion.

“I am not in support of anything that harms our natural environment, especially given everything outlined here for your reference:

“We have lost so much this past year, I am not ready to watch our wildlife and protected lands disappear as well.”

I want to thank Kaitlin for writing to me.

I’ve received thousands of letters from people in my riding about this bill. I want the government to understand. I know, talking to my colleagues in the official opposition, we all have. This is something that has touched people in every corner of this province. They’re not buying this baloney about this all being about the broadband fees. They know the game the government is playing here and they’re very afraid.

I want to share another letter that was sent to me by Nick Keresztesi; I think that’s how you say it. Actually, he CC’d it to me. He wrote it to Minister Clark and had a few really important things I wanted to share with regard to his concerns about schedule 3. He says, “At this time, when the world is on the brink of catastrophic climate crisis, citizens rely upon government to grasp the issues and lead us forward to solutions. Time is critically short to do so. Your government’s support for developments like Duffins Creek and Highway 413 that compromise wetlands and further destroy natural ecosystems is deeply, deeply troubling. If we are to mitigate the worst impact of global warming, we are going to have to rely upon a robust natural environment, such as wetlands, as a defence to flooding.”

“The government of Ontario,” he goes on to say, “must take leadership in protecting its citizens, and our future citizens, from environmental catastrophe. If you don’t do so, who will?”

“I ask you not to create unaccountable procedures that can easily contribute to decisions which undermine the health of the province.

“I call upon you not to sneak legislation through to shield past mistakes from scrutiny.

“This is not the way to generate economic activity. Look forward! We can be a world leader in clean energy,

clean jobs; we can invest in retrofits, in elder care. The list of positive employment, investment and development opportunities is long.

“Ontario’s economy could be booming, if your government makes the right decisions.

“Schedule 3 to Bill 257 is not the right decision.”

Then he respectfully requests that you remove it from the proposed legislation.

Thank you, Nick, for that letter. It’s very powerful. I appreciate it. I hope the members opposite in the government listen very carefully to those words. I really appreciate that.

I also want to mention some of the other comments that some of my constituents have written to me with regard to their concerns about this legislation. They include the fact that, as I’ve mentioned, the climate should be the government’s top social, economic and political concern. This is not aligned with this legislation. They are concerned that allowing MZOs to override the basic planning laws of the land would concentrate far too much power in the sole discretion of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. They’re concerned that the ministry did not post a public notice of these decisions on the Environmental Registry of Ontario, even though that was common practice in the past. Somebody here called it—actually, I probably shouldn’t that. Okay, I won’t use the words that they used; I’ll use some other things: short-sighted and irresponsible; destroying the future for our children; and beneficial for the government’s largest donors but failing to consider the common good.

Madam Speaker, those are just some of the comments I have received from my constituents. It is, as I mentioned at the beginning of this, really unfortunate that the government is taking this tack.

I said this before a few times in talking about the budget and other issues in this Legislature. This moment, this pandemic surely calls on us to rise a bit above some of these games and to do something bigger and bolder, perhaps, for the province of Ontario. I think that carries forward in some of the comments that my constituents have written to me about. I wanted to mention that again because I think this is a missed opportunity.

We in the NDP, the official opposition, are going to vote against this legislation unless they remove schedule 3. We cannot support that. It’s shameful; it’s abysmal. We can’t do it. We maintain that economic development must be sustainable, that we can grow the economy and we can create new jobs without sacrificing our environment. We in the NDP will always put the environment and environmental rights at the forefront of our actions; you can be sure of that. Those commitments are clear in our Green New Democratic Deal. We are very proud of that. I refer anyone who’s watching today to that document and what we committed to there. I think you can see there the kind of bold vision and path forward that this moment really demands of us.

**1420**

I hope the government will also take some time to consider what we’ve put forward and to consider, again,

why they continue to play these games, why they continue to include these poison pills. I can assure them that the people of Ontario are very quickly losing patience.

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

**Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto:** I’m proud to rise today to speak in support Bill 257, the Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act, introduced by my friend the Minister of Infrastructure. I would like to begin by thanking her, her staff and her parliamentary assistant, the member from Oakville, for all their work on this important bill.

Speaker, in my role as parliamentary assistant to the President of the Treasury Board and now the Minister of Finance, I was honoured to co-host over 30 virtual pre-budget consultations, from Mississauga to Muskoka, to Stratford, to Stormont, throughout the month of February. I can report that the issue of broadband was raised at almost every single consultation. In fact, some of the participants, including the mayor of Caledon, had difficulty even connecting to our virtual town hall meetings.

It’s safe to say that no infrastructure project is more important to the people of Ontario than access to broadband, and as the Premier said, there is no infrastructure project that can improve people’s lives more. Up to 700,000 households across Ontario still do not have reliable access to broadband. This includes rural and northern communities—but it also includes many homes not far from urban centres like Kitchener and Peterborough, where families have struggled to work, learn and stay connected from home during COVID-19. That is unacceptable.

The federal government is responsible for broadband, and I join my colleagues in calling on them to do the right thing: to properly fund broadband service in Ontario.

But at the same time, we simply can’t wait any longer for the federal government to take action. That’s why our 2021 Ontario budget includes an historic \$2.8-billion commitment to ensure every region in the province has access to reliable broadband by 2025. This is the largest single investment in broadband in any province, by any government, in Canadian history, and it will be pivotal to our long-term economic growth.

If passed, Bill 257 would help connect communities to reliable, high-speed Internet sooner, by providing the Minister of Infrastructure with the ability to reduce barriers for provincially significant projects, including the development of broadband infrastructure. This is one of the most cost-effective ways we can drive our economic recovery and growth and help to position Ontario as a leader in the new digital economy. But it’s not the only way.

For the remainder of my time today, I’d like to focus on the proposed amendments to the Planning Act in schedule 3. If passed, these changes would ensure that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing may take other considerations into account, outside the provincial policy statement, when making ministerial zoning orders to support important government priorities.

Speaker, we know that the provincial policy statement is a very important document that governs land use planning, but we also need to ensure that other factors can be considered, especially during a crisis. This bill would ensure that there are no unnecessary delays or barriers. It will help accelerate key projects, like the expansion of Sunnybrook hospital, the construction of a made-in-Ontario PPE facility, and an important initiative by the city of Toronto to provide more outdoor dining areas.

We're also using MZOs to accelerate the construction of more long-term-care facilities, to finally fix this broken system. The previous government built only 611 long-term-care beds across the province, from 2011 to 2018. As the number of Ontarians over 75 grew by 75%, the number of long-term-care beds grew by less than 1%. As a result, our wait-list for long-term care grew to more than 37,000 people, including over 4,500 in Mississauga alone. We have 20% fewer long-term-care beds per capita than the provincial average and our wait times are 26% longer. New and renovated long-term-care facilities are very important because of the many serious limitations in our existing long-term-care homes.

I am fully committed to this important priority and I know that our government is as well. That is why I was proud that an enhanced MZO, issued on August 31 last year, will help to expedite the construction of two new long-term-care facilities at Sheridan Park, in partnership with the Trillium Health Partners, in my community of Mississauga–Lakeshore. This facility will include senior-friendly design, modern infection control standards, private or semi-private rooms, and air conditioning. The project will include 420 new long-term-care beds and 220 upgraded beds, for a total of 640 beds. Again, that is more than the previous government built for the entire province.

This project also includes the first residential hospice in Mississauga, in partnership with Heart House Hospice. Best of all, these facilities are being built through an accelerated build model. Building a project of this scale would normally take three years or longer, but it can now proceed on an accelerated schedule to be ready for the residents next year, in 2022. This will address an urgent need in our community to provide modern and safe facilities for our seniors waiting for long-term care and to relieve pressure on our hospital in Mississauga. But this simply won't be possible without an enhanced MZO.

There are similar projects under way in various stages of development to build over 3,700 long-term-care beds right across the province, in Oakville, Aurora and Vaughan, thanks to enhanced MZOs.

The minister's MZOs are also having a positive impact on affordable housing. Last year, the minister issued two MZOs in Toronto for modular supportive housing projects, and some of the most vulnerable Ontarians were living in them less than a year later. In West Don Lands, the minister issued an MZO as part of our plan to build almost 1,000 new affordable housing units on a surplus piece of provincial land. At the request of the city of Hamilton, in the Leader of the Opposition's own riding, the minister issued an MZO to accelerate the construction

of 15 new units of affordable housing to allow the city to meet its deadline to access federal funding for the project.

I want to take the opportunity to thank the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook for her hard work on this project, and I want to thank the minister for answering my question about schedule 3 last week at the Standing Committee on General Government and for clarifying a few points, which I will reiterate here today.

First, as the minister said, every single MZO that we have made on non-provincial land has been requested by the local municipality. Municipalities are in the driver's seat.

Second, these proposed changes would not apply to the lands in the greenbelt, including the protected countryside, the urban river valleys, the Niagara Escarpment Plan and the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan.

I'd like to thank the minister for clarifying that he denied nine MZOs from municipalities that were seeking to develop inside the greenbelt. That's quite a change from the previous government, which carved up the greenbelt 17 times and removed 370 hectares of land from the greenbelt. This included environmentally sensitive lands like Glen Williams in the Credit River watershed, that the Liberals carved out of the greenbelt in 2017. As I'm sure many members know, the Credit River watershed feeds into Lake Ontario at Port Credit in Mississauga–Lakeshore. So I'm proud that our government is taking a very different approach. We made a commitment to protect and expand the greenbelt for future generations and the minister will not consider any requests for an MZO for developing inside the greenbelt.

In closing, I'm confident that, if passed, Bill 257 will help us deliver the critical infrastructure that we need for broadband, long-term care and affordable housing and more complete transit-oriented communities.

#### 1430

Again, I want to thank the Minister of Infrastructure, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and their staff for all the hard work that they put into this bill. I look forward to voting in favour of this bill later on.

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

**Mr. John Vanthof:** It's always an honour to stand in the House, and today as well, to represent the people in Timiskaming–Cochrane—but today, as well, as the deputy leader of the official opposition and the critic for agriculture, food and rural affairs. My comments will be concerning the Building Broadband Faster Act and its infrastructure component.

I'd like to start by saying that, for those of us who lack adequate broadband in many parts of the province, I fully agree with many of the aspects of this bill. Schedules 1 and 2—I don't often get excited, but I was truly excited when the minister introduced this bill because I know, I've been told from people across rural Ontario that one of the impediments is access to hydro poles. This bill addresses a real issue.

Access to broadband or fibre optic or however you get your Internet, if you can get it, is an essential service.

That's why we would have supported this bill if it was only talking about broadband. The NDP put forward—it's under my name, but it's an NDP bill—the Broadband is an Essential Service Act. We believe it's an essential service and, as an essential service, should be available to everyone.

One of the members across said that the important thing about Internet is that it should be reliable, but the one he missed is that it needs to be affordable as well, because for a lot of people, the digital divide isn't availability of the service, it's the access to the service because you can't pay. So when we hear that the government wants to have everyone covered by 2025, we're on board, as long as everyone can pay for it by 2025, because if it's available and it's \$300 a month, then it's not available. That's something that's very important.

Now, for schedules 1 and 2, the official opposition put forward amendments that specifically mentioned northern and rural Ontario. We weren't trying to exclude other parts of Ontario—not at all. We, in the official opposition, before COVID-19, did a few broadband tours across the province. I come from northern Ontario, and I have no problem saying I was shocked that places very close to big metro centres, sometimes in metro centres, don't have access to adequate Internet. So we're not trying to exclude, and the rationale behind our amendments wasn't trying to exclude other parts of Ontario. Having said that, why, when the bill says that Internet projects or broadband projects of “provincial significance”—we want to know. Why we put “northern” and “rural” in is so we know that those are going to be included as projects of provincial significance, because there are lots of services in Ontario that the majority of the province and the majority of the residents think everyone has and that would be projects of provincial significance, you would think, and they're not.

So you would think that everyone in this province—and I'm talking about in populated parts of this province. There are remote parts of this province where few people live, but there are populated parts of this province—sparsely populated, but populated—towns and villages that don't have 911. And do you know where they are? Northern Ontario.

Now, you would think that 911 would be something of provincial significance. A lot of people now are actually selling their homes and properties in this area and moving to my area. They are quite surprised that they don't have Internet, but some of them are going to be more surprised on their first accident when they don't have 911. You'd think that would be of provincial significance.

Our highway system: The Trans-Canada Highway is four-lane across the country. Do you know where it isn't four-lane? Northeastern Ontario. Again, you would think that that would be of provincial significance.

Forgive us for being touchy on the provincial significance part. When we hear, “Oh, trust us. We have got you covered. Everybody is going to have broadband because we have said that it's of provincial significance,” but “No, we don't want to mention ‘northern’ or ‘rural.’ Trust us,” we say, “Okay, so where's our 911? We trusted you on

that one, too.” Forgive us for having a chip on our shoulder on that one.

We don't want to exclude anyone. We firmly believe that everyone in this province needs access to broadband, affordable and reliable and fast enough to actually be able to function in our modern society. But we know in northern Ontario we're always the last mile. We're the last mile, and the last mile never gets service.

At the committee, some of the Internet providers who came, who represented smaller companies—two of them said a phrase that I had never heard before, and it's been sticking in my heart for a while. In many areas, when you think about providing Internet, you measure customers per pole: how many customers you can get on a hydro pole, how much money you can make. In our part of the world, it's how many poles per customer. When you're talking multiple poles per customer, you know that there's not much money to be made servicing that customer. Overall, that customer will provide income and economic activity to the province, but not to the Internet company.

That's why the last mile never gets service, despite all the promises. Because if promises to northern Ontario came through, we would have 911 and we would have a four-lane Trans-Canada Highway. And The people who drive transport trucks from here, many who come from southern Ontario, wouldn't be scared to death to drive on Highway 11, and the people who live on Highway 11 wouldn't be scared to death to be with those transports. You'd think that would be of provincial significance.

If we're going to provide something that is an essential service, the fact that the government didn't want to talk about northern or rural—“Oh, no. We've got it covered. We've got rural members, and the minister.” I have very good relations with most of the ministers. Actually, the Minister of Infrastructure is one of my favourite ministers, and that's saying a lot, because I'm related to one. She is one of my favourite ministers, and when she was walking out this morning, I said, “Laurie, I'm afraid I'm not going to be able to vote for your bill, and I'm going to get to why not.” She says, “Look, that's okay. I will connect you anyway.” I said, “I will hold you to that.”

**1440**

But despite the minister and I having a great relationship, the fact that it's not in the legislation—if I'm not here or the minister is not here or something else happens, and we're not of provincial significance to whoever is sitting in those chairs, it's going to be just like 911, just like Highway 11. And that's why.

We did support 1 and 2 in committee, and if schedule 3 wasn't in it, we would vote for this bill, despite the fact that you wouldn't accept northern and rural, because we are very, very in favour of providing broadband to everybody. But we've heard the promise so many times before, so many times: “Trust us. We've got it covered. Don't worry. No, no, we don't need to mention rural.”

Before I switch gears to schedule 3, I'll give you another example. This government passed legislation—which I also voted against and was chastised for—regarding bringing natural gas to rural and northern Ontario.

Member after member on the other side talked about northern and rural, and we asked, “Okay, why isn’t it in the bill?” “Oh, no, trust us. We’re making a fund, and that’s going to help where it doesn’t pay otherwise.”

We were worried and said, “Wait a second. But that fund might be used for servicing new builds and subdivisions. That fund might be used for that instead of going to northern and rural,” because it doesn’t stop it from doing that in the bill. Quite frankly, if I was an investor in a gas company, I wouldn’t want to be putting lines out in the middle of where I live, because there’s not that much money in it.

Every member who spoke on that side talked about northern and rural, but it wasn’t in the bill, and we’re hearing this all over again.

**Mr. Kaleed Rasheed:** John, trust us.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** “Trust us,” he says. I have great relations with most of you, but we’ve heard that so many times before.

I drive home on those highways. My wife is on those highways when she drives to work, and our families. Before I switch to schedule 3, that stat that I brought up a while ago, I think in the last session: If your car is registered in the district of Timiskaming and you get in an accident, it’s four times as likely to be fatal than anywhere else in the province. So we don’t have a lot of fender-benders. “Trust us, trust us.”

We support schedules 1 and 2. We wish that there would be northern and rural in it. Quite frankly, no, we don’t trust Queen’s Park when it comes to servicing—and it’s not a partisan thing. We have seen this over and over. Except for that, this bill would have been great to support. The member across I overheard—he said that he doesn’t even trust himself. I trust a party that has a lot of northern people in it to push like crazy.

This bill would have been easy to support. When I first read it and when the Minister of Infrastructure introduced it into the House—I hadn’t read it yet because we weren’t given advance notice, but she introduced it and she made a ministerial statement. I happened to be sitting here, because we didn’t have advance notice, and I responded to it very favourably. We are going to be favourable to broadband infrastructure for rural Ontario. I’m a farmer. I have kids. I know how important it is.

But then you turn to schedule 3. Schedule 3 has nothing to do with broadband infrastructure—zero. Schedule 3 has got to do, basically, with the provincial policy statement, which basically regulates planning in Ontario.

We have a pretty strong planning structure in this province. It was really pushed when, in the 1950s, we got Hurricane Hazel. We got massive flooding and we thought, “Oh, this isn’t good. We’re a pretty advanced people. We’re not going to let that happen again.” So we have the provincial policy framework. Basically, if you want to build something or if you want to protect your groundwater, you want to protect your surface water, you certainly want to make sure that your surface water doesn’t end up flooding not only basements but streets, as happened in Hurricane Hazel, drowning people. We have

the capability. That’s what the provincial policy framework does.

It’s a complicated process developed over many years. It’s there to protect not only infrastructure but to protect people and to protect future generations, to protect not only our physical survival but our economic survival so that we don’t waste our resources, so that we use and we enjoy the beauty and the resources that we’re given and that we don’t waste them, so other generations past us have the ability to use them as well and to benefit from them and not to abuse them, so they’re there.

So we have the provincial policy statement. Part of that process is the ministerial zoning order. We’re not opposed to ministerial zoning orders. There is a place for ministerial zoning orders. In Elliot Lake—a few people mentioned it was a grocery store. It wasn’t a grocery store. It was a mall. People died when that building collapsed. An MZO was used there to help the process along.

There are examples of other MZOs. MZOs have a purpose if it’s a project that needs to be done. But MZOs still have to follow the provincial policy statement. The provincial policy statement is the floor. You can do better than the provincial policy statement, but you can’t go worse.

The member from Oshawa always uses this example, and I really like it. There’s all kinds of building going on. Right now, I pity people who are building because building materials are very expensive. But the building code is the base. So if you build something to code, that’s the base. And if you see a house that says it’s custom-built for the contractor himself, you’re thinking, “That’s built above code. That’s better.” Right? The provincial policy statement is like that. That’s the base. You don’t want to go below that. An MZO can be issued, but it can’t go below the provincial policy statement. There is a place for MZOs. What schedule 3 does—it says that we don’t have to look at the provincial policy statement. If the minister decides, for whatever reason, you could ignore the provincial policy statement—actually, what it really says is that the minister has already done that a couple of times, and it was illegal, so you can ignore the provincial policy statement retroactively. That’s what schedule 3 says.

#### 1450

If schedule 3 was about speeding limits: The speed limit is 100 and you get pulled over. You’re doing 120, but you call the minister and the minister says, “No, no. I deem that there was no speed limit there, so you’re free to go.” That’s what this is for provincial planning and that’s why it’s so dangerous.

The members across have given good examples of where MZOs have been used. We needed a long-term care—I challenge whether there was no place to build long-term care but on some place that was below the provincial policy statement. If you think about it, if you’re going to build something below the planning and you do get a catastrophe—I’m not sure how happy people are going to be when your project, which you just finished building or which you built 20 years ago, starts flooding.

The members across are going, “No, no. That won’t happen.” There are a few things I know about. I’m a farmer; I don’t pretend to be an engineer, but I’m going to explain something to you. As a farmer in my former life, I was a bit guilty of this. Before I start quoting other farmers, I’m going to quote myself. When you have a field and it’s got a little gully in it—and it’s much easier if the field is square—you pull back the topsoil, you put in fill and you close that gully.

*Interjection.*

**Mr. John Vanthof:** You know exactly what I’m talking about—yup, thumbs up.

You know what? That gully never goes away. Even though you can’t see it, the water still goes there, and that part of the field is always wetter. So if you’re going to do the same thing with wetlands, you’re going to have the same problem. And if that’s not the case, then why did we have major flooding problems in Toronto, even with the provincial policy statement?

You’re taking the bare minimum and saying, “You know what? If the minister decides, it doesn’t even matter, about the bare minimum.” I’m shocked that that is truly the legacy that you want to leave: the bare minimum, less than the bare minimum. We have the capacity to plan correctly. We have the capacity to develop our resources, to maintain our natural resources, to do it right and to create jobs, yet schedule 3 shows that you’re satisfied with cutting corners and leaving the problems to future generations. That’s what schedule 3 says.

Now, if it was just me, you could discount me, and I’m sure that the government is going to try to discount the official opposition; that’s kind of the way this game works. The government is going to spend all their time talking about the broadband part and not much time talking about the MZO part. A few of the members across have talked about MZOs. I commend them for it. Not one of them talked about how the bill actually takes the provincial policy statement part out. Not one of them said that, but that’s what it does.

I don’t often have actual paperwork where I quote people, but I’m going to this time. If it was just me, you could discount it, but it’s not just me.

One other thing that I would be remiss if I didn’t say: this bill—two parts are not only acceptable, but are as good a policy as we can expect from this government. About the third part, in political terms, they’re putting a poison pill in it. You are going to see—and I know this, I’m from rural Ontario—that, “Oh, my, the NDP does not support rural Ontario because they are opposed to this broadband bill. They don’t know what they’re talking about.” I can see them, for political purposes, trying to do that to another political party.

What I don’t understand is why you’re doing it to people who tend to support you and people who you try to work with. For one, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture—pretty supportive of the government’s policies, I would say, and a very relevant farm organization; not just relevant, the biggest one in Ontario. Very well respected. They are very supportive of

schedules 1 and 2, because no one has lobbied harder than the OFA to get broadband infrastructure into rural Ontario, bar none. They’ve done a fantastic job at it. They’ve pushed us all very hard. I’m sure they’re very happy with schedules 1 and 2.

But schedule 3—they’re not that happy with it, because when you ignore the provincial policy statement, you’re also endangering farmland, because farmland is also very important. If the minister of the day says, “Well, you know what? We’ve got lots of farmland someplace else; this 160 acres, we need this one, and we need this one, and we need this one.” That happens now already because we lose 175 acres a day of farmland, class 1, 2 and 3, on average—now, with the provincial policy statement. That’s not enough for this group.

Quoting the OFA:

“It is our view that since the language in subsection 3(5)(a)” of the Planning Act “was strengthened to include the words ‘shall be consistent with,’ the subsequent requirement of local planning authorities to follow” the provincial policy statement “mandate have really begun the work of managing sprawl and allowing development in Ontario to proceed in a thoughtful and logical way.” So the provincial policy statement is actually making steps to look at managing sprawl and look at saving farmland, but the amendments to the Planning Act proposed in schedule 3 “risks undoing that good work.”

“The OFA is” therefore “unable to support amendments to the Planning Act that would give the minister or any other planning authority the ability to make planning decisions which are not consistent with the provincial policy statement.”

“We therefore respectfully request that the government remove schedule 3 of Bill 257”—something that we fully agree with.

If the government wants to have a discussion about land planning and wants to look at the provincial policy statement and wants to have a robust debate about how to improve it or how to make better use of our resources, please, bring it forward. Don’t try and hide it in something else, because that’s what you’re doing. You’re hiding it.

I said in a previous—I can’t remember exactly what I said, so I’ll just say again. When this government was elected, people said, “Well, you know what, Premier Ford? He’s no Bill Davis, because Bill Davis was a great conciliator and that’s why there was a Tory government for 40 years.” I submit that the Ford government is also not Mike Harris, because at least Mike Harris didn’t hide. If Mike Harris was coming for your land or Mike Harris was coming for your job, he told you. This bill is coming for your land, and says that it’s all about jobs, but it’s not about long-term planning, it’s not about long-term jobs, and it’s certainly not about protecting the resources that make this province great, like farmland.

**1500**

The OFA isn’t the only farm organization; the National Farmers Union and the Christian Farmers Federation have come out and said the same thing: Schedule 3 shouldn’t be in this bill.

We've said the same thing. I can see you not wanting to listen to us. That's the way this place works. I really appreciate that you're listening to me today. But I understand that despite the great ideas we give you guys sometimes, you don't want to accept.

Many of you are rural members and claim to represent the farmers of this province, yet you're putting them in a terrible position. No one understands better than farmers how important it is to protect farmland, but you're saying, "No, the minister knows better. We don't need to follow the provincial policy framework."

Another group, Ecojustice, came to the committee. I know this from personal experience: Although farmers are stewards of the land and environmental groups are stewards of the environment, they often don't get along, because they have different visions of how—it's not that they don't personally get along, but often their goals aren't the same. The brief from Ecojustice says the same thing—that subsection 3 should be removed because the government is, basically, retroactively trying to get around the law, the provincial policy statement.

You're trying to skirt the law. The problem with that is, when you're gone but the projects that have skirted the law—the people who own those projects or the people around those projects or the people whose homes and businesses are flooded because you skirted the law for short-term gain are going to be left holding the bag. That is the biggest issue.

On the first day of the committee, one thing that really caught my attention was when the Minister of Municipal Affairs said—and many members across have said it, too—that they're only going to use MZOs if the municipality requests it. And one of the members said it here today—the municipality is in the driver's seat, and when the minister gets the request, then they do due diligence before the request is granted.

My question is, if you're removing the need to apply the provincial policy statement, what exactly is the definition of due diligence? If groups who are opposed no longer have any right to go to court to make sure the minister has done his due diligence, what is your term of "due diligence"? Due diligence is pretty important. I would like one of the members across to explain that to me. I would like the Minister of Municipal Affairs to explain that to me.

When you have schedule 3 basically saying that the laws don't apply retroactively— "Things we've done in the past may be illegal, but now we're going to change the law so they're not illegal anymore, but we've done our due diligence." No. That doesn't make sense. It really doesn't.

Again, you don't have to listen to me, but do you know deep down somebody who eventually is going to be listening? The investors in those projects and the insurance people for those projects are going to start wondering, "Wait a second. If the government's not doing due diligence to make sure these projects are built in the right places and that their construction is not going to impact others, are they worth the risk of investing in or insuring?" Think about that when you're doing these shortcuts. Not only are they not worth the risk of the public outcry, à la

Amazon, but the damages are caused. If the government doesn't have to obey any kind of planning authority, then who is protected?

I will go back again to the building code. I used to be a councillor in a little township, and we had a building inspector. The building inspector came to inspect houses as they were being built. And do you know what? Sometimes the person building the house didn't like the building inspector, because sometimes the building inspector makes you do things differently. But do you know who really likes the building inspector? The person who buys the house a few years down the road, because that person knows that the house was at least built to code, because it was inspected, because there was a law that they had to follow.

You'd think with planning that would be equally important, yet this government is taking that away. The provincial policy statement is the building code for the environment and the infrastructure of the province, and the government is saying, "If we feel like it, it doesn't apply." It doesn't apply. "And do you know what? The people who have to deal with that 20 years down the road, it sucks to be you." That's what you're saying. That's what you're saying to the people of Ontario. You know that. The members across know that, and I think the minister knows it too. That's why this is in an independent piece of legislation. That's why this piece of legislation, schedule 3, is hidden behind schedules 1 and 2, which are about broadband, which everyone wants.

Do you know what? I just thought of this. Sometimes my speeches aren't very coherent, Speaker. I've got another great example. When you were on this side, and the budget where the Liberals sold off Hydro One—that budget is the budget that introduced beer into grocery stores. You guys had a beer budget too, but the Liberals were first with the beer budget. So the Liberals went, "Beer in grocery stores—oh, and we're selling off Hydro One, but beer in grocery stores, beer in grocery stores." You're doing the same thing: "Broadband, broadband, broadband, but, well, we're kind of breaking the law here, but broadband, broadband." You're doing exactly the same thing. I don't understand; if it's such a good idea to ignore the provincial policy statement, be proud of it. Own it. No, don't hide behind it.

*Interjection.*

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

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Something else that really struck me at the committee: The First Nations came to the committee, specifically, the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, Chief Kelly LaRocca. She made a very good presentation about how the government has the duty to consult with the First Nations before they proceed with a project. They weren't consulted. The province had downloaded the consultation also down to the municipality. Well, that's not how it works. It's not the municipality's job to consult.

**1510**

But what struck me most at that committee meeting was we had a First Nations chief making a very respectful

presentation about how they weren't consulted, how they weren't acknowledged—in the current day, with a law that impacts them on their land, and they're saying they weren't consulted—and after that, a land acknowledgement was done. I don't know if it struck anybody else, but it drove me crazy. I've got nothing against land acknowledgements, but how about we acknowledge what's going on now? Because they're not being consulted now and they have a stake in this. It's actually their land. They were here first. And yet they got quite a bit of runaround, I would say, Speaker. But the land acknowledgement after the fact, when they were there saying that they weren't being acknowledged—that just drove me crazy. That's like—backing up a second, this is much worse. Not acknowledging the First Nations—I don't know how to describe it, but it's the same as “Trust us” in northern Ontario. “Trust us, we will get to you.”

The First Nations signed treaties—“Trust us” treaties—and they're still waiting for clean water. “Trust us. We can build a road to get resources, but we can't build clean-water plants and make them function. But we're happy to take your resources. We're happy to consult about your resources, but we're not that interested in actually providing what we promised in exchange for using what rightfully belongs to you.”

I have covered, I think, that the provincial policy statement is the building code for the province. We haven't done that well, even with the building code. We've lost 75% of our wetlands. Our flooding costs are likely going to triple by 2030. We've seen the flooding damage that can happen, specifically here in Toronto, and yet the government is saying, “Nah, trust us. We don't need rules. We need to build this and this and this. Trust us, we know what we're doing.” Trust us like a fly-by-night carpenter: “You know what? You just pay me cash and I'll build it at night and nobody will notice.” The next person who buys that addition on that house or that garage pays for it very dearly. That is what's happening here.

As I was listening to the committee, I was struck by—I'm going to get a bit personal here. Years ago—although I've never been an active member of the Conservative Party, but I was always a Conservative supporter at heart, for years—I happened to end up on a public liaison committee for the Adams mine landfill. I wasn't opposed, but there were some things that weren't being done correctly.

I called up somebody I knew: the Minister of Agriculture. The process wasn't done, and he gave me some very good advice. He was completely honest with me, and I respect that—and I respect him; I always have and I always will. He gave me some very honest, specific advice. He said, “John, the decision has already been made. Find something better to do with your time.” And I did: I stopped that project and stopped being a Conservative. I still get along with my uncle—maybe not after today—but that impacted me greatly.

Another statement that has impacted me as greatly is when I asked the Minister of Natural Resources in this House how—basically, the question was, I can understand

you're trying to wedge us, but why are you trying to wedge the people who support you in many ways? Farmers and—because they know this isn't a good idea; they know schedule 3 isn't a good idea. The minister—and look it up in the Hansard, look it up on video; I'd try to imitate him, but I can't because I'm missing one thumb, so I can't tear a paper—he tore schedule 3 out of the bill and says, “Just pretend it's not there.” That's what he said in this House. The man responsible for signing off on the flood control plans of this province told me, “Just pretend it's not there.”

Now, he was being a bit theatrical and a bit flippant, but he is the man who signs off on the flood control plan. The longer I think about it, that is actually the policy on schedule 3: You're all, deep down, saying, “Just pretend it's not there,” because the damage won't be done for a few years. “Broadband, broadband, broadband,” and, “Just pretend this is not there.” I think the minister was being more truthful than anybody else, and I respect him, too. He cemented the fact that I'm not a Conservative.

But that's a big problem. You can't just pretend stuff is not there, especially when you are, for lack of a better word, fooling around with people's futures and with the economy's future. You guys are all about the economy. Actually, you're all about the economy now; you're not so much about the economy in future generations, because it's, “Trust us.” Well, it's not just, “Trust us,” or, “Pretend it's not there.” We have laws to protect our resources, to make sure that we can create jobs and people can feel safe with their investments in their homes and that our natural resources are protected. We have a legal framework for that. It's called the provincial policy statement, and in schedule 3 of this bill, you are saying, “But it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. The laws don't matter. The minister can make the final decision.” That sets an incredibly bad precedent—not the first one. You've done it with long-term-care homes, you do it continually. But with this one, you're hiding behind something that rural Ontario wants. You're forcing this on them, and they all know it's wrong.

Getting back to Adams mine and how these are similar, in the 15 years that I fought that—I represented the farmers and we were slow to the table. The environmentalists were there, the First Nations were there. We didn't get along, but our common enemy united us.

What you should be worried about is that you are taking people who don't get along and you're making yourself the common enemy. You don't think so yet, but there are less and less people trusting you—less and less. And deep down, I don't think you trust yourselves, because if you trusted yourselves, you would all be standing up and saying how it's so great that we are bypassing the laws of this province. Because that's what you're doing. We can create laws going in the future, but what you're doing is saying, “The laws we have now don't matter, because we are changing them retroactively.” That's what you're doing. You're changing them retroactively. And do you know what? You're going to end up in court. A few of us were joking one time not too long ago that soon at the Supreme Court there's going to be, “Oh, man, the Ontario

file again?" You are going to be known as continually trying to break the laws of this land and continually losing. Is that the legacy you really want?

**1520**

Take out schedule 3. We'll all move forward together on broadband. You'll get accolades.

You're not poisoning the bill for us; you're poisoning the bill for yourselves. If you think that this is just going to go away easy, you're wrong. Let's build Ontario with strong environmental laws, protect people from flooding and take out schedule 3.

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

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** Madam Speaker, imagine for a moment your son or your daughter is getting married, but you're not able to livestream the wedding, or maybe your loved one is dying, and you're not able to attend the funeral online. Imagine landing an interview for your dream job but then not being able to fully hear the interview questions simply because your Internet connection is too slow and not reliable. For many women and men living in northern Ontario and pockets throughout the province, this isn't something that they have to imagine; it has been their lived reality for far too long. This is why I rise today to ask every member of this chamber to join me to support Bill 257, the Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act, 2021.

Fast and reliable Internet is something many of us in this chamber take for granted. Online and virtual meetings define so much of our current reality. From digital committee meetings to livestreaming family events, every member of this chamber relies on a strong Internet connection. We rely on it for our work, our homes and personal lives. In a world where physical distancing and staying home are essential to saving lives, a strong Internet connection that is fast and reliable is of utmost importance to a vibrant life.

It is therefore genuinely heartbreaking that after 15 years of the Liberal government in Ontario, so many people lack access to a fast and reliable Internet connection. While the global economy has come to rely on high-speed Internet, the Liberal government allowed a digital divide to emerge in Ontario. As many as 700,000 households and businesses in Ontario lack access to adequate broadband speeds or have no Internet connection at all.

Our proposed measures in Bill 257 would help communities in the north and throughout Ontario connect to reliable broadband sooner so people can work from home, learn online, connect with family and access vital services.

While the global economy increasingly relies on digital meetings and high-speed Internet, we cannot afford to have people in this province struggling to log on.

Broadband development will enable people to fully participate and compete in the global economy. This was the case before the pandemic, and it is even more so today. The pandemic has created a global economic crisis where whoever can bounce back fastest will be more successful.

Our government has worked tirelessly to develop broadband throughout the province even before the

pandemic. I am grateful for the foresight and insight our government has demonstrated in this, and leading in this.

We have invested in initiatives to improve connectivity across every part of Ontario, in regions that are lacking broadband access.

On November 4, 2020, our government announced a historic investment of almost \$1 billion to improve broadband and cellular services, which is an additional \$680 million on top of what we have previously committed.

These are necessary investments and amendments to enable people throughout Ontario to fully participate in the job market and the global economy.

I am shocked that the opposition parties insist on doing more studies before establishing access to stronger and faster Internet. If this was their Internet connection at stake, if this was their job interview that they were trying to log onto, if this was their friend's wedding or their loved one's funeral that they were trying to livestream, would they demand study after study? If further studies are required for the members opposite to understand the urgency of this situation, then they clearly don't understand the people they were elected to serve. The opposition is demonstrating just how unplugged and disconnected they are from everyday Ontarians.

While the opposition parties want more studies, we need to understand that we have no time. We cannot delay.

The opposition's main concern is that Bill 257 proposes to amend the Planning Act to provide the minister's zoning orders. Bill 257 clearly states that it will only apply where it is requested by the municipalities. This means that the Planning Act requested by the local municipalities, it will be amended by the local municipalities—it's only unless they request it for this provision. Even after they've requested it, we still do our due diligence to make sure that this is what we should be doing—and we have rejected some of those that have come through for the request.

The Green Party expressed their concern for how strengthening access to broadband will impact wetlands and protection of the green area. Our government is committed to expanding the greenbelt and will not touch it. There is, therefore, no substantive reason here to object to this legislation.

This legislation proposes to reduce costs and would provide timely access. It helps people in the north and throughout Ontario have faster, more reliable and more affordable Internet.

**1530**

Bill 257 will help connect more communities to reliable high-speed Internet sooner. This is why the president of the Association Of Municipalities of Ontario, Graydon Smith, noted the significant urgency of this legislation when he stated, "The need for better rural and northern connectivity is clear. Speeding up provincially funded broadband projects will connect more people, faster. AMO looks forward to working with the province to make real improvements that benefit people and their communities."

Mr. Speaker, I have had the privilege of meeting with mayors from across Ontario and listening to them. They

expressed the concern that they have, especially when young people will have to leave town because they cannot find a job where they are, mainly because the digital economy is not there. Losing many young people is having a brutal impact on the region. It is both financially impactful to them and interpersonally not benefiting them at all. If members listen to the anguish expressed by those living in these regions, they will sense just how time-sensitive this legislation is.

In Bill 257, members of the chamber have an opportunity to work together to help Ontario stay connected and competitive. This is not just an opportunity, Mr. Speaker; this is our responsibility as public servants. I urge my honourable colleagues to take this seriously and join me and my colleagues in supporting broadband infrastructure in Ontario. Please join me in supporting Bill 257.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield):** Further debate?

**Mr. Sheref Sabawy:** I would like to say at the beginning of my speech that I am biased. I am biased toward this bill. As an IT professor with 36 years of experience in technology and networking, I am biased toward this bill because I think this is the best thing a government could do for Ontarians.

Let me begin by emphasizing the fact that this government, under the leadership of our Premier, Doug Ford, and the Minister of Infrastructure, Laurie Scott, have made it very clear that infrastructure is a marquee part of our mandate. Since coming into office, our government has invested more than \$45 billion in infrastructure and we are planning to invest another \$143 billion in the next decade, through transit, highways, upgraded schools, new and upgraded hospitals, and new and upgraded community centres, including very strategic investments in broadband connectivity.

Now, one might ask, why should we invest in broadband? All of us here attended the AMO meetings and the ROMA meetings, and at both conferences everybody spoke about broadband, how broadband availability will open doors for them. It has allowed Ontarians to work from the safety of their own homes, removing the need to risk their lives while still being able to provide for their families. Thus we have been able to contribute to Ontario's vast, diverse economy, placing it on the path to recovery.

Speaking of the economy and how vital it is to our well-being, broadband infrastructure has allowed commercial activities to continue through online stores which cater to our every need.

Through the leadership of this government, we announced in June 2020 that we are helping small business reach more customers through the Digital Main Street platform. That's a \$57-million program which will help up to 22,900 Ontario businesses create and enhance their online presence—and I would like to use the word "presence." In technology, we always talk about point of presence, being on the network, accessing the network, being able to be recognized as a point on the network, connected to the network. We also generate jobs for more than 1,400 students through this program.

Of course, our needs are diverse and greater than just commercial goods. To that end, broadband infrastructure has also allowed us to order food from the safety of our homes, ensuring that we support local businesses and Ontario's vast catering industry.

And as I stand here, Mr. Speaker, let's not forget how broadband has allowed the functioning of this very government and this very Legislature, allowing us to protect Ontarians and ensure that we serve the people—not only us, but many municipalities, and the federal government too. We did not stop the Parliament, our committees or any of this Legislature's procedures. We adapted, and speaking with many of the legislative staff here—who work very hard, and I thank them for all that they do for us—"We actually achieved more working online than in person," to quote one of the staff members.

But it's not only that, Mr. Speaker. As we plan for the future, we can't forget the importance of Ontario's youth. Broadband infrastructure has proven critical in the continuing remote and virtual education for Ontario's youth. Children and students have been able to continue learning, growing and advancing, even when schools and universities had to be closed to prevent the spread of COVID-19. We stood up to the challenge, and we adapted quickly to the current situation, tackling every concern or issue across the whole province, as we continue to do to date.

Today, as many as 700,000 households across Ontario lack access to reliable broadband. That's hundreds of thousands of people who are unable to work, provide for their families, learn or connect remotely from home. Our Ontarians are struggling to access vital resources or simply connect with loved ones during these difficult times. This doesn't even include the small businesses across Ontario who are struggling to connect with their customers because they don't have reliable broadband connections.

How can we, Mr. Speaker, be at the forefront of technology or finance and other sectors when we leave these Ontarians behind? This is simply not acceptable. That's why we are proposing these bold changes through this legislation: to expand access to broadband infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, why do governments build highways? Why do they build roads? It is to connect people to services, to expand development in areas that are underdeveloped, to make it easier for residents in those areas and developers and builders to go into those spaces and build new communities. The expansion of broadband in Ontario is the same principle as building highways: It connects disconnected areas and people. Broadband connects everyone to the world.

In today's day and age, access to reliable Internet is a requirement for the growth of communities, and will help open up all of Ontario for business development and more opportunities. Broadband infrastructure will bring significant opportunities to every corner in Ontario. This decisive action will get unserved and underserved communities connected faster.

**1540**

This also ties in perfectly with our vision to expand digital government. We want to ensure that all government

services such as ordering car plates for your car or renewing your licence are available online. This vision can only be completed if all Ontario has access to reliable broadband. How many times do we need to download an application or apply through a portal on the Internet? This is to make it easier for Ontarians to access basic services and increase their quality of life.

Through this legislation, our government will work with our partners in communities across Ontario to help pave the way to build infrastructure faster, in more cost-effective ways. We are committed to collaborating with our municipal service providers and private partners to help accelerate project delivery times so it can benefit all individuals, families and workers faster. It would also send a clear signal that Ontario is committed to expanding broadband connectivity to all communities in Ontario. It will also help make Ontario more competitive, while boosting our long-term economic recovery.

With our immigration and growth of population, the infrastructure and broadband is a greater motivation to expand the development in rural Ontario. Speaker, you can get a bigger and more affordable house on the outskirts of crowded, expensive urban cities, but you need to be able to access services and access some way of working remotely.

This pandemic proved that connectivity is the future. We enjoyed it and we are taking it for granted. We shop and order food online. We file our taxes and access government services online. We access education, schools, colleges, university, libraries and research, and do-it-yourself projects online. We work, search for jobs, conduct meetings, and sell and buy things online. We do our banking and access stock markets online. We listen to music, watch TV and the news, visit museums, attend events and virtual performances—or, at bare minimum, have a family movie night and watch a new movie—all online. We meet our family and friends who we can't visit in person online. We get medical care, remote telehealth and access our diagnostic results online. We pray and attend our worship services virtually online. We need to give this access to all Ontarians.

As we help businesses to build applications and services online, our role is to build that pipe that is the broadband infrastructure to deliver those services. I don't think that anyone from the opposition does not want this list of services for their constituents. All Ontarians should have their fair share of access to these resources, services and better style of living, and also advancing the growth of businesses as well.

I'm urging all members of the House, especially the opposition, to support the growth and prosperity of Ontarians of all ages and walks of life through this bill, the Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act.

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

**Mr. Billy Pang:** I'm glad to have the opportunity to rise in the House today to speak on Bill 257. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted families and businesses in many ways. To help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and the impact this deadly virus can have towards our loved ones,

Ontarians, including many sitting here in the House, have shifted their activities online.

Internet and broadband have become important in our everyday affairs. In many communities, we are fortunate to have fast broadband speed and able to access the Internet at the touch of our fingertips. But this is not the reality for all families and communities across the province. In fact, as many as 700,000 households and businesses in Ontario lack access to adequate broadband speeds or have no Internet connection at all. Now more than ever, people across Ontario need reliable broadband to work, learn and connect with friends and family. This bill will support just that, Madam Speaker.

As the province recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, as a government we are taking action to strengthen communities while laying the foundation for future growth, renewal and the long economic recovery. The Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act consists of measures that would help accelerate the deployment of broadband infrastructure in our province. If passed, the legislation will enact the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021. This would expedite the delivery of provincially significant broadband priority projects. This would be achieved by removing barriers and streamlining infrastructure-related processes while enhancing coordination and engagement with public and private sector stakeholders.

As part of the proposed act, if passed, the Minister of Infrastructure would also have the authority to reduce barriers on provincially significant projects, including:

- ensuring municipalities and utility companies provide timely access to their infrastructure, including municipal rights-of-way and hydro utility poles, when appropriate;

- supporting an approach to reduce the time it takes to prepare electricity infrastructure such as hydro utility poles for a few wire line attachments for provincially significant projects; and

- ensuring owners of underground infrastructure provide locations of their infrastructure within 10 business days for specific broadband projects prior to a dig through the Ontario One Call system. This would allow Internet service providers to more quickly start working on laying down underground broadband infrastructure.

The Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act would also amend the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998. This would provide the Ontario government with regulation-making authority regarding the development of access to or use of electricity infrastructure for non-electricity purposes, which will include:

- reducing or fixing the annual rental charge that the telecommunication service providers must pay to attach their wireless to hydro utility poles;

- establishing performance standards and timelines for how utility companies must respond to attachment requests;

- requiring utility companies to reconsider possible joint use of hydro utility poles during their planning process; and

—transparency around when and where hydro utility poles are scheduled for replacement or refurbishment.

This would help to save time and money in the future, as telecommunication service providers seek to enter new communities.

**1550**

To speed up broadband deployment, reduce delays and shorten the time it takes from getting permits to getting complete works, this act would also allow the development and implementation of a one-touch, make-ready model to allow for a streamlined approach for broadband deployment while increasing certainty and predictability during that process. This model would refer to proposed requirements for owners of utility poles to allow a single contractor or construction crew to make changes to multiple utility wires, all guided to ensure it's done in an efficient and timely manner.

Madam Speaker, broadband connectivity is fundamental to Ontario's economic recovery and the shift to the future digital economy. As a government, we recognize the importance of removing these barriers so that more Ontarians, most importantly, people in underserved or unserved broadband areas of the province, mostly in rural, remote and northern communities, would benefit from quicker access to improved broadband service.

To be clear, telecommunications and broadband are a federally regulated sector. As our government continues to call on the federal government to step up to the plate and properly fund broadband in Ontario, we recognize the importance of bridging the digital divide. That is why, instead of waiting for the federal government to respond, our government has taken real and concrete actions.

Last summer, our government announced the initial \$315-million, five-year broadband and cellular action plan, Up to Speed. This includes Ontario's broadband funding program, the Improving Connectivity for Ontario program, or ICON, with an initial investment of \$150 million. Since then, we have doubled our ICON investment to \$300 million for projects that will connect more people to broadband, in collaboration with the private sector and other partner funding. Taken altogether, this brings our total investment to a historic nearly \$1 billion to help ensure that more communities across the province are connected.

Our government acknowledges that significant investments and actions need to be made to connect Ontario households and businesses to the digital world. The COVID-19 pandemic has only magnified the digital divide that puts many without reliable connectivity at a disadvantage.

Having the ability to access the Internet should not be a luxury anymore. Now, more than ever, we need an Ontario-made plan to help build infrastructure faster and strengthen communities, all while laying the foundation for future growth, renewal and long-term economic recovery. This legislation will do just that.

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

**Hon. Laurie Scott:** Thank you for the opportunity to speak in third reading debate. I want to thank the member

for Timiskaming–Cochrane for saying I was his favourite cabinet minister over here, so thank you very much. I was listening.

We've heard over the last few weeks, as we discussed the bill, how people across our province are being left behind, from the small business owner right outside Ottawa who just wants to sell her products online, to the university students we heard from at committee whose classmates struggle with poor connectivity as they learn remotely, to the family whose frustrations over their poor Internet connections has led them to tears. When an increasingly digital world threatens to leave them behind because of a lack of reliable broadband, we, as legislators, have a responsibility to act quickly, because our communities, the ones we all represent, cannot wait any longer.

That's why we need to do everything we can to help achieve 100% access for every household and business in every community in every region across Ontario. Our proposed legislation comes at a time when COVID-19 has underscored the importance of digital access in our daily lives. Through the Ontario budget, we're investing an additional \$2.8 billion so that every household and business in Ontario will have access to reliable broadband by the end of 2025. This brings our total investment to an historic nearly \$4 billion, and that's billions with a B. This is the largest single investment in broadband in any province by any government in Canadian history and will be pivotal to our economic recovery. This is about getting everyone in Ontario connected to Internet, no matter where they live.

Mr. Speaker, in conversations I've had with representatives at ROMA, NOMA and FONOM, do you know what they all tell me? They say that access to reliable broadband is the difference between attracting investments and jobs, and being left behind as the world moves forward.

The Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce even said, "The pandemic has put the spotlight on the digital divide for people and businesses, particularly in remote and rural communities. Additional funding to connect all Ontarians, including businesses, to reliable broadband by 2025 is welcome news."

FONOM, the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities, said, "Broadband connects us to the rest of Canada and the world, and our members and constituents rely heavily on broadband services in their daily lives."

Knowing this, it's unfortunate that broadband connectivity isn't an issue unique to Ontario. The Minister of Environment and Climate Change in New Brunswick said, "An important observation that has been made during the COVID-19 pandemic is an increased sense of urgency for access to quality broadband."

The president of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities said, "Health delivery—some of that is being done online now." Some rural residents "can get some diagnosis online and there are some areas where we cannot do that. They are at a disadvantage because of that."

As we all know, the telecommunications sector is a federally regulated sector. That's why we will continue to

work with the federal government to secure investment for broadband in Ontario. In the meantime, we're taking a proactive approach so that everyone in Ontario can get reliable Internet, no matter where they live. That's why we introduced Bill 257, the bill we're wrapping up today.

It's undeniable that our investment and legislation will make a real difference in people's lives across the province. Just how many lives? Well, Madam Speaker, as many as 1.4 million people in Ontario. The Rural Ontario Municipal Association says that they welcome our investments, calling broadband "a lifeline" in rural Ontario.

Barry Field, the head of SWIFT, an initiative created by the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus, called it "an amazing and historic level of investment for broadband in Ontario. It's a massive win for rural Ontario residents."

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce called it "welcome news," and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario called it a "big step forward." To give this some perspective, that's the combined populations of Windsor, St. Catharines, Barrie, Guelph, Kingston, Milton, Thunder Bay, Brantford, Peterborough and Sudbury.

As you know, the Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act addresses three barriers to broadband infrastructure deployment: the costs and delays when attaching to hydro poles; delays in access to municipal rights-of-way; and Ontario's rate for hydro pole attachments and other costs. With our proposed measures, additional enforcement powers and our significant investment in broadband projects, we are demonstrating that we are using every tool to get as many people access to broadband as quickly as possible.

To respond to the urgent need for connectivity COVID-19 underscored, we cannot afford to let unnecessary barriers and cumbersome processes stand in the way of achieving access for all. That's why it's imperative that every single member in this House votes in support of this legislation.

Just like how the railways helped usher in the industrial era and connected our province to new markets, or the electrification of our province a century ago connected homes and businesses to the electrical grid, or the 400-series highways during the mid-20th century connected our cities and towns to each other, we are now helping to connect our communities to a new frontier—a digital frontier—with new opportunities and new markets.

In a world where access to digital technologies determines whether individuals and companies can succeed, Ontario cannot be left behind as the entire world moves forward. Broadband access is fundamental to our economic recovery and the shift to the future digital economy, and it will be vital to the success of many families who continue to face all kinds of frustration. There's the story of the employee who has to go to her father-in-law's house in another township just to work and use his Internet, and there's the story of a secondary school principal who has to drive to the school parking lot just to get better Internet service, or the nurse practitioner who has to seek Internet service at fast-food outlets. These families, especially in rural and northern areas, cannot wait any longer for access to better broadband.

We know that farmers—in fact, the majority of them—are having trouble conducting normal business operations because of unreliable broadband service, and we know that for those in the service industry, whether it's a bed and breakfast or a local bakery or the Kawartha Dairy ice cream truck, a lack of reliable broadband and cell service often means a lack of opportunity.

A Queen's University study shows that broadband deployment provides rural employment and wage growth in the services industry in Canada. That's why we're helping to ensure that our economic engine is firing on all cylinders and that we can compete globally. This is vital to our future prosperity.

For almost 20 years, I've advocated for better Internet connectivity in Ontario, both inside and outside of this Legislature. Madam Speaker, that's why I was honoured that Premier Ford trusted me to be the minister responsible for this portfolio. It remains my top priority to ensure that no one is left behind when it comes to accessing broadband. I'm proud to stand in this place today and say that we are doing just that.

Let me remind this House that our close-to-\$4-billion action plan focuses on four pillars: First, we're focused on delivering regional and shovel-ready projects in southwestern, eastern and northern Ontario.

Second, we're investing \$300 million in our Ontario-designed Improving Connectivity for Ontario program—ICON—to increase access in more communities across Ontario. We expect to announce our first set of projects this spring.

Third, we're maximizing existing programs and assets.

And finally, we're modernizing government to remove barriers. That's exactly what we're doing now through Bill 257.

I want to thank all of my colleagues for their support of this bill and give a special shout-out to the member from Oakville, who is also my parliamentary assistant, for all his hard work in getting this bill to this point.

Thank you to all of the members on the government and the opposition benches for your comments and feedback during debate on this bill. I enjoyed listening to, at times, very spirited and hilarious moments in this House, and watching remotely.

To the members opposite: I want to thank you for the recommendations you put forward. Like the member from Guelph said during committee on Tuesday, it's really refreshing to see that although we may come from different political stripes, we are all able to come together in agreement to approve this bill. I'm encouraged that there are so many in this room who understand how important broadband access is to our future.

I know that the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane spoke about how there just isn't a business case for the unserved and underserved. That is why, I'm going to remind the Legislature, we have put almost \$4 billion on the table. We absolutely recognize that that is what it's going to take to help us connect everyone in Ontario. Not only are we working collaboratively in the Legislature, but

we also need to know that we have to connect everybody in all parts of the province of Ontario.

I know the members opposite may not want to support this bill—I'm not going to say I'm going to keep it a secret that they didn't support increasing broadband connectivity—but I think that we can all work together when this bill passes to help connect all of the people in Ontario, not only for the immediate future but for future generations as we move into our global world and the new world that we exist in during—and hopefully soon to be the end of—the pandemic, that we will connect everyone by 2025.

I appreciate everyone's time and listening in the spirit of debate and committee to getting this to this point of third reading.

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

Pursuant to the order of the House passed on March 23, 2021, I am now required to put the question.

Mr. Calandra has moved third reading of Bill 257, An Act to enact the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021 and to make other amendments in respect of infrastructure and land use planning matters. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until the next instance of deferred votes.

*Third reading vote deferred.*

## 2021 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 31, 2021, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

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

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** Last week, we heard from the Minister of Finance all the things he claims his budget would do for the people of Ontario. Today, I'd like to use my time to make clear all the things it doesn't do and highlight the people it leaves behind.

This budget continues the tradition of not doing enough for northern and rural Ontario. This budget will not change the fact that businesses, infrastructure and communities of northern Ontario are chronically underfunded. It also robs the people most affected by the pandemic of the hope that once this pandemic is over they will have opportunities to make their lives better. Young people disproportionately unemployed by the effects of COVID-19, education workers who did their best to provide supports and support students through the pandemic and front-line workers who still have no government-supported paid sick leave will all suffer under this budget. Today I'm going to give voice to the concerns of all of those not included and not supported by this budget.

As mentioned, Speaker, it is nothing new to see that northern Ontario has once again been an afterthought in

the provincial budget. It is, however, extremely disappointing to see no additional support pledged specifically to the north's health infrastructure even as we see just how disproportionately the effects of the pandemic have been on rural and isolated communities and my community of Thunder Bay. There is not one mention of a community in the north that will be receiving this support.

**1610**

While the other areas of Ontario see large-scale capacity increase and new facilities in health care, for the entirety of the north, including Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie and Thunder Bay, all that is mentioned is a possible support for a new health care facility in Moosonee. There are very few details.

Meanwhile, the other mentions, like the funding for Thunder Bay health sciences' cardiac surgery program, which is a program, largely, that has had a huge fundraising activity of millions of dollars—and I congratulate the people who are still fundraising so that people in northern Ontario do not have to go to southern Ontario to get cardiac and vascular surgery—and the overdue renovations to the health facilities in Geraldton—again, there are few details. What we need to see is a real plan with timelines for both those announcements. Even as a global pandemic continues to affect this province, the Premier and his government refuse to address the needs of better local care in northern Ontario.

Also, I didn't see any changes or additions to the Northern Health Travel Grant. That is a shame, because it is such an important part of the health infrastructure in the north. So many people need that grant to access specialist care in southern Ontario. This would be a small investment and would make such a big difference to the health outcomes for people across northern Ontario.

I have a letter. There are many things that come across your desk as an MPP, but this letter really emphasizes the state of health care in northern Ontario and what the citizens of northern Ontario have to face when they're trying to access health care. It comes from a wife of a—both are constituents.

She says, "I am writing to you today on behalf of my 49-year-old husband, Jeff. We want to share a recent experience that was both traumatic and, in our opinion, completely avoidable. It pertains to his recent emergency spinal surgery where he had to be airlifted to Toronto (via Ornge). I was unable to accompany him due to COVID-19 restrictions. We must inform you that he is a paraplegic as a result of a bad outcome post spinal surgery in 2019.

"After his surgery, eight days post-op, our neurosurgeon called our city hospital to try to arrange a transfer. He was not accepted. Then they tried to call our old hometown of Nipigon to see if they could accept him. The importance of this arrangement allowed him to be accompanied by a trained medical provider and ease the process of a disabled, wheelchair-bound patient. Again, we were let down.... Our only option was to pay for a commercial flight and travel alone.

"Now, for you and me, a flight alone would not be a huge deal. For someone eight days post-op after major

spinal surgery, wheelchair-bound and has to self-catheterize every four hours, this is more than a challenge. This is when my husband experienced the most degrading and unfortunate sequence of events.

“After arriving at the airport, as most travellers do, he needed to use the bathroom. Afterwards, he went to transfer himself, and the inevitable occurred; he fell. Alone, he struggled to try to get himself back up into the chair. An impossible feat even when not eight days post-op. After about 10 minutes of struggling and contemplating what to do, he rang the emergency bell. Airport personnel came on the overhead speaker and talked with him. It was decided they would call the fire department to assist him. Twenty minutes after sitting on the bathroom floor, they arrived and scooped him back into his wheelchair, but he missed his flight.

“With only two flights scheduled per day, he was unable to get home. Thankfully, Air Canada scheduled him on the next day’s flight, but he would have to stay overnight in a hotel. This poses its own challenges, which we will outline...” He was “in an unbelievable amount of pain. He tried to get himself into the bed, but without a transfer board or help, his feeble attempts left him stuck, teetering on and off the bed. Remarkably, we at home wondered why we had not heard from him, so we placed a call to the hotel. Luckily we knew Murphy’s Law would follow him this trip because they found him on the edge of the bed holding on for dear life. They assisted him into bed, where he fell asleep for hours.

“Upon waking, he realized he had no incontinence briefs.... This was an emergency that he would have needed them, as he woke up.... We managed to ‘Instacart’ some pads to him, which was a relief but now he would have to fumble to get dressed from his chair in the” morning. “Too nervous to leave the bed, he stayed trapped for 12 hours.

“We have had a very emotionally and physically difficult year and the health care system has continued to let us down. We weren’t looking for handouts, just a little compassion.”

I think it’s important that we bring some of these stories of what people in northern Ontario are really facing. It would have been nice to see at least some help in this budget for the extreme situations that people in northern Ontario find themselves.

But it’s not just health care infrastructure—our transportation infrastructure in the north suffers from budgetary neglect. While the government’s broadband and cellular action plan may help improve connectivity for those who live in rural or remote areas—we’ll see; trust me—people have been waiting for decades for help. Even worse, this government’s plans for northern transportation development did virtually nothing to make connecting from place to place an easier task.

In this budget, northern Ontario can expect to receive three to six kilometres of highway with the Cochrane bypass.

It has become a continuing joke that we continue to announce the twinning of the highway between Thunder

Bay and Nipigon. It has come up with every budget for the last 10 years with this government and the last—and some improvements to roads around Kenora, but nothing else.

Also, it’s important to know that in the north—that is the Trans-Canada Highway, and what my colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane has said is a two-lane highway. It’s a disaster. When it’s closed down, the goods and services that are travelling across our province stop.

We also have abysmal investments in rail infrastructure. We’re talking about that they’re looking at the northerner and some design, and looking at the possibility of the Northlander possibly running once again. But that means that the entire north of our province—with a larger population than Hamilton—which received a \$5-million rail line commitment, is receiving 0.5% of the rail funding that is given to one single city in southern Ontario.

This transportation plan has no respect for northern Ontarians who need better, cheaper, more reliable personal and public transportation options. It appears that our transportation needs are just not a priority for this government.

There was no new funding mentioned for inter-community bus service, and that is a shame—just a review. There is no need to review the bus service; we know there isn’t any—and there are some that have now gone from Toronto to Winnipeg. But there are many small communities in northwestern and northeastern Ontario that do not have bus service.

*Interjections.*

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** I’m sorry to interrupt the member.

Stop the clock, please.

Could the side conversations cease, please? I am finding it very challenging to give my undivided attention to the speaker who has the floor at this time. Thank you.

I return to the member.

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** Thank you, Speaker.

Too many people are now stranded across northern Ontario without access to regular bus service to get to cities for health care and other important services or to see their families. This is another way that the budget simply isn’t doing enough for the people in the north.

Instead, this government has told Ontarians in its budget that it will pass the buck to the federal government to take responsibility for funding infrastructure projects in Ontario’s north through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. What kind of projects for northern Ontario have been nominated for funding for this program in the coming year? There is no breakdown of public funding provided through this program available, and it is therefore impossible to determine what levels of funding northern Ontario is even receiving for its infrastructure.

Instead of targeted funding, northern municipalities will have to rely on grants from the \$2-million pool set aside for all municipalities in Ontario with under 100,000 residents to use for infrastructure rehabilitation.

**1620**

The only other alternative to secure funding for critical infrastructure repairs in the north is for our municipalities to take out a loan from Infrastructure Ontario. So, in place

of direct funding for northern Ontario, northern Ontario has been given three options to renew their infrastructure: ask the federal government, compete with 424 other municipalities for a portion of \$200 million or take out a loan.

We need to be making infrastructure investments in northern Ontario. Stakeholders, such as the mining industry, I have spoken with have asked for support for getting better highways and roads to their facilities in isolated parts of the province. What Ontario mines need is to be better integrated into the province's supply chains, and that starts with investing in the north's highways and roads and by revisiting the procurement plans in this province.

I'm hopeful that when consultations on the Ontario Critical Minerals Strategy close in May, the government listens to the companies, prospectors, Indigenous peoples and workers affected by mining and proceeds with an industry sector plan that supports the mining sector better than this budget does.

Across the province, not just in the north, this budget has excluded groups of Ontarians most affected by the pandemic from accessing adequate resources they need to recover. For example, the job skills retraining credit, which is meant to cover up to 50% of the costs of workers who need new qualifications as they search for work, does not apply to workers under the age of 26. This requirement ignores the very real needs of younger Ontarians who saw their rates of employment drop by 14% since February. Why has this government excluded the age demographic most severely affected by job loss as a result of the pandemic from the part of the recovery program aimed at getting Ontarians back to work?

This budget's pattern of offering little help to those most affected by the pandemic extends to women, Indigenous and racialized people. This budget has done almost nothing to make good on the finance minister's claim that it would prioritize the economic well-being of women and racialized communities who have been amongst the hardest hit by the economic effects of the pandemic.

There is \$117 million that is dedicated to programs meant to service women, racialized individuals, Indigenous peoples, youth and individuals with disabilities. This is too small of a commitment to meaningfully address the effects of the pandemic on so many different people.

What this province needs is a budget that prioritizes helping those demographic groups most affected by the pandemic financially recover. Unfortunately, the budget is treating them as an afterthought.

Education workers also continue to feel the squeeze of the Conservative government in this budget. The school boards will have to access \$790 million in funding which will be gone at the start of the new school year. The reduction is going to cost 10,000 teaching jobs and slash funding for school supports for children with autism and other disabilities. This is going to have knock-on effects for Ontario's students, as well as those who are suffering from the chaotic learning environment they have persevered through this year.

Many parents across the province have complained about the insufficiency of virtual education for their children, and experts have warned that education workers will have to do serious catch-up once in-class learning resumes. However, this budget ignores these problems and seeks to double down on disrupting any chance that Ontario's students will be able to receive quality education, by seeing them return to school with larger class sizes and fewer educational supports. That hasn't gone away. Now is not the time to be going ahead with these cuts to education unless we want to see our children fall even further behind in their studies.

Speaker, this budget is said to be looking to a future beyond COVID-19 while we're still in the middle of the third wave. Right now, Ontario has the highest rates of ICU admissions in the province since the start of the pandemic. Make no mistake: I've spoken with nurses, and when patients are in the ICU, they are so delicate. They are teetering between life and death. The stories you hear from that—one nurse told me, "I wish someone would come with a camera and blur out the faces and see what people are going through and see what the staff is going through." Although there are commitments to that, I don't think there's been enough to address that fragility and the burnout that is happening there.

Yet despite the alarming rates of transmission of this virus, the government has made no allowances for paid sick leave for front-line workers, or employers generally, in this budget, and that is such an important piece, because even nurses who work part-time or RPNs who work part-time or developmental service workers do not have paid sick leave. A program where you have to apply is not paid sick leave. That is not replacing your wages with your wages, not an amount that's less than your wages, never mind the whole idea that when you're ill, you should have one or two days to stay home and be tested. If we don't do that, we're going to be seeing our numbers rise.

Despite this government's insistence that vulnerable workers continue to service the economy, these workers are provided with no financial or job security and are expected to continue working as the pandemic worsens. This is completely unacceptable. Ontario's workers need paid sick days. They need mandated time off when they're sick and for their vaccines, and they need to keep themselves and their families safe.

There's a story that one of my colleagues shared with me: A teacher had contracted COVID-19 in her classroom. She went home—she didn't know she was infected—infected her spouse, and her spouse passed away. Could you imagine the grief and the guilt that would bring?

As things stand, our front-line workers have been forgotten. Speaker, this has been a devastating year for Ontarians from all corners of this province and from all walks of life. The pandemic has been incredibly difficult for our province's senior citizens, health care providers, PSWs, for its education workers, students, for women, for racialized and Indigenous folks and for many others. The people of Ontario need their provincial government to step in and help, but this budget does not go anywhere near

enough to address the real and continuing suffering of people.

While this budget congratulates itself on the money spent fighting COVID-19, levels of infection and hospitalizations are still soaring. There is still so much work to be done to end this pandemic.

I want to use my last 20 seconds here to thank the front-line and essential workers who are continuing the battle against COVID-19 and to encourage everyone to stay safe this Easter weekend.

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

**Mr. Stan Cho:** I appreciate the comments from the member opposite. I know she mentioned cuts to education funding, but in the 211 pages, here I can't seem to find that. On page 7, page 9, page 11, page 164, page 175, I see increases to the program spending. I see increases to overall programs and to the education ministry. Could the member opposite point to the page number specifically where the cut to education funding is? Thank you.

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** You know what? Shame on you. I've seen this tactic before in this House, and I think it's ridiculous that you believe that that's some kind of a badge of merit that you are going to call me out on what page number some cut is on. This has been a very clear, published cutback, that you are using the same funding from 2019, which everyone knew was a step back.

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

1630

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** I just want to commend the member for putting a really good highlight on what this budget doesn't have in it. I have to commend the member from Thunder Bay—Atikokan.

But I just want to go back and bounce back off of the member on the opposite side and what he asked the member. I just want to say, school boards around this province had to jump into their reserves—reserves—and they didn't see any top-up in the budget for their reserves. I want to ask the member, what do you think those reserves could have done for the children in the schools and for school boards across this province? What could they have done with that money that they had to take and put into COVID measures?

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** Thank you to the member from St. Catharines for the question. I want to really highlight that when I have been in communication with the school boards in my region and my constituencies, they have done a great job in trying to manage their funding, and have had to dip into their reserves and are concerned about what the future is going to bring. Trustees have also come to me and said, "We don't know what the future's going to hold. We're holding our own and we're going to try our best, but are really looking for help and assistance from the government."

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

**Mr. Stan Cho:** I have great respect for the member from Thunder Bay—Atikokan. I meant no disrespect by my

last question. I was simply pointing to the figures in the budget. On page 7, we see last year's education funding overall for program spending was \$30.2 billion and that next year's spending is \$31.3 billion. I know the members opposite reference inflation, which is on page 129, indexed on average to a 1.7% increase, but that funding increase of \$702 million represents a 2.3% increase.

I'm just, with great respect, asking, because I couldn't see the figure of a cut to education, where the member opposite is getting that figure? Because I am pointing to the actual figures from the budget that indicate that funding has increased.

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** I used to be a negotiator. So when we went to the table with an employer, what they would say is, "It's good news. We're not going to give you a cut this year; we're going to give you 0%." I don't know how many times I've said that when we are looking at organizations and costs, we need to look at the rate of inflation.

We also need to look at the realities of the situation, and this is an extraordinary situation. COVID is an extraordinary challenge. Like I said this morning, we don't have child care spaces. We don't have schools open in our district. The catch-up that's going to need to happen with those children who have been struggling at home, especially when we had the broadband with no access to broadband, is going to be incredible.

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

**Mr. Chris Glover:** To the member from Thunder Bay—Atikokan: When I heard you speaking, I asked for an opportunity to ask a question because I want the people in northern Ontario and in Thunder Bay to know that we in the south are thinking about them.

You talked about continuous promises that were made by the Liberals, and now by the Conservatives, to do things like twin the highway from Thunder Bay to Nipigon and to expand broadband. This government has had three years to expand broadband. Now, finally, in the year before an election, they've announced—they've got a bill before the House. But they haven't actually done what was needed, and students have suffered.

But my question is about Geraldton. You mentioned the Geraldton health centre. I lived in Geraldton for a couple of years in the 1980s, and I know that Geraldton's health centre serves everybody from Beardmore to Hearst. Can you just express to us the importance of upgrading the health care centre in Geraldton?

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** The Geraldton health centre is very important for many reasons, because it services a large geographic area, plus several First Nations. But also, there is a huge mining development going to be happening in that area, and the population in that area is going to be expanding. So we need to have a facility that is going to be able to support the workers, because if we don't have the infrastructure in place to support those workers, then that mine development will be difficult. So thank you for the question.

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

**Ms. Andrea Khanjin:** Part of being government, which I've learned in my short three years being in government, is making responsible decisions on what you try to do every single time in a bill—and not only just a bill, but a budget and other regulatory things that need to be done for the betterment of the province. Something that we quickly understood when we got elected was that we do need to build more capacity in our hospitals and to train more nurses, so many other things that need to be done that can't just be thrown into a budget. The prudent thing to do is to solve that before you get to a budget.

So here we are at this crossroads, in the short three years of this government, trying to undo some of the damage that was done 15 years before us. My question to the member is, when she speaks to her constituents and they talk to her about some of the damage that's been done over the 15 years, how does she reconcile with not being able to support measures that will really help her local constituents?

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** When I spoke to constituents about the health care system, it was the main topic, and still remains the main topic in our communities, the lack of good health care services in our communities. Our hospital has been in crisis for many years, and our health care system and access. But when we ask for simple things, like the Northern Health Travel Grant, this government put it into a committee and isn't going to resurrect it. It hasn't been increased in over 10 years. It's something they don't see the government really addressing—the needs of the north.

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

**Mr. Gurratan Singh:** My question to my colleague is, with respect to this budget, what would you have liked to have seen that would have actually benefitted your community, that would have benefitted issues that you're facing in the north? What are the huge gaps that you see that this budget is quite frankly lacking, that it should have?

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** Thank you for the question. There is a wish list, I'm sure, that people in my community have recognized. But the one thing that has been clear is that they want clear and stable funding for health care and education, things that they can count on, not piecemeal. And then, what we really want to see and is a strong movement, is paid sick leave, because there's a community movement where people say that we need this to stabilize our health care system and the COVID-19 epidemic. The other thing they want to see is supports for mental health, as well.

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

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I rise to speak to the budget motion. Given the government's announcement today of a 28-day province-wide shutdown, I think the government needs to amend the budget. It needs to amend the budget to reverse the \$4.8-billion cut to next year's fiscal year, because clearly we are still in a pandemic.

They need to use that money to invest in a safe workplace plan, providing paid sick days and paid time off

for workers to get vaccinated. If we have any hope of containing the spread of COVID, we have to ensure safe workplaces. If people are going to be asked to stay home, we need funding for supported housing and affordable housing so they have a home to stay in. Speaker, it appears to me that those two chapters of the budget were left at the printer's. The government needs to find them and put them in.

The government needs to reverse the \$790-million cut to education funding. We're clearly still in a pandemic. We want to keep our schools open. We have to invest in those schools and ensure our children have safe schools.

Speaker, given the announcement today, we need a third round of the Ontario business support grant. Clearly we're still in a pandemic. Those struggling small businesses will need additional support, and we need to expand the eligibility criteria so businesses that are being left behind can apply.

Speaker, given the tragedy we've experienced in long-term care over the last year, it is clear that our elders cannot wait four years for four hours of care, and the people who care for them, our loved ones, cannot wait four years for four hours of care. The funding for that needs to be accelerated into next year's fiscal year.

People on Ontario disability supports are struggling to get by each and every day, and there's nothing in this budget that provides them with the support they need, especially because during the pandemic, the costs for people on ODSP have gone up and those little odd jobs and things like that that people could do to supplement their income—many of those have closed.

**1640**

Speaker, we need to accelerate the government's plan to provide funding for mental health and addiction services. It is clear from this pandemic that the mental health crisis is getting worse and not getting better. I appreciate that the government wants to invest in it, but we can't wait eight, nine, 10 years. We need to accelerate that investment into more recent fiscal years.

Our post-secondary institutions have taken a huge financial hit, and there's nothing in this budget to cover off the lost revenue they've experienced. We know that we're going to have to train workers coming out of this pandemic.

Finally, I'm hoping by next fall we'll have a vaccine rollout and we'll be ready for a recovery. We need some budget items in this budget for a green recovery that will create jobs and address the climate crisis.

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

**Mr. Rick Nicholls:** I listened intently to the member from Guelph. He talked about the small business support grant, and now he's saying that we need to do even more.

If ifs and buts were candies and nuts, we would all have a merry Christmas.

Our government has done the absolute very best that we can, at this point in time, to help protect and keep families safe, to keep the economy rolling.

Approximately 120,000 small businesses will automatically benefit from the additional \$1.7 billion in relief.

To the member opposite: Do you believe in direct support for small businesses across Ontario?

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I absolutely do. It's why I've been pleading with this government since last April, I think, to provide direct support for small businesses; finally, we got some back in January. It was six months too late for far too many small businesses.

Last week, when the budget came out, we were not going into a third lockdown. So if we needed two rounds of the support for the first two, we need a third round of support for this next lockdown, and we need to expand the eligibility criteria.

I'm guessing your office is like my office. We're working so hard to support those small businesses that are falling through the cracks. Let's help them, as well.

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

**Mr. Tom Rakocevic:** The government's handling of the pandemic, when it comes to business, has shown their disdain for small business, some would say. They disproportionately advantaged big box stores, when you compare them to mom-and-pop shops.

In fact, many have gone so far as to say that this might be the worst government when it comes to small business, in terms of how they've been handled. What do you say to that?

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I thank the member for the question.

What a lot of small businesses have been asking for is a level playing field. As a matter of fact, I've seen numerous petitions calling for a level playing field.

It was pretty darn tough on small businesses when the big box stores—the Walmarts, the Costcos and stores like that—were able to stay open and sell non-essential goods. I understand why they would be able to sell their essential goods. But it was a slap in the face to small businesses that were closed, that couldn't sell those non-essential goods, when they knew that big box stores were able to do that.

As a long-time small business owner myself—so often it's, "Provide us a level playing field."

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

**Mr. Stan Cho:** Thank you to the member opposite for those remarks.

That was a curious question from the member from Humber River–Black Creek—saying we didn't support the smallest of small businesses.

I would remind all members of this House that there was a PPE grant for the smallest of small businesses—a permanent elimination, not reduction, of the EHT, a tax on jobs, for 30,000 of those small businesses; an up to 30% reduction for small businesses throughout this entire province. Once again, that's another permanent measure.

I have great respect for the member from Guelph. We've done these budget consultations together. We've heard from small business communities. I share that small business background, but I find it curious why the member

from Humber River–Black Creek, why the member from Guelph voted against those measures that we just mentioned. Now, here we have an opportunity to double the support grant and to add to the tourism sector, the hospitality sector, another grant. Will the member do the right thing this time and vote in favour of those support measures?

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** One thing we hear a lot around here is that for the last 15 years we've been calling for something. Well, I can tell you, for the last 15 years I've been calling for a doubling of the EHT—the employer health tax—exemption for small businesses to \$1 million. I'll have to say that, finally, a government listened to that thing I was advocating for, because I know it provides cash flow relief for small businesses. So I support that. It's unfortunate that the Liberals never delivered on that.

But, Speaker, because you support one thing in a budget, if there are so many other things in there that you can't support, then how can you vote for it? It's kind of like Bill 257, which we're debating today. I support broadband expansion, I want broadband all over this province, but I'm not going to vote for a bill that essentially blows up planning laws and puts the people of this province at risk, puts their property, their businesses, their personal safety at risk. So I would ask the member: Let's have a bill that we can support in its entirety, not just one little part of it.

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

**Mr. Rick Nicholls:** Good afternoon, everyone. You know what? I'm really honestly happy to rise today to speak to, and speak in support of, Bill 269, Protecting the People of Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2021. But I would be remiss if I didn't stop to take a moment to thank our Minister of Finance, Minister Bethlenfalvy, and his parliamentary assistant, MPP Cho, for their countless hours of hard work and for what everyone else has done to bring this budget forward for presentation—

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** I'm sorry to interrupt the member. I just want a point of clarification for the member: We are not debating Bill 269; we're debating the budget motion, number 64.

I'll return to the member.

**Mr. Rick Nicholls:** I'm happy to rise today to address the motion, actually. I can change; I can pivot on a dime.

Furthermore, I just want to take this time to stop and thank all the doctors, nurses, personal support workers and any other front-line health care worker, who have been through so much during this past year. I also want to thank small business owners, who are keeping their heads above water. I know it's difficult; I know it's challenging. I was a small business owner as well. From 1989 to 1992, I went through a slowdown in the economy. Unfortunately, it was a challenge, but I got through it.

Lastly, I want to thank all Ontarians for doing their part in social distancing and wearing masks. The end is in sight. We cannot lose sight of our goals for the safety and protection of our entire community.

This a very large bill and it encompasses many different components. I want to take some time to highlight some of

the key sections which I feel will benefit Ontarians significantly, in addition to some exciting news for my riding of Chatham-Kent–Leamington and our neighbouring riding of Windsor-Essex.

Our government said that we're going to protect the people of Ontario, and that is exactly what we are doing. We're on the forefront of a battlefield which I've often called World War III, only we're not able to see our enemy. But our fight isn't over. With this well-thought-out and carefully planned bill, we will emerge stronger than ever before, investing in much-needed projects that were neglected by past governments.

Speaker, Ontarians have always been this government's priority, and I want to show you how we are stepping up and exceeding these expectations. This third phase of our government's action plan is investing over \$34 billion to help Ontario families. This funding will benefit communities, businesses, the health and safety of citizens and, of course, flow back in order to benefit all of Ontario and our economy. Part of this funding will also be used to strengthen the public education system. It will be used towards building state-of-the-art infrastructure, such as expanded transit and subway lines, and the funding will also be used to expand broadband Internet, which we talked about earlier this afternoon, across this entire province.

**1650**

I wish I held a magic wand in my hand, and I could wave that magic wand and say, "There's your subway. There are your highways. There's whatever else you're asking for." But it takes time. Oh, and by the way, it takes money, too. It takes money, too, and that's why we need to keep building this economy. We are aware of what the people of Ontario want, and we're making sure that our future populations continue to grow.

I want to talk about COVID-19. Two very simple words, COVID-19. Focusing on this pandemic alone, this government is bringing you, the people of Ontario, \$51 billion in total support towards COVID-19. As my colleagues have mentioned in past debates, we have invested more than \$16 billion to protect our health care system from COVID-19—\$16 billion. That wasn't on the books a year ago, but we had to deal with a pandemic. As a result, we've had to spend a lot more than what our previous budget had indicated.

Some people think we're spending like Liberals. Well, that's not true either. You do what you have to do. We treat the people of Ontario as our family, and you do what you need to do to protect your family.

These vital costs include much-needed personal protective equipment to keep our front-line workers safe. Listen, we're keeping this information very transparent so that anyone is able to see that our government is spending taxpayers' money to benefit all Ontarians, individually and collectively as families, during the pandemic. This bill, or this motion, is a step in the right direction to help and recover from this pandemic.

Look, we understand the mental health impact COVID-19 has had on families, the challenges that families face

and young people as well. It has not been easy. That's why we're using \$3.81 billion and investing that in mental health supports, and that's over a 10-year commitment to mental health and addiction.

For the first time in our province's history, we're also creating the first centre of excellence for mental health. Look, our government sees just how important mental health is and understands that COVID hasn't been easy on any of us. These commitments of funding will surely benefit all Ontarians now and also for future generations.

Let's talk about long-term care and our seniors, our most vulnerable. Let's not forget our loved ones and some of our most vulnerable citizens residing in long-term-care homes across Ontario. To protect these loved ones, our government is investing an additional \$650 million just this year to keep people safe. This funding will be used to buy much-needed supplies such as more masks and other PPE resources. It will also be used to increase staffing across these homes so that residents have the support they need when they need it. In addition, this funding will now bring the total amount of funding since the beginning of this pandemic to over \$2 billion.

Our government is also well aware of the wait-list problems that seniors are experiencing to get into long-term-care homes. That is why, through the budget, we have announced 30,000 new beds. It was mentioned in a debate from my colleague that the past government took nearly 10 years to build only 611 new beds. Knowing that information, I would like to reiterate my previous statement that we are planning to build 30,000 new beds for Ontario. That is an investment of \$933 million to make this need a reality, bringing the total investment to \$2.6 billion.

I'm kind of excited because in my riding of Chatham-Kent–Leamington, Franklin Gardens in Leamington will be getting 40 new beds and the existing 120 beds will be upgraded into a new facility. As well, Copper Terrace in Chatham will be renovating 64 beds, with an anticipated start to construction in December 2022.

Lastly, I was very pleased to meet with the executive director of Meadow Park nursing home in Chatham. They are going to be building on a new site. It's kind of a one-stop shop, as I call it, because they are going to be building a long-term-care home on an existing site that has town-houses, retirement homes and long-term care. It's called St. Angela's Meadow care centre, and they'll be getting 61 new beds and 99 upgraded beds as part of a new facility anticipated to be constructed in February 2022.

In addition, \$246 million will go towards improving the living conditions in already existing long-term-care homes. These facilities will ensure air conditioning for residents to improve living conditions and keep air flowing to help reduce COVID-19 infection rates.

And here's something very, very important, and that is that we are increasing the average direct care to four hours a day for residents through our government's \$4.9-billion investment. In addition to that, we're also investing \$121 million to help speed up the training of almost 9,000 personal support workers, PSWs, which will go hand in

hand with hiring more than 27,000 new positions, which would include more PSWs and nurses to help those in need. I want to give a shout-out to St. Clair College in Windsor, because I've spoken with the president, Patti France, and they're very excited about the offerings that they have for these PSWs.

Now look, by having more jobs and hiring more workers, it not only benefits residents in long-term-care homes, but also our economy. Not only are we specifically helping seniors in long-term-care homes, but also seniors who enjoy living in their homes. Therefore, through an investment of \$160 million of the community paramedicine program, we will be able to bring seniors in their homes the care and attention that they need throughout 33 different communities, including my riding of Chatham-Kent-Leamington and Windsor-Essex. We need to keep our most vulnerable citizens safe, and through these investments, you know what, we will.

Speaking of vulnerable citizens, since the COVID-19 pandemic began and people have been spending more and more time at home, we've noticed an increase in domestic violence. Feeling safe in your home is a fundamental right, and no one, woman or child, should have that taken away from them.

Our government is stepping up through the budget and we are taking action to support those in need. By allocating money towards support services for women and children in need, we will ensure that they always have somewhere to go to get help. We're also investing \$8.2 million over a three-year plan to support and protect our First Nation, Inuit and Métis women and girls across Ontario. Additionally, we're also investing \$18.5 million over three years to support survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking, and help them to find safe places to live.

Speaker, I want to add that a few years ago, before we actually formed government, I conducted three different human trafficking information meeting seminars. The biggest one that I held actually had over 600 people attend at the Bradley Centre in Chatham. I want to give a shout-out to those who helped make that a success, and that is the OPP; the Chatham-Kent Police Service; victims services, who also had a survivor who addressed and spoke to the grandparents, the parents, the children, the students; as well as the Chatham-Kent Health Alliance.

This commitment to support these survivors is among many government promises that are actually being fulfilled, ensuring that those found guilty of breaking the law are punished. And I would like to see the punishment to the full extent of the law for those perpetrators.

Let's talk about child care for a moment. We introduced changes to the Taxation Act, 2007, which will directly lift financial burdens from Ontarians and businesses. Our three changes to the Taxation Act, 2007, will have a focal point on supporting parents through child care. We are proposing a CARE tax credit for 2021 that is a 20% top-up to the Ontario Childcare Access and Relief from Expenses tax credit. We understand the stresses of child care and want parents to be able to choose the child care program that works for them.

**1700**

Let's talk about jobs and the economy for a moment. We have all heard about the economic impacts that COVID-19 has had on our economy. I mentioned that earlier. We know the struggles that small business is going through. We are fighting for jobs with the Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit. This particular tax credit will provide close to \$260 million in order to support over 230,000 Ontarians in 2021.

In addition, we have included, in the proposed bill, enhancements to another tax credit called the Regional Opportunities Investment Tax Credit, or the ROITC. With employment growth lagging in certain industries, our government, in March 2020, wanted to encourage companies and businesses to invest in these areas to stimulate better growth for our economy. By having these different businesses build, renovate or purchase commercial land or industrial buildings, they could be eligible for a 10% refundable tax credit. We are working hard to put money back into the pockets of Ontarians. Another way we're doing this is by doubling the tax credit rate from 10% to 20% through the ROITC.

In addition to that, I want to talk about small businesses, specifically. Our government believes that small businesses are the backbone of our economy. Today, I'm going to tell you how, through this motion, we are showing how much we back that statement.

We've already held the first round of the Ontario Small Business Support Grant payments, but now we are expanding our support for small businesses by providing a second round of funding. Eligible recipients will be able to get \$10,000, up to an additional \$10,000, totalling 20 grand, in order to help their businesses through these tough times, especially when they're in lockdown—not shut down—because that's lost business for them. We know that, and we're sensitive to that. If a local business has already applied for the first round of funding, they will automatically be entitled to a second equal payment to that of the first.

The response to this program has been overwhelming. So if you haven't yet received your first round of funding, be patient. They're working around the clock to ensure that you get what you deserve and what you have applied for. So far, over \$1.4 billion has already landed back into the pockets of local business owners, with only an average waiting time of 12 days—well, it's getting a little bit longer than that now, but be patient with us.

I want to talk very briefly about the Children's Treatment Centre in Chatham. Kudos to the executive director, Donna Litwin-Makey, her fundraising team and her entire staff. They have been working in a facility servicing over 5,000 students with special needs for many years, and that facility has been outgrown for many, many years. Well, I'm pleased to announce that our government has come through, and Chatham-Kent will be receiving a brand new Children's Treatment Centre. The ground is ready for digging or for build. Of course, this facility will provide the care and the treatment to 30,000 families with young patients in Chatham-Kent. It includes investments to

support people and jobs in Chatham-Kent, including the Chatham treatment centre, in the amount of over \$23 million. As Donna Litwin-Mackey said, “Our dream for a new Children’s Treatment Centre has come true.” The money will help bring a state-of-the-art facility for the children’s special needs.

I also want to talk about the Windsor Regional Hospital, because I’ve been working with the CEO of both the Windsor Regional Hospital, David Musyj, as well as the CEO of Hôtel-Dieu Grace hospital, Jan Kaffer, and also a friend of mine now, Karl Straky, who formed a group to, in fact, push hard to get Windsor Regional Hospital to a second phase for funding. Our government listened, and now that funding will become a reality and they can continue to move forward. It’s going to take a while; I mentioned earlier about a magic wand. It’s going to take a number of years before it’s complete and servicing not only the people in Windsor-Essex, but also the catchment basin as well, which probably includes Chatham and a few other areas. Again, I want to say thank you for their perseverance to the CEO, David Musyj, and Mayor Drew Dilkens, as well as the other lobby groups and so on.

The last thing I want to mention very briefly here is that the Windsor Hôtel-Dieu mental health in-patient bed expansion and renovations to Hôtel-Dieu’s Tayfour site have also been approved.

There has been some talk about Highway 3 and Highway 401. I just want to suggest that the project on Highway 3 is started, and that’s good news for the safety of the people from Essex through to Leamington. And Highway 401—build the barrier. “Carnage Alley”—we’re starting on that as well. I’m very excited to see the expansion, because with the Gordie Howe bridge, once it’s built, the transport traffic will be immense, and we need to have safety.

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

**Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong:** I listened to the member from Chatham-Kent, and he mentioned that COVID is like a battlefield, that we can’t see it and we’re fighting a battle. One of the battles that I think is the greatest battle that’s being fought is on long-term care, the front-line workers. So I wondered—the government did acknowledge them and gave them a bump-up in wages for a temporary period of time. I just wanted to ask the member why the government didn’t see fit to include that permanent wage increase for the valuable work that people are doing on the front lines in our long-term care, which was hit the hardest during this pandemic?

**Mr. Rick Nicholls:** It doesn’t help when your knee slips out on you when you go to stand. Ouch.

I want to thank the member from London-Fanshawe for the question. You know what? You do make a very valid point. Looking at this pandemic, let’s just isolate it for a moment. Within that picture that we have in front of us, our PSWs, our doctors, our nurses and anyone in the health care field have gone above and beyond. You see the signs on the road all the time, and on front lawns: “A hero lives here” and so on. We don’t take that lightly. We realize that

they deserve more than perhaps what they are currently receiving. That’s why we did what we did within that particular window. Again, we do totally appreciate the impact that our health care workers have in our communities, especially in our long-term-care homes.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Questions? I recognize the member from Whitby.

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** Thank you, Speaker, and good afternoon. You’ll know that the Ontario budget includes \$16.3 billion for health and protecting people in this great province that we have the privilege of representing. Can the member from Chatham-Kent talk about the impact of that money in his riding, and especially the new Children’s Treatment Centre that he has been working hard to acquire for his riding?

**Mr. Rick Nicholls:** I want to thank the member from Whitby for his question. The people of Chatham-Kent were so excited to hear the announcement that the Children’s Treatment Centre of Chatham-Kent—a new one—will finally become a reality. As a matter of fact, when I called the executive director, Donna Litwin-Mackey, she filled up with tears—yes, it gets you there—because we fought hard for that. Even before we formed government, we were fighting hard for that. Kudos to Donna and her team for never giving up and pushing hard. When you believe in something, you work hard, fight hard, and you overcome obstacles. I want to thank them, and I want to thank the member for that question. It means so much.

1710

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

**Mr. Faisal Hassan:** I was listening intently to the speech from the member from Chatham-Kent-Leamington. He talked about long-term care, he talked about front-line workers, PSWs, and he talked about small businesses. We know now, on all of these issues, the government has let us down. And we know now a lot of small businesses—even though the program is there—are still having difficulties to access it.

We know that the front-line workers, the PSWs, are also having difficulties getting a living wage. My question is: In long-term care, what has the government done to recognize these front-line workers, to give them a living wage and to at least raise their salary by \$4 per hour?

**Mr. Rick Nicholls:** I want to thank the member from York South-Weston for his question. It’s a challenge for any government at this point in time, because you have public sector and you also have private sector, especially in the long-term-care homes. I know and I understand—I don’t agree, but I understand the opposition’s stance with regard to private nursing homes. It’s not up to us to identify—because a lot of the nursing homes are unionized as well, so that’s a negotiation thing.

But, again, we saw fit to provide additional funding at our expense, at the government’s expense, to assist these long-term-care PSWs and other people working in these facilities. I think it’s very, very important that they get recognized for what they do. And you mentioned—

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Response.

**Mr. Rick Nicholls:** Did you say “response”? Okay, so that means I don’t have a whole lot of time left. As a matter of fact, with what I’m doing right now, I’m probably killing the rest of that time. So thank you very much. I’ll sit down right now, and I look forward to the next question.

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

**Mr. Amarjot Sandhu:** I’m thankful to the previous government for showing us and presenting us a model of what a government should not be like. Our government has delivered so much in the last three years that the previous government was not able to deliver in the last 15 years. The people of Brampton are very excited that we’re getting a hospital and a medical school.

I know, member from Chatham-Kent, we are also getting a new hospital in Chatham-Kent, so can you please tell the House how excited the people of Chatham-Kent are for this new investment?

**Mr. Rick Nicholls:** Well, I’m so excited, I just can’t stand it—I’m about to lose control.

When I think about the people and how they have suffered from 15 years of neglect under this former Liberal government, and to now see the hope that our government is providing to the people of Ontario and, more specifically, the people in Brampton, as well as down in the Windsor region area, with the brand new hospital that will serve as a catchment basin—and not just Windsor-Essex, but also a good chunk of my riding as well. With state-of-the-art—they will be able to attract top doctors in the medical field. They will have top equipment. I am just so excited for the people—it’s going to take a while; it’s probably going to take 10 years to get it built, but it will get built, and those people will have the health care that they need.

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

**Mr. Chris Glover:** We’ve heard the member opposite and many government members praise their small business grant. I just received this email from a small business owner in my area an hour ago. She says, “I’m getting in touch because of my nightmarish experience with the provincial small business grant. We applied for the grant on the 22nd of January. We began receiving emails informing us that the bank account information didn’t match the business information. I called three times and emailed once. No one could give me any information. On the 14th of March I received another email. I called the helpline and was on hold for 25 minutes. I have no faith that this grant will occur at all. I am frustrated, discouraged and stressed. A year of this has been awful, and now, like so many, I am really struggling just to get through a day.

“The experience with the small business provincial grant has been awful. They have done so little for small business, and their grant system is clearly not working properly.

“It shouldn’t be this hard. Do you have any ideas?”

I will relay that question to the member opposite. How can you praise the small business grant system when the experience of small business owners like this one is so awful?

**Mr. Rick Nicholls:** It’s easy to praise. We’ve had over 120,000 businesses apply. Has it been easy? No, but I’ve had similar situations as your constituent has had with their business, and I’m working hard, as you are, to find out the reasons why. But you can appreciate that it just doesn’t happen like that. It takes time, and sometimes what we have found is that people, when they go online, have not completed the form correctly. It may be, to your point earlier, when you mentioned that the name of the business didn’t match, perhaps, a Canada Revenue number.

Again, you know what? I understand that. I understand the frustration. But let’s focus on what we can do to help your constituent, to help my constituents who are experiencing similar challenges. We will get through this. If they’ve completed everything properly, they will get what is coming to them.

*Interjections.*

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** The House will come to order, please. And side note: Those of you with notifications on your phones that are audible, turn them off, please. Thank you.

Further debate?

**Mr. Faisal Hassan:** It is an honour to rise in this House today, this evening, this afternoon, to speak to the government’s motion on the budget. It has been said that the budget is a moral document, one that outlines the priorities and principles of government. This 2021 budget, tabled in the throes of a terrible pandemic, comes up falling short, and it isn’t as much what is in this budget, but what is not in the budget wherein the trouble lies. The devil, they say, is in the details.

I’ve often stood in this House and spoke to the inequities and disparities that exist in my riding of York South–Weston. York South–Weston is home to decent, hard-working front-line essential workers, the folks who have kept this city and this province moving during this historic pandemic. These are the heroes that the Premier often mentions. I fully agree that those essential workers are heroes, but I see nothing in this budget for them. My community has long been designated as a hot spot, meaning it’s at high risk of COVID according to Toronto Public Health. Those essential workers getting on crowded buses as they travel to work, often only working part-time and juggling several jobs, put themselves and their families at risk every single day. How does the government reward these heroes, and what is in the budget for them? Nothing.

I have mentioned that York South–Weston is a hot spot and at a high risk for COVID. What has the government done to recognize the risks faced by essential workers and their families in Toronto’s northwest? Well, they have done nothing, to be honest. It is why I speak about rising in this House time and again asking the government for support. I think it is remarkable for people to know that York South–Weston didn’t even get a permanent COVID-

19 testing facility until September 28 of last year—September 28—for a designated high-risk hot spot that is home to those essential front-line workers.

1720

This budget provides no new dollars for those front-line workers, and the 2021 budget is silent on paid sick days for workers. I know that folks in York South–Weston have to make the difficult choice of going to work not feeling well or losing a day's pay. These families cannot afford to lose a day's pay. They get on the crowded buses to go to work. Many families are a paycheck away from losing their homes, and this government provides nothing in the way of financial support or support by banning evictions during the pandemic.

This budget does nothing to recognize that the pandemic has not treated everyone equally. The phrase, "We are all in the same boat," does not apply to COVID, and it certainly doesn't apply to the government's response to COVID. If this was the official opposition's budget, we would ensure that the hardest-hit areas, like York South–Weston, were taken care of.

The same way my riding didn't get a permanent COVID testing facility until months and months later, to this day, we do not have a permanent vaccine distribution facility for seniors. How can this be, Madam Speaker? We have eight pharmacies in a huge riding designated distributing vaccines; although, recently, they are in short supply. We have zero facilities to protect and vaccinate our seniors. This neglect is nothing short of discrimination along Indigenous, Black, racial and economic lines. It is not acceptable and it needs to be addressed immediately. This budget nowhere recognizes these inequities.

I act as the official opposition critic for youth opportunities, and I also am a proud member of Ontario's very first Black caucus. I see first-hand how this government's actions and this budget do nothing to address the systemic racism in Ontario or provide even the most meagre support to our youth. The government previously gutted and shut down the Anti-Racism Directorate, and this budget has no new money for any anti-racism initiatives. I spoke earlier about a budget being a moral document and revealing the true face of a government. As youth opportunities critic, I continue to be outraged that this government eliminated the position of the Ontario child advocate. The valuable work done by that office and by Irwin Elman is not forgotten, but it is very much missed. When this government looks to cut offices, such as this, that provide such great service, it is so very short-sighted. While professing to be fiscally responsible, it is actually the opposite that results.

The official opposition looks at taking care of youth as an investment in their future. This government does not look to tomorrow. Madam Speaker, the official opposition does look to tomorrow, and we plan for the future and put structures in place to help our communities. One such initiative was a motion I put forward about work-integrated learning for young people. This motion was passed in this House, but it has yet to have any investment in the program, and this budget was an opportunity for that to happen.

For so many young people who are doing internships and not getting a paycheck, all to gain "work experience," work-integrated learning would create new paid opportunities for young people across our province. My motion, which passed and is still awaiting the government's implementation, will create 27,000 paid internship placements and co-ops. I would have liked to have seen this budget invest in our youth in Ontario in this way.

This pandemic has been challenging for students, families, seniors and businesses. My office hears their stories and tries to help them every day. I don't see support for them in this budget or even a basic recognition of their struggles.

We need to invest in long-term care. We need to hire 10,000 PSWs and pay them what they deserve. We need to stop the part-time, no-benefits, for-profit long-term-care industry that exists to exploit. Every dollar the government puts into long-term care should be in public care and not diverted to shareholders' pockets. It is very simple, Madam Speaker. It is right, and it is our moral imperative to protect our elders. There's no money to make on the backs of our seniors.

Education is another area that this government has failed to address in this budget. This government is cutting education by \$790 million, compared to 2020. We need to hire more teachers and education workers, and we need to prioritize them now with vaccines—and that includes school bus drivers. This government's vaccination plan has allocated them getting their vaccines in late June or July. Schools are a source of COVID-19 transmission, and this government is reluctantly getting around to acknowledging that. Why, then, do we make educators wait until the summer break till they see a vaccine? This makes no sense, and the government's entire COVID response, along with this budget, makes no sense, given the COVID realities. They have badly mismanaged the pandemic, and history will not judge them kindly.

I would like to return to the long-term-care measures in this budget because it is such a critical issue. We know that the Canadian military came in and exposed the horrors that many of us on this side of the House have been shouting about for years. We know this government has a great many former staffers who are now paid lobbyists for for-profit long-term-care operators.

We know that a public, open and transparent inquiry into long-term care was rejected by this government and, instead, their own commission had many requests for documentation delayed or denied outright. The commission's request for more time to fully complete their tasks was denied. The Premier, who said he would answer any questions about the long-term-care disaster, did not fulfill that promise.

We all know that long-term care is a complete mess, and that this government's actions—or, should I say, inactions—contributed to the loss of a great many lives. This budget should invest in long-term care and in those essential front-line health care workers who perform such valuable work caring for our loved ones under extreme, difficult circumstances. It does not do that, Madam Speaker.

We see instead no commitment to wage increases to PSWs beyond two months from now. Incredibly, despite the military flagging the horrific conditions in long-term-care homes, there is no commitment in this budget to reinstate the comprehensive resident quality inspections needed in long-term care. Let me restate that this government acknowledged that long-term-care conditions were found to be horrific in many cases, yet they will not budget for increased inspections. That is disturbing and an outrage to our elders.

This government has declared they would offer four hours of care per resident. We have tabled bills and motions asking for just that. I'll note that my colleague from London West has also put that forth. However, when you read the fine print in the budget, you see that those four hours of care promised will not even be implemented until the end of four years. I will correct, Madam Speaker: That bill was with my colleague from London–Fanshawe. That was the Time to Care Act. That has not, to this day, been implemented. Four years, Madam Speaker: In four years, this government's legacy could just be a footnote in history.

1730

This budget makes no mention of for-profit long-term-care homes. I have previously mentioned that the death rate in for-profit long-term care as opposed to public is vastly higher, upwards of 80%. The official opposition advocates for taking the profit out of long-term care. This government actually subsidizes for-profit care and, as a result, many of those corporations have made record profits during the pandemic—in the middle of a pandemic.

We believe that every dollar going into health care, and that includes long-term care, should be in the public health system. You cannot adequately care for seniors when money invested needs to go to shareholders and lobbyists. Madam Speaker, we cannot make money on the backs of our seniors and treat seniors like that. The for-profit model is in view for all to see, with the horrors the Canadian military revealed. This budget does not commit to phase out for-profit long-term-care homes.

Small businesses in my community of York South–Weston have really been struggling. I have spoken to many of the owners, and COVID has affected them in a devastating way. They see the big box stores open all during COVID, and they have been unable to operate. These many family businesses located on our main streets are a huge part of the community fabric. It is heartbreaking to see them struggle.

The messages from this government are often confusing. We know that small businesses are creators of jobs. They're close to the community. My office has assisted in any way we can with letting them know about small business supports and in helping them navigate an often-confusing government website. It is very frustrating to see these small business owners and families, who have in good faith applied for the funding they qualify for, be still without that money or any communication from the government. Some of them are still waiting to this day. Now, the government is saying that they are again rolling

out another program, while some businesses still haven't received them.

Madam Speaker, these families are literally in a position of having to decide if they have to close their doors and the silence they are met with by this government is deafening. This budget does not provide for those small businesses.

It was clear from the previous Ontario Small Business Support Grant that many deserving businesses did not qualify and were not eligible for it. This budget had an opportunity to correct those mistakes and fix the gaps that exist. That has not happened. There is no expanded eligibility for businesses, which simply demonstrates that this government either didn't learn from its mistakes or just doesn't care about our main street small businesses.

In my riding of York South–Weston, housing continues to be a big issue. It is harder and harder for families to be able to afford a decent living space in this area. Rents are skyrocketing, and this past November, 170 eviction hearings were scheduled in York South–Weston. I see nothing in the budget to address the housing crisis we have in the city. My office has heard countless stories of tenants being evicted or facing eviction. It is well known that COVID-19 has highlighted the inequities and disparities that exist in our society and in this city.

There are no new announcements about housing in this budget. With federal and provincial agreements about social housing investments about to expire, we see no new initiatives.

Housing should be a priority for this government, and clearly it is not.

In fact, a recent Financial Accountability Office report declared that continued declines in social housing investment will result in the increase in the number of Ontario families in core housing need and that the decreases in spending when it comes to anti-homelessness strategies—that Ontario will not meet its goal of ending chronic homelessness by 2025.

Madam Speaker, this budget was an opportunity to address the very real needs affecting Ontarians during this difficult time. Sadly, it has missed the mark, and it speaks to the government's priorities—priorities I do not share.

Many members of my community are struggling.

I've noted that it took this government—last year, when the pandemic was declared—until September 28 to have a permanent COVID-19 testing facility.

We are also a pharmacy desert in my community. There is no clear priority and investment directed—not only in my community, but much of Toronto and many communities across the province of Ontario.

This is not only in vaccines, but also in child care. This budget has nothing in it for child care.

It also has nothing, as I mentioned, on youth opportunities. Our youth are our future. They have no summer jobs to look for.

Also, as I mentioned in my motion on work-integrated learning, that has not been included in this budget.

I have a lot to talk about, but I'll end it there.

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

**Mrs. Nina Tangri:** Thank you to the member opposite for his presentation and remarks today.

To vaccinate every person in the province who wants to be vaccinated, Ontario has made more than \$1 billion available for a province-wide vaccination plan. Ontario is also making it safer to re-engage in our workplaces, our businesses and our communities with \$2.3 billion for testing and contact tracing.

I did hear when he was speaking earlier about the lack of locations in his riding where people can get vaccinated. I did take a look at the pharmacies that are coming onboard, and in Toronto alone, there are well over 150 pharmacies. That's in addition to the hospitals and the mass vaccination clinics.

Will the member opposite be supporting our government's continued commitment to the health and safety of the people, and will he be supporting this unprecedented investment in public health?

**Mr. Faisal Hassan:** Thank you for the question.

I guess you haven't been reading the Toronto Star lately. They have reported on the pharmacy desert in northwest Toronto. You just mentioned 150—my community only has eight pharmacies.

If you look into the inequities and disparities that exist within Toronto, which is a huge city, and also the entire GTA and the entire province, this plan is not really working.

Do I support vaccinations? Yes, I do. But this budget has nothing in it to support communities like mine.

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

**Ms. Doly Begum:** I want to thank the member from York South–Weston for his speech. He did a really good job of mentioning quite a few things that are missing in this budget.

Specifically, he talked about essential workers and racialized workers in his community. In terms of the needs in our hospitals and ICUs, because we're getting so many of these workers who are exposed—I want to quote a doctor who so beautifully puts what we should have had in our budget. Dr. Lisa Salamon said, "Please find qualified ER and ICU nurses. Please find me physical space in my hospital. Please give me transport teams that can transfer patients in a timely manner. Please find me space in my ER to treat the next sick patient when I'm housing a mini ICU and have no recess rooms." She goes on to examine how short-staffed we are in Scarborough.

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My question is, does this budget really address the severe needs in our hospitals, especially in areas like Scarborough and areas—

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

**Mr. Faisal Hassan:** Thank you to my colleague from Scarborough Southwest, the most hard-working member from Scarborough. That's a very good question.

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Faisal Hassan:** Yes, you are.

This budget has nothing for investments for front-line workers, for hospitals. Look now, my colleague from London West has put a bill, "if you're sick, stay home," that would have helped a lot of front-line workers. It also doesn't have the PSWs. Also, my colleague from Sudbury, yesterday, put the PSW wage act, and this would have been an opportunity to help front-line workers and invest in Scarborough and across this province. If I answer your question, member from Scarborough Southwest: It doesn't. It doesn't have any investment.

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

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** The budget has multi-million-dollar investments in infrastructure dealing with transportation initiatives, hospitals, large expansion of broadband and long-term-care projects as well, which is supported by a variety of sectors, one of which is LIUNA Local 183. One of their directors had this to say: "With respect to the 2021 budget, we're delighted to say that the Ford government has once again demonstrated its commitment to renewing, repairing and building infrastructure that Ontarians depend on in their daily lives." Will the member opposite be supporting these investments to help improve the lives of hard-working Ontario families?

**Mr. Faisal Hassan:** Thank you for the question, the member from Whitby. Do I support workers? Do I support LIUNA? Yes, I do. I know they're hard-working. They're decent, hard workers. They live in my community. But this budget doesn't help them, to provide them paid sick days. It doesn't provide them time off to get vaccines. And that's exactly what they're telling me, workers in my community, including LIUNA. They want that investment.

Yes, we need to create jobs, but this budget doesn't provide them paid sick days. It has been reported that 60% of workers do not have paid sick days, and in this budget, the union—like LIUNA—workers don't have that. That would have been great, if this was included in the budget, and LIUNA would have been happy with this.

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

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** It's always a pleasure to rise, and I really enjoyed his presentation. But what I don't understand about this budget—and I've said this a number of times; I'm going to continue to say it every time I get a chance to ask a question. If we care about workers, which I know they don't, why are there no paid sick days in the budget? Why are there no reduced class sizes, as we know, by the way, that our kids are getting COVID in our schools? I know that because somebody in my family has COVID.

A messed-up vaccination plan: no vaccinations for our education workers, where our kids and our grandkids are getting COVID, where our teachers are getting COVID, where our bus drivers are getting COVID, where our caretakers are getting COVID. I heard a story last week in my area where a caretaker took COVID home to her husband and her husband passed away.

So my question, I think, is pretty easy. As we look at this third wave, this is on this government, what happened.

Can you please tell me why this government would not put paid sick days, reduced class sizes and a vaccination plan in this budget?

**Mr. Faisal Hassan:** Thank you, my colleague from Niagara. You're right; this budget doesn't provide that. The members talked about labour, organized labour, but it doesn't provide them those essential supports, paid sick days, providing them investment in education workers, in providing them opportunities to invest. This would have been an opportunity to do just that. Unfortunately, the question the member from Niagara asked me—it doesn't, and this is, again, another failure from this government.

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

**Mr. Michael Parsa:** I want to thank my colleague for the presentation.

I was quite surprised to hear him talk about how small businesses are not getting any support in this budget.

As most of you know, I'm a big advocate for small businesses—as many of you are in this House.

The small businesses that have been most affected by the necessary restrictions to stop the spread of COVID-19 will receive a second round of support—those who are eligible for it. So far, in Toronto, where the member's riding is, over 28,000 businesses have received funds. That's over \$400 million. In total, over 120,000 businesses have received over \$1.4 billion of support.

This quote is from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce: "What we see here is a lot of immediate, necessary supports that are going to be required for these businesses, in particular businesses that have been acutely impacted by the crisis, through the end of this economic crisis."

Madam Speaker, I've got quote after quote of support for the budget, that are supportive of these small businesses.

I was wondering if my colleague can elaborate on how he doesn't see all these supports—these are on top of the many supports that were presented before the budget.

**Mr. Faisal Hassan:** Thank you to the member. I appreciate your question.

I do welcome and advocate—that's why the decent, hard-working people of York South–Weston sent me here, to get more results for them.

I'm happy that some of the small businesses in my community are getting some results, but there are many, which I am going to talk about, that have not received this support. They include decent taxi drivers, who are also working very hard, day in and day out. They are not being included in this. There are also others who are having challenges and who, to this day, haven't received that. This is a fact, not only in my riding, but in many ridings.

To mention that some members of our community have received that—I welcome that. That's why I'm here—to advocate for those who have not received. That's why I'm saying this needs to be expanded.

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

**Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos:** I'm pleased to rise today to address the motion before the House.

Everyone in this House knows that over the last year, Ontario has faced one of the greatest challenges in our history. It's a challenge that we have all struggled with together. For the longest time, we didn't know how long this pandemic would last. We didn't know the best ways to fight it. Do we wear masks or not? How does the disease spread? What steps did we, as a government and as a society, have to take to get through this?

Well, we've learned. Under the leadership of our Premier, Ontario's government put together a team of the best experts in our province to protect our health, to protect us from this disease and to save lives.

We supported our businesses, our municipalities, our social agencies and charities.

We stood with our health workers, the brave women and men on the front lines, in the trenches, fighting COVID-19. We tracked down PPE, coats and gowns and gloves, shields and masks and ventilators—all of the supplies to protect the sick and those caring for them. And now we are making these supplies right here in Ontario.

We know that Ontario is weary of lockdowns and restrictions. We are all weary. But as our finance minister has said, there is hope on the horizon. We know that these measures we have taken are necessary. We have to break the back of the pandemic, as we wait for everyone to be vaccinated.

To date, 2,276,000 vaccine doses have been administered by our health workers. This number is growing daily, and with pharmacies opening to deliver the vaccines in communities such as mine, we can expect many more.

There is hope on the horizon, and that is what our government's budget this year is about—protecting the people, yes; protecting the economy, yes; but most importantly, building a plan for hope for an Ontario that returns to normal, an Ontario that sees prosperity return and job creation to greater levels than ever before. Our budget is laying the foundation for hope; for a newer, stronger, healthier, greener, happier Ontario.

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So, let us take a look at our Premier and our finance minister's foundation for hope in Ontario. At the base of our foundation, the platform on which everything else rests, is our health care. This means, more than anything, defeating COVID-19. Since the pandemic started, we've spent what was necessary to defeat COVID. This budget will bring total anti-COVID spending to \$16.3 billion: \$5.1 billion more for hospitals, creating 3,100 more hospital beds; \$11 million for almost 100 more beds for my own community at Joseph Brant Hospital and Halton Healthcare. This hospital funding includes \$1.8 billion more in this year's budget—funding that will tackle COVID, resolve surgery backlogs and keep pace with patient needs.

We will spend \$30 billion over 10 years for new hospital space. I'm very pleased that the west end of the GTA will have new spaces in Brampton and Mississauga. This means more resources and less waiting for everyone in our province.

There is \$175 million more this year for mental health and addiction services. We know that isolation and worry

because of COVID affects people's mental health, and the funding we have is part of our \$3.8-billion plan over 10 years—\$175 million more this year is great news in this budget. There is \$7 million more for post-secondary mental health, in addition to \$19 million more for students, announced in October, and \$8 million for mental health workers in OPP communication centres, helping people in crisis.

For my constituents in Oakville North–Burlington, I'm happy that we've recently seen community paramedicine extended to people eligible for long-term care in Halton region. This is a \$5.3-million investment in our region, part of a program rolled out in 33 communities across Ontario. I know it will make a difference supporting seniors and helping them stay in their own homes for longer.

We are also seeing vaccinations increase, as the federal government brings more supply into the country. There are over two million doses now done in Ontario. In Halton region, after health care workers and long-term-care residents were vaccinated starting in January, people over 80 started in early March. On March 19, the over-75s could book appointments; on March 26, the over-70s; and just five days later, on March 31, everyone over 65. And now we have learned that pharmacies are open to offer the vaccine, with four in my own community.

This progress is mirrored across Ontario. It's another sign of the green shoots springing up, giving us hope. I want to thank everyone involved in this great undertaking: everyone at Halton public health, at the vaccination centres; our paramedics; and all of the other staff and volunteers who are making vaccines work.

We are also ensuring families have the child care spaces they need. Our government is committed to creating 30,000 new child care spaces to help Ontario's families, and I'm proud that the finance minister reported that Ontario is more than two thirds of the way to meeting this commitment. These child care spaces will give parents the support they need: good, quality child care for kids—an opportunity for many parents to get back into the workforce or into education or training.

Our long-term-care residents are almost all now vaccinated, with every resident who wanted a vaccine now given one. We know the devastating toll on residents, as COVID struck our older and more frail citizens. COVID-19 exposed the long-existing challenges in our long-term-care homes. Previous governments neglected the sector for years. I'm proud that it is this government that took action and, indeed, had started to take action before the pandemic struck the province. We will have spent over \$2 billion since the beginning of the pandemic protecting the vulnerable long-term-care residents and staff; \$650 million in this year's budget.

With 40,000 seniors on our current wait-list, time is of the essence that we build the additional homes that our seniors need in long-term care. Our government campaigned with a promise to spend \$1.75 billion on new spaces, but we've gone beyond this: \$933 million over four years, for a total of \$2.6 billion. Approvals of new and upgraded beds are now at more than two thirds of our 30,000-bed commitment, as well as 15,198 upgraded spaces.

We will also make sure residents get the quality care they need. We will increase direct care from 2.75 hours to 4 hours per day, investing \$4.9 billion to do this. This level of care has been demanded for years. Study after study made the recommendations to the previous government, and our government with our Minister of Long-Term Care, Dr. Fullerton, is the first one to get it done. I am proud to be the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Long-Term Care, who will provide the direct care that residents need and deserve.

Parents and kids have also been challenged by COVID. I know parents were concerned when kids went back to school that the proper infection controls were in place. I think the return to school was successful. We ensured student safety by providing close to \$1.7 billion to protect students and keep schools safe, including \$100 million to improve classroom ventilation. We provided PPE; more staff, including 1,200 custodians; and 650 public health nurses available to schools. We worked with school boards to develop protocols for a safe return to school.

I'm particularly proud that we are still planning, funding and building the new schools that students, teachers and staff need for quality education. The new Dr. David R. Williams Public School funded by our government just opened in Oakville last September. We are also funding the building of a new Catholic elementary school and a new public high school. We've also funded the expansion of a French Catholic school.

The community has demonstrated the need for these schools, and I'm very proud that our government is delivering. These four investments total more than \$75 million in funding from the Ontario government in education in our community. They are part of our plan to invest \$14 billion over the next 10 years to build and upgrade schools, all to ensure quality learning for our kids.

Virtual learning and the challenge of child care created financial challenges for many parents and families, so the government put in place financial assistance to help meet these concerns. Last year, the government provided two rounds of support for the COVID-19 child benefit: \$200 per child and \$250 per child with special needs. This year, there's a third round, but the amounts have been doubled: \$400 per child and \$500 for each child with special needs. This doubled amount means the total direct support to families since last spring will be \$1.8 billion, funding that will meet the challenges for families with kids in school.

Child care is also an issue for many families. Helping parents with child care is not only good for stressed families during COVID-19; it's an important factor in helping people get back to work. We know that the burden of child care falls disproportionately on women, and that is why our government is proposing a temporary 20% enhancement to the child care tax credit for 2021. This would increase support for an average of about \$1,250 to \$1,500 per family for 300,000 families.

Too many people in Ontario have lost jobs during the pandemic. Many have returned to work, but others will need retraining to get a new job. To help workers with their training expenses, the government is proposing a new temporary Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit for 2021. It

would provide up to \$2,000 per recipient for 50% of eligible expenses—

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

*Debate deemed adjourned.*

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Sorry to interrupt the member, but it being 6 o'clock, the time for debate has expired and now it is time for private members' public business.

*Report continues in volume B.*

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<b>Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)</b>	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	

<b>Member and Party / Député(e) et parti</b>	<b>Constituency / Circonscription</b>	<b>Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités</b>
<b>Walker, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (PC)</b>	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	
<b>Yakubski, Hon. / L'hon. John (PC)</b>	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
<b>Yurek, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (PC)</b>	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**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Donna Skelly  
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

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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**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Aris Babikian  
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

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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

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas  
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Jessica Bell, Stephen Blais  
Stephen Crawford, Rudy Cuzzetto  
France Gélinas, Christine Hogarth  
Daryl Kramp, Taras Natyshak  
Michael Parsa  
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Fraser  
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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**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Bhutila Karpoche  
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

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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