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Mardi
13 avril 2021

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Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
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Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
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Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires
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

Tuesday 13 April 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 13 avril 2021

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Good morning. Let us pray.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECTING ONTARIO ELECTIONS ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LA PROTECTION DES ÉLECTIONS EN ONTARIO

Mr. Downey moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 254, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to elections and members of the Assembly / Projet de loi 254, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les élections et les députés à l'Assemblée.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Attorney General to lead off the debate.

Hon. Doug Downey: I am honoured to rise in the House today for the third reading of the Protecting Ontario Elections Act. This bill, if passed, would make it easier and safer for people to vote and participate in Ontario elections.

We are proposing responsible changes that would ensure the province's electoral process is equipped for urgent and evolving challenges, including COVID-19. Each and every Ontarian is a driving force in our democracy, from casting their vote to volunteering on campaigns or putting one's name on a ballot. This proposed legislation would protect Ontarians' central role in elections, promoting fairness and access to the electoral process for everyone. Our government is proposing changes to update election laws to better respond to the challenges of the day, the needs of voters and the way Ontarians interact with their democratic institutions.

The enduring health of these institutions is a testament to the work that has been accomplished over generations by parliamentarians and election officials to uphold the integrity, accessibility and transparency of Ontario's electoral process, no matter the challenges that have emerged.

Like other Parliaments before us, it is our responsibility to ensure that the electoral system and the laws that govern it continue to evolve to promote fairness and access to the electoral process for everyone. Never has it been more important to take steps to make our elections safer, more accessible and efficient for individuals. Our government recognizes this, and we are committed to ensuring that our

electoral process is equipped to respond to the challenges of the day and is resilient now and in the future.

If passed, the Protecting Ontario Elections Act, 2021, would help strengthen our preparedness for the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, add additional guardrails to ensure that the influence of third-party advertising is reasonable, and provide new protections against irregular campaign spending and collusion.

Before I begin to discuss the proposed changes in this legislation in greater detail, I would like to extend my gratitude to our partners who have contributed to this legislation. I would like to thank the diligent and dedicated teams at the Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs and my own ministry, the Ministry of the Attorney General, and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for their collective work on this legislation.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the Integrity Commissioner for his continued engagement and participation at committee. We look forward to working with the commissioner and his office on this bill in relation to the Members' Integrity Act and any legislative rules that may develop around social media.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank Elections Ontario for its continued leadership in ensuring elections in this province are fair, accessible and responsive. A special thanks to the Chief Electoral Officer, who participated at committee and has been engaged in this legislation prior to the introduction, right through until today.

I would like to recognize the diligence of the Chief Electoral Officer for bringing forward a special report on election administration that was released in November 2020 in response to the risks that surround COVID-19, as well as his report, Modernizing Ontario's Electoral Process: Report on Ontario's 42nd General Election, both of which laid the groundwork for this bill and some key amendments, including making it easier for people to get to the polls earlier in advance of the general election and thereby avoid lineups.

Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to all those who provided their feedback on this legislation at committee.

In Ontario, we are fortunate to choose our governments at the ballot box. It is imperative that the Legislature do everything it can to protect that privilege and keep our elections safe, fair and efficient. That is why we have introduced this legislation. It is why we are putting forth proposals to ensure that one of the flagships of our democratic system is protected and updated to meet urgent challenges, including COVID-19.

The legislative action we are proposing would protect Ontarians' essential voice in our democracy and strengthen the integrity of the election process. It will make it easier for Ontarians to vote on election day and in advance polls. It will ensure that candidates of all stripes and political parties can participate fairly, whether they be a member of a party or an independent. It will ensure Ontario is able to respond and readily adapt to changes in voting machine technology and the use of social media. It will bring in new accountability measures to protect Ontario elections against those who break election laws or participate in collusion. And it will provide responsible guardrails that would ensure the positions and power of third-party organizations don't drown out the voices of individuals who are willing to stand behind their convictions openly and transparently. Fundamentally, it will protect the voice of individuals and ensure that the people of Ontario are at the centre of democracy in this province.

The Protecting Ontario Elections Act is about putting people first and making sure that elections in Ontario are responsive to the challenges of the day. Whether that be new technologies, outdated processes that don't hold bad actors to account, the proliferation of pop-up organizations spending millions on influencing our elections or the uncertainty posed by things like COVID-19, Ontarians are fortunate to be able to count on the independent integrity of Elections Ontario, which began celebrating 100 years of elections in 2020.

Let's pause for a moment: 100 years of elections for this institution. You can see the names on the walls when you go downstairs. There's great history here. I remember when we were elected in 2018 and we were doing an orientation, they talked about there being only about 2,000 people who have ever been elected to this space. But I want to take a moment to think about all the people who weren't elected here, who put their name on a ballot, the people who put themselves forward with an idea or a conviction. Obviously, we know more than two people run in every riding. So that means if there are 2,000 people here, there are thousands of people who put their name on a ballot. Those people deserve a chance to have their voice heard.

Over the course of its proud history, Elections Ontario has administered 28 general elections, 149 by-elections and two referenda. Throughout that period, Elections Ontario has remained committed to meeting the changing needs of voters while upholding the integrity, accessibility and transparency of the electoral process in Ontario. I know its dedication to excellence will continue.

As a result of that persistent commitment and the contributions of successive governments over the years that have made efforts to ensure legislation continues to evolve with the times, Ontario continues to be seen as a leader in promoting and protecting the democratic process.

With this bill, our government is taking up that critical responsibility to protect Ontario elections. We are responding to the challenges of the day and the needs of voters.

We know all too well the reality and impact of COVID-19 here in Ontario, across Canada and around the world. Right now, keeping people safe is at the heart of everything we do. As we all know, maintaining distance from one another is essential to curbing the spread of COVID-19. In today's environment of physical distancing, we know many added measures will need to be in place to safely hold an election in Ontario, and we are proposing action now to help ensure Ontario is prepared.

0910

The COVID-19 pandemic has driven up the importance of ensuring elections are accessible and safe for all Ontarians. When we think about election day in this current environment, for better or worse, one of our first thoughts is about people gathering at polling stations. We know that they can be crowded, with lengthy lineups, especially in peak times like after a long work day. It doesn't take much to think about a school gym with multiple stations to vote at and people working side by side, each taking registrations as people come in, checking ID, and people lining up and going behind the box. There's a lot of activity in that space.

One of the things that happens, at least in a lot of the places that I've volunteered, is that it's a gathering place for the community. Because there are a lot of people, people then go outside and they're talking to each other and they're enjoying their community. I just can't imagine how that would look if it were to happen today. Things have changed a little bit. We need to be careful, we need to make sure that we have distancing and we need to make sure that Elections Ontario is responsive to that.

We know that the idea of lining up and gathering at polling stations can be a source of anxiety and concern that could deter some voters from participating as they normally would on election day. Some people would envision that scene that I just described and be nervous about it and maybe not vote. We do not want that. We want everybody to vote who has the ability to vote.

Being able to maintain a safe distance while exercising your civic duty has never been more important. That is why we have proposed changes that would make it safer and easier to vote in a COVID-19 environment. We want to increase the number of flexible advance polling days from five to 10, based on need. Increasing the number of advance polling days would reduce the number of people in a polling station, so they could stay a safe distance apart and minimize risk. That added flexibility would allow people to participate in Ontario elections without fear or apprehension.

Ontarians who face obstacles in making their way to a polling station, such as people living in northern and remote communities, would have more options on when to vote. We have to remember that for many Ontarians, voting is not just a matter of walking a few city blocks or driving a few miles in their cars. For some Ontarians, casting their vote is a time commitment, it's a travel commitment, and it often means juggling an already busy daily schedule with work and with family. This change

would also make it easier for shift workers and others on a strict work clock to cast their vote safely.

While this change could be essential for our next provincial election, I want to emphasize that it will have an enduring impact into the future in increasing the accessibility of voting more broadly. Speaker, as I have mentioned, there are several changes in this proposed legislation which address recommendations made by Elections Ontario and the Chief Electoral Officer. This includes recommendations made in the Chief Electoral Officer's November 2020 special report on election administration during COVID, which I mentioned earlier. The proposal to expand advanced polling responds to recommendations made in that special report.

Even before the heightened urgency to provide additional flexibility for advanced polling during COVID-19, we have seen that advanced polling has been a beneficial and increasingly convenient option that increases accessibility for Ontarians seeking to participate in Ontario's elections. In fact, according to the Chief Electoral Officer's 2018 post-election report, more Ontarians voted during advanced voting in the last provincial election than ever before. More than 698,600 people chose advanced voting, which is more than a 22% increase from the 569,632 people who voted in 2014. There is a trend that predates the COVID-19 challenge, so we're harnessing both and making it more accessible for people. The Chief Electoral Officer said that expanding the advanced voting period to 10 days would let more voters take advantage of casting their ballots in advance, and I agree.

All these voters benefited from new technology-enabled polling stations. The success of the technology during this period provided Elections Ontario with some excellent insights about what to expect on election day.

During the 2018 election, mail-in ballots also proved to be a very popular option. Elections Ontario reported sending out more than 15,000 mail-in ballot kits for the 2018 election, which is up more than 50% from the 10,000 kits sent ahead of the 2014 provincial election. Speaker, we can clearly see that Ontarians have shown a growing interest in taking advantage of more of the convenient voting options that are available, even before the pandemic. We can see that for many people, voting in advance of election day can be a better fit for their individual circumstances and their routine.

Putting aside the present urgent need to provide flexibility for voters, I hope every member of this Legislature can agree that it is essential to make our elections more relevant and convenient for the people they are intended to serve. By increasing advance voting days, we would expand the opportunity for more Ontarians to vote safely and with more convenience, and help to ensure more individuals can make their voices heard. That is the experience that has been measured in recent elections here in Ontario and has been identified by Ontario's Chief Electoral Officer as an area of our elections that needs addressing.

Speaker, we have also seen the need to improve access to advance voting through the example of provinces that

conducted elections during the COVID-19 pandemic, with specific public health directives in place. Provincial general elections were held in British Columbia and New Brunswick last year. This past winter, a severe COVID-19 outbreak in Newfoundland and Labrador created chaos for election officials and voters. As a result of the outbreak, election officials cancelled in-person voting on the eve of election day and extended the time voters had to cast ballots until March 25.

Recognizing that this virus will be part of our reality in some capacity for the foreseeable future, we want to ensure we take responsible measures to mitigate risks related to COVID-19 while providing more options for Ontarians to feel safe voting in advance of election day. Newfoundland and Labrador's experience shows how unpredictable elections can be in a COVID-19 environment and how quickly circumstances can change.

Like Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick was home to a relatively low number of COVID-19 cases when the writ was dropped last summer. Fortunately, that election was not marred by an outbreak of COVID-19 that required the kind of emergency action that was taken in Newfoundland and Labrador. The New Brunswick election saw voters turn out for advance voting in record numbers. In fact, more than 133,000 people voted in the two days of advance polls, the most ever in that province. This was up from 88,000 voters in 2018. So that's 133,000, up from 88,000, which represents a marked increase in the COVID-19 context.

British Columbia has also had its own unique voting experience during the pandemic, and even though voting occurred as originally scheduled, unsurprisingly, British Columbia also saw a rise in votes cast in advance polls. According to elections officials, in 2020, the advance votes cast as a percentage of total votes—the increase was 35%, compared to 30% in 2017. Again, in a province the size of British Columbia, that's a marked increase in round numbers. This demonstrates that there has been a greater uptake of advance polling in provinces where elections have been run safely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have proposed provisions to ensure election day and advance polls do not occur on weekends of major religious holidays, as determined by Elections Ontario.

As mentioned, 10 days of advance polls was most recently proposed by Ontario's Chief Electoral Officer in a special report released last November on election administration and response to the risks that surround COVID-19. We are pleased to be responding to that recommendation, the lessons of previous elections in Ontario and the example of other provinces that have held elections during this pandemic.

Speaker, Ontarians see the current system, and it permits pop-up organizations and political action groups. It allows them to use their spending power to bring American-style politics that overpower the voices of individuals. We're proposing to also include responsible reforms, to put safeguards in place to address the under-regulated third-party advertising in Ontario.

I want to begin here by clarifying what third-party advertising is and how it impacts our elections. Third-party advertising is a way for organizations that are not part of a candidate's or a party's campaign to make an impact on the public dissemination of information leading into an election and, ultimately, its outcome. I want to be clear: We recognize that there is a place for third parties to participate in our democratic elections. But the fact of the matter is this: The level of activity and spending that these pop-up organizations are engaged in in our province is significant, and it needs reasonable safeguards.

What we do know is that north of the border, this kind of campaigning takes on unique dimensions in our province compared with the rest of the country and even in the federal context. In Ontario, we're the only province in Canada where third-party spending is counted in the millions rather than in the thousands. The influence of third parties in our elections is disproportionately significant in Ontario compared to other provinces and even in the federal context, on a dollar-to-dollar basis.

0920

In 2018, in Ontario, third parties spent over \$5 million during the election period and in the six months prior to the election. This is not spending by actual political parties or candidates who raise funds from transparent and accountable donations made by individuals. This is spending by outside organizations that can be funded by a wider variety of sources. The amount of money that can be spent, and is being spent, by third parties can be shocking when you look at the numbers.

Our government has been clear: We believe Ontarians should be the ones deciding elections. Again, we recognize that there needs to be room for third parties to participate alongside candidates and parties in the electoral process. Their voice is important too. But what we cannot allow is that their voice be louder than Ontarians themselves.

This bill would provide a balance to ensure the voice of individual Ontarians will not be drowned out. This is a position that has been supported by the independent officer of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario responsible for the administration of provincial elections. In 2016, the Chief Electoral Officer stated that the scale of third-party advertising in Ontario was greater than at the federal level and suggested that third-party election ads be monitored between elections, not just in the immediate lead-up or during the writ.

In this proposed legislation, the Protecting Ontario Elections Act, we are building on the Ontario Legislature's 2016 decision to ban corporate and union donations by requiring third-party advertising spending limits to begin 12 months before an election instead of six months before. This proposed time-limit increase would responsibly regulate third-party advertising between elections. It would protect the essential voice of individuals and ensure that they—and not pop-up organizations—remain the driving force of our elections.

The spending limit is not changing. It will remain at \$637,200. That's in addition to the \$106,000 each third-

party group is permitted to spend during the official writ period. Of course, prior to the pre-writ, that is, 12 months before the election, the spending limit is unlimited—unlimited for nearly three years. So that's an unlimited opportunity up to the 12-month period, over \$637,000 for the 12-month period up to the writ, and then another \$106,000 during the writ for any third party. That is significant, Speaker.

We're proposing to strike a balance. We're proposing changes to help reasonably regulate third-party advertising between elections, balancing the ability of third parties to continue to participate in elections and the need to ensure Ontario voters have the loudest voice in our elections. For clarity, I will note that these amounts are indexed annually and will be updated by Elections Ontario with the new amounts in January 2022.

The proposed time-limit increase would help to reasonably regulate third-party advertising between elections. I think we can all agree that we don't want our politics to become as adversarial or polarized as what we have witnessed in the United States. Much of the disenchantment that many people feel about politics stems from attack ads funded by faceless political action groups, pop-up organizations and big-money conglomerates.

The proposed changes will protect Ontario from those risks. At committee, we made a few key amendments that will further strengthen this portion of the bill by creating greater accountability for third parties who choose to participate in our elections through paid advertising. We have made amendments that would require third parties to file interim spending reports with the Chief Electoral Officer to support compliance with third-party spending limits. These reports will have to be filed for every thousand dollars that the third party spends or commits to advertising.

Elections Ontario will then track third-party advertiser spending online by publishing interim reports, as well as the percentage of their allowable spending limit spent or committed to date. This will allow sellers of advertising to do their due diligence and not contract with or commit advertising to any third party if doing so would put the third party over their spending limit. It would both improve transparency and ensure organizations selling advertising are part of the accountability process.

Ultimately, we want individuals to make decisions based on what each party stands for and based on the record of that party. Our proposed changes will ensure that the under-regulated third-party spending is addressed—under-regulated, yes.

Speaker, our goal is also to protect Ontarians' essential voice in campaigns and strengthen the integrity of the elections process by doing other changes. It is for this reason that this legislation also includes changes to increase the amount that an individual can contribute.

I would like to take a moment to touch on the 2016 Ontario Legislature decision to ban corporate and union donations. That decision also helped to protect Ontarians' essential voice in campaigns and strengthen the integrity of the elections process. I think we can all agree. The Chief

Electoral Officer has supported the ban of union and corporate contributions, and we agree that this is a good action taken by the Legislature. In fact, we believe it is imperative to ensure individuals—not big corporations or organizations—remain at the centre of the electoral process.

As we contemplated this change to increase the amount that an individual can contribute to a party, candidate or riding association, we looked at Ontario's situation in comparison to other provinces to see where we stood against some of our counterparts across the country. By increasing these annual limits from \$1,650 to \$3,300 this year, as this bill is proposing, we would be putting Ontario right in the middle of the pack for individual donation limits in Canada. This would still be well below Alberta, where the limit is \$4,243. It's well below Manitoba and Nova Scotia where, in both those provinces, the limits are \$5,000. In Saskatchewan and Newfoundland and Labrador, there is, in fact, no limit at all. Again, this is another element of this legislation that builds on this Legislature's long-standing history of updating Ontario's election laws and ensuring that the electoral system continues to evolve.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed almost every aspect of our lives and how we interact with our communities. Party and riding associations have not been able to safely engage with their constituents in the way they could before COVID-19, and this runs across all party lines. That impacts their ability to effectively connect with and represent their constituents and supporters, and their financial viability.

In recognition of the current circumstances, which have changed since the last time this Legislature debated per-vote subsidies for political parties, we're proposing to extend the per-vote subsidies each party typically receives during an election at the 2018 rate of 63 cents per vote. These subsidies were scheduled to be phased out by 2022. In order to protect the essential political dialogue that Ontarians expect to engage in with political parties across the spectrum, we're proposing that the per-vote subsidies each party typically receives stay in place until December 2024. This will give all parties a chance to find some financial balance and move forward with planning for the future. We need to ensure that the electoral system continues to evolve to preserve fairness and access to the electoral process for everyone. We're proposing a balanced approach which ensures we won't be in a situation where parties aren't part of the discussion simply because they can't afford to be there.

I also want to briefly discuss a change to this portion of the legislation that we made at committee. In order to ensure that this proposed change fully meets our goal of ensuring all parties are financially viable, we made an amendment that would make the proposed change to subsidies retroactive and effective January 1, 2021. It's a matter of fairness that parties and constituency associations should have the resources to fully participate in our democracy. We believe that this change would help our democratic institutions be part of the province-wide COVID-19 recovery that our government is leading, and

it helps protect the essential and vigorous dialogue that Ontarians expect in their elections.

Now I'd like to touch on the matter of social media, which has been glaringly absent from Ontario legislation until now. In fact, Ontario may be leading the way in terms of bringing practical change and ideas for social media. It's no secret that politicians and voters are all active on social media—well, they're not all active, but some are very active. It's a modern, dynamic way for us to communicate. We can actually increase accountability in many ways.

Not only is it an immediate and efficient way for politicians to reach voters, supporters and constituents, it can also help citizens engage politicians. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, I regularly receive ideas, things happening from—I follow any Ontario lawyer I find on Twitter, and they will sometimes post saying, "Hey, did you know this is happening?" That helps us pre-empt a problem that may be developing or it gives us insight into what's happening. Social media can be a very powerful tool for somebody who may not pick up the phone or may not write a letter. They won't even send an email, but they'll throw something on Twitter, and you pick it up and you may solve a problem before it becomes a problem.

Our proposed legislation will be the first express recognition in Ontario law—or even in Canada for that matter—that members of the assembly use social media to reach the public and their constituents, their supporters and followers and sometimes detractors. We think it is time to clarify how existing election rules and responsibilities extend to these platforms. We're therefore proposing amendments to the Members' Integrity Act, 1994, to allow members of provincial Parliament to have a single social media account before, during and after an election period instead of having to create multiple social media accounts for each period.

0930

I just want to capture the practicality of that: requiring an individual to have to have a Twitter account because they're running in a campaign, when they had a Twitter account before they even thought about running in a campaign. Then they get elected and they have to have a different social media account to communicate with their constituents, supporters, followers and detractors. Then, if they hold a particular position, let's say as Chair of a committee or a cabinet minister, you have to have another social media account. And then when you come out of that and you run the next time, they want you to go back to the first social media account you abandoned four years before. That's not practical. It's not what happens. It's not how people engage. So we're recognizing the practicality of setting up these disparate platforms.

We have the responsibility to ensure legislation governing the conduct of members of the Legislature is clear and relevant to our world today. The Protecting Ontario Elections Act would empower the Legislative Assembly to make the first set of rules for how social media should be used responsibly by MPPs. All members and their staff would have to obey the established rules regarding the

permissible use of government resources. Similarly, all ministers would have to obey the specific rules that apply to them and their ministerial staff to ensure that public funds are not used for partisan purposes. I am proud that Ontario is once again a Canadian leader in ensuring election laws are updated and modernized to meet the needs of voters and the evolving platforms they use to get information from and communicate with their elected representatives.

Speaker, this legislation also includes important changes which will increase fairness for candidates. When we talk about ensuring fairness for candidates, for too long election rules have forgotten independent members. Currently, independent members of provincial Parliament do not have the same ability or resources as registered political party candidates to fundraise outside of election periods or keep surpluses from their campaigns. Their financial resources are limited. I believe and our government believes this is unfair.

If passed, our proposed legislation would level the playing field and provide all sitting independent MPPs with access to constituency associations. They would also receive the related benefits of being able to fundraise outside of election periods, qualify for constituency association voter subsidies and keep surpluses. British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan all presently allow incumbent independent MLAs to form constituency associations. We are proposing that Ontario join those jurisdictions.

Our government has continually worked to ensure that independent members of this Legislature stand on equal footing with those who are members of a party. Just before I move on, I would like to discuss a few other examples of how the government House leader has worked to ensure fairness for all members of this chamber. A few recent examples come to mind: In 2019, the standing orders were amended to provide equal time for independent members to respond to opposition day motions. In 2020, the standing orders were amended again to reallocate two government question period questions each day to the independent members. Now, in 2021, I am glad to build on this work to support the independent members of this Legislature and the next and so on.

The proposed changes in this legislation will go a long way to ensuring that independent members have a fair shot in future elections. I am proud to be bringing forth this change to help build a more accessible election system in Ontario for all.

Ontario didn't build a world-class electoral process by allowing the system to grow outdated. It didn't allow it to be unresponsive to the needs of the people who rely on it to express their voice. Elections Ontario is celebrating a proud centennial, because generations of Ontarians have made our elections and our democracy a priority. In 2021, that means keeping up with how Ontarians expect to interact with their representatives, public life and even the technology they expect to be used as part of the elections.

As I mentioned earlier, this bill puts forward several reforms that were recommended by the Chief Electoral

Officer, including a proposed change to introduce guidelines on voting technology. Just as Ontario's justice system needs to keep up with the times, so does Ontario's voting system. We are taking great strides in moving from an outdated, outmoded, paper-based justice system to one that embraces technology. We need to apply the same principles to our electoral processes.

Voting equipment used to count and submit ballots needs to keep pace with new advances. Of course, when we are looking at equipment that is used to count and submit ballots, we must ensure accuracy and accountability are paramount. That is why we are proposing an advisory committee appointed by the Chief Electoral Officer of Elections Ontario to advise on guidelines and make recommendations for Ontario's voting equipment. This committee would include representation of every registered party in the Legislature. It would have a similar structure to the political advisory committee to the Chief Electoral Officer, with the notable addition of experts in election technology. The advice of this committee would help modernize Ontario's voting process and ensure it is updated to meet urgent challenges, including things like COVID-19.

Another recommendation from the Chief Electoral Officer that we are putting forward as part of this bill is about the use of administrative monetary penalties to ensure compliance with election rules. This bill would also boost the Chief Electoral Officer's enforcement powers and discretion.

Currently, the Chief Electoral Officer reports election infractions to the independent prosecution service in the Criminal Law Division within the Ministry of the Attorney General, where they're considered for possible prosecution. Once that has been done, the Chief Electoral Officer must wait. He must wait and see whether the independent prosecution service will proceed with a prosecution. While the Chief Electoral Officer will continue to have this opportunity, if this bill passes, it would provide the CEO with new options and more discretion to drive compliance, because to have it submitted to the Criminal Law Division for possible prosecution is sort of an all-or-nothing. It's a very significant move for prosecution when some of the infractions are fairly minor, but there was no way to address those non-compliance pieces.

These options would include new powers to impose administrative monetary penalties for offences classified as "minor." So, for example, for third parties, administrative monetary penalties could be applied for:

- third-party advertising with no authorization, if you forget the little tagline on a sign or something;
- failing to register as a third party;
- exceeding spending limits.

For nomination contestants and leadership contestants, these penalties could be applied for failure to register.

All political actors could be given an administrative monetary penalty for:

- failure to submit financial reports;
- exceeding spending limits.

Other offences would include:

- release of election surveys on polling day;
- failure to submit other reports.

Most offences would be subject to a maximum penalty of \$1,500 for individuals and \$5,000 for an entity, with the following exceptions:

—In the event that a contribution in excess of the limits imposed by the act is made, the maximum amount of the penalty is an amount equal to twice the amount that was contributed in contravention to that section, plus \$1,500 for an individual or \$5,000 in the case of an entity that contravenes the act.

—For any political or third-party advertising appearing during a blackout period and any third-party advertising that does not disclose the source or lacks authorization, the penalty would be up to \$10,000 if the third party is a person and up to \$100,000 if the third party is a trade union, employee organization, corporation or other organization.

—Failure to register as a third party would lead to a maximum penalty of \$10,000.

Again, I want to be abundantly clear that each of these offences could still be prosecuted by the Criminal Law Division within the Ministry of the Attorney General. These are additional tools to drive compliance.

Speaker, the Commissioner of Canada Elections within the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer is authorized to use AMPs in this manner, and election officials at the federal level, in British Columbia and in Alberta can also apply similar penalties. Ontario would be following the precedent set in these jurisdictions. With respect to penalties for third parties, Ontario is proposing to follow the Alberta model, with higher maximum penalties of up to \$10,000 for individuals and \$100,000 for organizations.

At committee, we listened to a number of stakeholders like Democracy Watch and others who cited the need for a few amendments that would make the monetary penalty scheme fairer and more similar to other jurisdictions. As a result, monetary penalties can be appealed to the Superior Court of Justice within a certain time period as long as the appropriate appeal process is followed, and the Chief Electoral Officer may only issue a monetary penalty if the officer believes on reasonable grounds that the person or entity contravened the act. This amendment makes the standard more objective and fairer to appeal. Like limitation periods in law, the Chief Electoral Officer will only be able to issue a monetary penalty within two years of discovering there was an infraction. These are all measures that will make it fairer and more transparent for all involved.

Speaker, we appreciate the feedback we received at committee, and as always, we're glad to incorporate amendments that will further strengthen this proposed legislation. It's a nod to the committee process, to the committee members who took the time to hear from people who self-selected to come in front of the committee and talk about what was important to them and their experiences in other jurisdictions. That's one of the great things about Canada, as a federated model. We have, really, all these different experiences across the country,

trying different things, where we can pick up ideas that have been tested already, things that are in the field. It's exactly this kind of approach that we heard at committee, where people said, "Here's what happens in BC," "Here's what happens in Alberta," or "Here's what happens in Nova Scotia."

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Quite frankly, it gives us a chance to be educated and to gain the experience without going through the difficulty that a place like Newfoundland and Labrador went through with their election, where they ran into trouble. We could learn from that in real time. So when we heard those ideas—we're always looking for ideas, but again, I want to thank all the committee members from all the parties who took the time to hear the depositions. They came up with some really good, concrete changes, and we've incorporated so many of those very practical changes into the process.

In terms of a legislative process, it's very helpful when we have somebody who is proactive like the Chief Electoral Officer for Elections Ontario, who puts together a paper, some research and some ideas, puts them on paper, files them in the fall, gives us a chance to digest them, lets people look at them to see what might work, what might not work. And then we draw on our collective experience. There's probably not anything else that I can think of that every member in this Legislature collectively knows as well as elections. It draws your keen attention when your name is on a ballot. If you hadn't been involved before, you certainly become educated very quickly on so many of the intricacies: things like blackout periods, things like how to raise money, how you report. There's actually quite a bit of reporting that happens, a lot of accountability, whether it be at the nomination level or the election level. All of that collective experience that we have in this House goes forward into a proposed bill.

When it goes into first reading, as we know, there's not a lot of discussion through first reading. At second reading, there's a little bit more: We get some debate with the opposition, with the independents, and we hear some perspectives. Then we have a chance to go to committee. When it goes to committee, that's when the public really weighs in. They talk directly to MPPs about what's important to them and things that they think we can do better, things that they think that we may not have full context for.

I know we hear sometimes about how we have a majority and so we could just go forward. That is true, but that's not really how we govern. We want to hear from people. We want to hear from people what their ideas are. There's proof positive in the number of the bills that I've brought through the Legislature where we've made changes once we heard from people and had context.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I just want to thank the members for taking the time to listen, to help us articulate ways that we can do better, and I just reviewed a few of the ways where we have in fact taken that input and provided some amendments here in third reading. I just wanted to pause and mention that so that people are drawn to—if they were

paying attention at second reading, there are some changes in third reading because of that process. It really is a very good process.

Another area of election law in Ontario that needed to be strongly enforced is collusion. In fact, as we were drafting this legislation to promote fair participation in elections, it was a priority to strengthen enforcement—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Doug Downey: I just wanted to wake the opposition up, Mr. Speaker; I just had to do something.

In fact, as we were drafting this legislation to promote fair participation in elections, it was a priority to strengthen enforcement around collusion. Now, to be clear, we're proposing rules to address collusion that focuses on sharing of resources, not sharing of message. So if organizations are sharing the same message, that's fine. Collusion is about sharing of resources, so that they're not skirting and going around the spending limits simply by setting up another pop-up organization.

Now, currently collusion can only be established where it can be proven that a third party's advertising has been done with the knowledge and consent of a candidate or party. Our proposed amendment would clearly outline what would entail collusion to help guard against those risks. We looked at the federal definition of collusion, and we are proposing to strengthen Ontario's accordingly. We would like to add more clarity around sharing information, common vendors, common contributors and use of funds obtained from foreign sources, to ensure Ontario benefits from the strongest framework in Canada. We are also proposing that the non-partisan, independent Chief Electoral Officer would investigate complaints or allegations on collusion. Our suggested changes would strengthen safeguards against collusion and, most importantly, protect our elections from outside influence and interference. Through this legislation, Ontario would have the strongest framework in the country.

We also made an amendment at committee that will further strengthen these collusion provisions. We are proposing now that third parties who donate funds to other third parties will have to disclose those donations as part of the donations relating to the third party's spending limit. This only makes sense. Currently, third parties can circumvent the spending limits because third-party donations aren't captured as part of those limits. So what I'm saying is, you could have one organization donate money to another organization, and then have double the spending. Again, this is all about Ontarians' voice, the voter's voice. We shouldn't have organizations doing that. It needs to be clarified and made more transparent. It's what Ontarians would expect from their system.

We know that Ontario's financial rules for candidates and parties in an election are inefficient and serve as barriers. These outdated rules may discourage people from running for an elected office. In order to further strengthen the measures set out in this bill, in the near future we will be proposing an additional amendment to streamline

processes so that people vying for party nominations would only need to submit candidate registration papers and not the additional financial reports introduced in 2017. This proposed amendment would still require contestants to register but remove all requirements for financial reporting, as recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer. Again, this is an idea that came from the CEO. This would simplify procedures and reduce bureaucratic red tape that could negatively affect interested candidates to the point that the actual candidate pool is reduced.

I also want to talk about spot audits for a moment. The term "spot audit" refers to financial audits of candidates, leadership contestants and parties that happen after an audit has already been submitted and found sufficient. So, as you know—I know everybody in this chamber knows—when you submit your financials, you submit them audited. They're reviewed by Elections Ontario and they're accepted. Well, a spot audit says, "We might have another look after that." Speaker, political parties and campaigns are already subject to financial reporting requirements that include many checks and balances. Like any other business in this province, they need to follow audit rules and requirements. For political parties and candidates, this means that political parties hire firms like PwC, KPMG or others to audit the party's financial statements which then must be submitted annually and after each campaign.

Now, I mentioned these big companies, but I have to tell you there are so many people—Mike Bunn in Barrie, who is retired now, would do audits; Charlene Anderson; Susan Morrison. There are so many sole practitioners that would do financials and do audits, so it's not just the big guys. It's also individuals in your communities that step forward and do that.

Once they're audited, the reports are then reviewed by Elections Ontario to confirm their accuracy, as I said. Spot audits reopen and reinvestigate financial statements that have already been audited, closed and approved, and place a large administrative burden on political parties and individual candidates. It's duplication of work and it's unnecessary. We're proposing an amendment that would limit the Chief Electoral Officer's authority to reopen previously approved audited financial statements. This change would help make the elections process more efficient, while maintaining regular audits of finances and strong, effective oversight of provincial elections. But, as an additional balancing measure, we're providing the Chief Electoral Officer with a stronger suite of enforcement tools to drive compliance. This will be the most complete toolbox of penalties and enforcement measures available to an election officer in Canada.

Speaker, we're also proposing a number of administrative changes to help simplify the electoral process and make it more efficient. Constituency associations will be required to submit financial statements to the registered party quarterly, or as requested, to increase transparency. This will help to increase the transparency of election finances between parties and their constituency associations. We're also proposing to reduce the requirement to post events to a party website from seven days in advance

of the event to three days. This would align posting requirements during writ and non-writ periods and help to increase the transparency of election finances between parties and their constituency associations. This proposed amendment also builds on previous reforms voted into law by Ontario's Legislature to strengthen the integrity of elections and encourage fair participation by Ontarians.

We are suggesting a new minimum \$10,000 threshold of contributions to trigger an audit. This would ensure audit subsidies are paid only to organizations with significant financial activity. The contribution threshold we are proposing is \$10,000 of any financial activity. Previously, there was no threshold, so organizations that received significantly fewer donations could still be audited. Again, Mr. Speaker, this isn't necessarily about the mainstream parties; this may be about an individual who puts their name forward on a ballot in a riding because they believe strongly in what they're doing. And I've been in the situation myself where one of my competitors registered and then realized that in fact that may not be the path they want to go in. But they stayed registered and ultimately, really, spent almost nothing. They happened to be on the ballot, but they really didn't do much financial activity. To provide a subsidy to audit those statements is a waste.

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We're trying to open the door for other voices to participate, to encourage people to put their name on a ballot, whatever their cause or their case or their argument may be. Again, this seems like a little bit of inside baseball that we're talking about things like audits of financial statements for campaigns, but it's pretty important stuff. It can be a gatekeeper for individuals who choose, then, maybe not to come forward. They may decide that they don't want to go through all the paperwork. We need to make it as easy as possible for individuals to participate in a democratic system in whatever manner they choose. Again, some people vote, some people do more. Some people knock on doors, put a sign on your lawn, contribute. Some people put their name on a ballot. We need to make it as easy as possible for all of those activities to happen.

This would ensure audit subsidies are paid only to organizations with significant financial activity. The contribution threshold, again, as I said, was \$10,000. Previously, there was nothing. In our proposed change, we would not be spending public money doing audits of financial statements where there has been little or no financial activity because—I failed to mention those subsidies come from public money, so we're spending public monies to audit where there may only be a thousand dollars of activity.

By setting an audit threshold, we'd also need to give audit subsidies to those organizations that have more than \$10,000 worth of financial activity. We're proposing to increase audit subsidies to a consistent level across the board—it makes it predictable and consistent—and we're proposing \$2,000 across the board.

Another administrative change that we're bringing forward is increasing the deadline for reporting total contributions over \$200, which is up from the current \$100 limit,

to political parties and leadership contestants from a single donor. We're proposing to increase this deadline from 10 to 15 days from the date of deposit—still pretty quick. The administrative change makes it easier for political parties to record and report on donations received, increases efficiencies and makes things a little less bureaucratic.

We'd also like to provide candidates who register early with certificates up to six months before the writ so they can do things like open a bank account and be ready well in advance of an election period. Again, there's a lot to do, and to have to wait until a writ is dropped, and then scramble to open up a bank account and do some of the administrative pieces that you need to do, is a complete barrier to some individuals who would otherwise come forward. Again, those of us who are in a political party may have more support structure for that kind of thing, but an independent or a smaller party may not have that ability. Not only will this be a welcome change for many potential candidates and enable them to feel much more prepared for the election period, it serves as another incentive for people to become a candidate.

Another proposed amendment would allow the chief financial officers of registered political parties to issue tax receipts sooner for political contributions to fundraising functions with direct costs of \$30 or less per person. This will make it easier for political parties and others who hold fundraising events to record and report on the donations they have received.

Now, I just want to talk about that again. If you're doing a fundraiser and you're confident that your costs per person are going to be less than \$30—let's say the ticket price is \$100, and you're going to provide some hors d'oeuvres and whatnot and it's going to come out to about 20 bucks. Right now, what has to happen is that the individual donor gets a tax receipt for \$80 on that \$20; if the \$20 is spent, you have to take that out. Well, that also means that you have to wait until after the event, because it might actually be \$19.50 or it might be \$22. You have to be accurate, and so you can't issue the tax receipts until after the event is closed, the costs are in and you get all that sorted out.

We're saying, "Look, we want people to engage. We want to make less paperwork. We want to still keep accountability and transparency." But if it's under \$30 on that \$100 fundraiser, let's get the tax receipt out into people's hands, and let's make it easier for the chief financial officers, who are volunteers in political parties in all of our ridings. Let's take away some of that red tape and make it a little more practical. Ontario's financial reporting rules for candidates and parties are difficult enough. They're inefficient and may make people think twice about running for elected office, as I said.

A final administrative amendment we're proposing is to provide the Chief Electoral Officer with the authority to share data extracts from the single register of electors with district social services administration boards, the DSSABs, for electoral purposes. This proposed amendment will help district social services administration boards have accurate data to reach out to electors in territories without municipal organizations attached. Work is under way to build

the single register, which will be in place to support the 2026 general election, regular municipal elections and any municipal by-elections initiated after January 1, 2024. Last year, in response to a long-standing request for municipalities, we made changes to eliminate duplication and combine the provincial and municipal voters lists into a single list managed by Elections Ontario.

For the last several elections, we have heard concerns about the accuracy of voter information that municipalities receive. Our changes will help make voting easier for Ontarians by reducing duplication and improving the accuracy of the municipal voters list, resulting in fewer corrections at polling stations, shorter lines on election day and reduced costs for municipalities. Beginning January 1, 2024, the CEO and Elections Ontario will be responsible for establishing and managing the single list. This action could cut red tape, help municipalities save money and make voting day easier for candidates, voters and, definitely, municipal clerks.

We've also received requests from municipalities to modernize election services and make them more efficient. In response to these requests, our government is proposing changes to make the election process more efficient for local staff, potential candidates and third-party advertisers. The proposed amendments to the Municipal Elections Act would enable clerks to allow candidates and third-party advertisers to submit their nomination and registration forms electronically. It seems like big innovation; we just have to use the tools that we have, Mr. Speaker. This is already done for provincial and federal elections and has been beneficial in reducing red tape and increasing efficiencies.

Another proposed change would allow registered third-party advertisers to end their advertising campaigns before voting day. The proposed change means that if a third-party advertiser files a nomination to run for office, their advertising campaign would automatically end. These proposed changes would apply to municipal by-elections initiated during the current term and all future municipal elections. This is one more way that Ontario is responding to the municipal sector's request to modernize election services.

We know that our municipal partners have been working hard to continue to deliver the critical services that people in Ontario, in our communities rely on. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are making it more difficult than ever for municipalities to deliver modern, efficient services that are financially sustainable. Our government is proud to support initiatives that will strengthen local service delivery, modernize municipal processes and better respect taxpayers' dollars. We'll keep working in partnership with municipalities to meet local needs.

Mr. Speaker, fair, accessible and safe elections are the cornerstone of a free democratic society, and we need to do what we can to protect the electoral process as life in Ontario continues to grow and evolve. People should be at the centre of the political process and of democracy in Ontario. It is the people who form the backbone of our

communities, whose spirit and energy drive our province and ultimately hold us, their elected representatives, accountable. They are the essence of Ontario, and they set the course for our province at the ballot box. With our proposed changes, we would reassert the central role of these individuals and put them back at the heart of the political process.

Our proposed Protecting Ontario Elections Act is about protecting the essential role of individuals in elections. We are putting people first. We are putting voters first. We want people to feel that they have a voice in our elections, and that's why we have put forward a comprehensive proposal of legislative amendments for consideration.

This legislation is also about making it easier for people to vote, to run for office, to effectively represent constituents' best interests. We have proposed changes that are crucial to ensuring our electoral system continues to evolve and fairness is promoted for everyone. As we move forward in these uncertain times, we are dedicated to making sure Ontario's elections process is safe and accessible to all, whether you're voting or running for office, or volunteering in your local riding, or working with Elections Ontario to keep our elections safe, fair and efficient.

I just want to take a moment. I talked earlier about that school gymnasium where there are multiple tables set up and how we're creating more advance voting days. The people who work in those stations, the hundreds and thousands of people who are engaged during an election—we want to make sure that they're safe, people from all of our communities. We know them; we all know some of them. You may have done it yourself. That may have been your pathway into politics, that somebody hired you during an election to help perform the functions, to take the vote, to make sure that there is integrity in the system. I just want to take a moment and thank those people who put themselves out there.

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We're making sure that the next election will have all the tools it can to keep everybody safe, those individuals who are working at a ballot station or the people who are volunteering in a campaign. Things are a little bit different; we need to be ready for different. Our government has innovated in so many different ways. I'm very proud to be bringing this forward on our behalf.

As we move forward in these uncertain times, we are dedicated to making sure Ontario's elections process is safe and accessible to all, whether you're voting, running for office or however you engage in the system. We want people to feel that they have a voice in our elections.

In this new COVID-19 environment, we want to make it easier for anyone who wants to make a positive difference in their communities to participate. These are responsible and balanced changes that are needed to make it easier and safer to vote during COVID-19 and beyond. These are practical updates that build on the Ontario Legislature's history of ensuring that our electoral process is equipped to respond to the challenges of the day and is resilient for the future.

I look forward to further engaging with Ontarians and members of this Legislature on this important legislation as we work together to protect Ontario elections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We now have an opportunity for questions. The first one goes to the member from Sudbury.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the Attorney General for his debate. Speaker, I get calls every day. I get calls from 80-year-olds asking for the COVID vaccines. I get calls from small businesses asking for financial support, essential workers asking for daycare spaces, and landlords and tenants asking for rental support. I have never once received a call asking me to double the maximum political donation. I'm just wondering, Speaker, does the Attorney General truly believe that Ontario's priority in the middle of a third wave COVID-19 pandemic—does anybody think their priority is to double the maximum political donation?

Hon. Doug Downey: I'm glad you're engaged in your constituency office. I, too, get calls from businesses struggling and looking for the supports that our government has provided, helping people navigate through these uncertain times.

I'm spending a lot of time these days helping people navigate how they can get registered to get a vaccine. If only we had more federal vaccines, we would be able to get them in arms. We're waiting; it's very frustrating.

But I can tell you there are individuals who just assume that our election system is fair, open, democratic and transparent. They just assume that it will be run with integrity. They just assume that Ontario will, if not be a leader, at least, when it comes to donations, be in the middle of the pack, Mr. Speaker. I think people have assumptions.

Yes, there are other things top of mind for them when they're calling into the office, but they are encouraging us to make sure that the system is current and has all the tools.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: I heard everything that was said during the speech, but there is something that you talked about very early on in the speech that I want to come back to. It really does tie into what the member of the opposition implied in that last question of his, and that is around the integrity of the election process.

Yesterday, the Newfoundland NDP filed a court case against Elections Newfoundland and Labrador because of how that election was run during a pandemic. People expect that things are going to be done fairly and that there aren't going to be any challenges to being able to vote in a fair situation.

How does this bill address that so that people in Ontario can be assured that the next election will be run properly regardless of what happens with COVID-19?

Hon. Doug Downey: I'll just take the opportunity to say that, of course, it's an active court file so I can't comment on it.

There are so many pieces in here. Really, at the core, the Integrity Commissioner—the Chief Electoral Officer

of Elections Ontario has been very active in this, as I mentioned. He filed a report in November of last year. There are many independent voices who brought to bear their experience. Then, of course, at committee, we heard from a very wide range of interests.

This strengthens the collusion provisions. It strengthens third-party advertising and puts some guardrails on that. It allows people to participate in a safe way, adding advance polling days. There are several things that are in here that guard against that type of experience. We've learned from the Newfoundland and Labrador experience, along with the New Brunswick and the BC ones—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Ten seconds to conclude.

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the Attorney General for his presentation. I listened with great care. I'd like to take this moment to remind the government that yesterday I asked that the N6A postal code be designated a COVID hot spot. The Attorney General mentioned a great deal about COVID safety. I'm looking forward to a response from the government.

My question is in regard to the donations. How does greatly increasing—or even doubling, actually—the maximum donation make elections safer and more accessible? How does this increase support the working class? How is this increase not for the Conservative elites?

Hon. Doug Downey: I just want to recap that we, in fact, looked across the country. Some areas have no limits at all. Some areas have \$5,000 as a limit. We're moving it to the middle of the pack in the country. Some people choose to participate by donating. Again, if you talk about an independent or you talk about somebody who is coming to run on a particular platform, they may reach out to their family. They may reach out to friends.

Look, there is no magic to the \$1,650 number. There's no particular magic to that number. But I think there is some magic to being the largest province in the country with an average or a middle-of-the-pack donation limit. There's nothing odd or strange about that, Mr. Speaker. It's updating technology. We've updated the limits. We've updated accountability. We've updated how people participate—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): You have 10 seconds to conclude.

Hon. Doug Downey: I hope I answered the member's question.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: In 2016, the Ontario Legislature decided to ban corporate and union donations to political parties. But we know that third parties can still have an outsized influence through big-spending advertising. In fact, much of that spending is, well, unlimited. This legislation proposes to extend third-party advertising spending limits from six to 12 months before an election period.

Speaker, to the Attorney General: Could you please explain how this change addresses the concerns that many Ontarians have about the influence of third parties in our elections?

Hon. Doug Downey: In fact, the member hit on something very important. In the first three years after an election, there's no limit at all. Then, for the 12 months leading up to the writ period, it's about \$50,000 a month for each pop-up organization, so \$637,200 in a 12-month period, and then another over \$105,000 during the writ period itself. We're giving ample opportunity for individual third-party organizations to have their voices heard. But Ontario is an outlier in that we are the subject of millions of dollars in third-party advertising, where other jurisdictions are in the thousands. So we just need to put some guardrails on it, Mr. Speaker, and—

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

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

M. Guy Bourgouin: Ma question pour le procureur général est un peu de ce dont mes deux collègues ont parlé. Ni plus, ni moins, c'est qu'on a des appels pour la COVID, on a des appels pour le vaccin, on a des appels pour les écoles, que les parents sont concernés pour leurs enfants. On a toutes sortes d'appels qui entouraient la COVID. On a fait la première vague. On a eu une deuxième vague. On a eu une troisième vague. On vit, comme c'est là, dans la troisième vague.

Puis ma question est : je n'ai pas eu d'appels quand ça vient aux augmentations des donations. J'aimerais entendre le procureur général. Pourquoi doubler les donations quand on vit, quand on est dans une crise de pandémie? On semble voir que le gouvernement vit dans une différente réalité, comme mon collègue de Timiskaming—Cochrane l'a déjà mentionné. Pourquoi augmenter ou doubler les donations dans une crise de pandémie?

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you to the member for the question. I, too, am getting a variety of calls in my constituency. We put this legislation out there some time ago. We went through second reading with many hours of debate. We went through committee with many hours of presentations and then a number of amendments. After all of that, you're confirming for me that you're getting no phone calls about the increase. So thank you for that, because, really, Ontarians accept it. I think I'm hearing that from all of your members, that this really isn't a big issue. It's an issue you might try and make some hay of, but nobody is calling you about it. It's quite simply they're accepting that we're middle of the pack and that that's okay.

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People want to participate in different ways. Some want to knock on doors; some want to donate. I think that we should make every opportunity for people to participate, and that's exactly what we've done.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for a quick question and quick response.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Protecting Ontario elections and ensuring that it's easy and safe to vote is not a partisan

issue. It is the responsibility of government to protect our elections and ensure that they are equipped to meet the challenges of the day, whether that be simply preparing for challenges that COVID-19 might pose to in-person voting or addressing the unchecked third-party spending.

Will the Attorney General please explain to this House why he has introduced this legislation and how it will protect elections in Ontario?

Hon. Doug Downey: We're protecting elections currently by updating some of the rules, but we're also making changes to protect elections in the future. The all-party members that will be part of the committee for the Chief Electoral Officer to review technology is a good example of where we're setting the stage for continued improvement. We're updating for 2021 and beyond.

I look forward to further debate from the members opposite on any of those issues about advance voting days, technology or any of the structural changes to support independent members and those who want to participate in our process.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): It makes little sense to begin another debate on this topic, so we're going to move along, with your permission, into members' statements.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm fortunate to represent a region that stems from that barn-raiser tradition of coming together to support each other, a mindset that has created an innovation ecosystem second to none.

For instance, last week, the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce and the Cambridge Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with Communitech, helped facilitate the distribution of 15,000 rapid COVID-19 tests to 300 businesses. Yesterday, they reached 25,000 COVID test kits to 450 small businesses. They stepped up and acted. Rapid COVID tests are a game-changer that we need to get out there, just like vaccines. Ian McLean and Greg Durocher are also in the process of supporting other chambers across Ontario to do the same, like Timmins and Gananoque.

In addition to rapid tests, the chamber is also distributing 1.5 million made-in-Ontario masks, which were generously donated by Cambridge company Eclipse. This is PPE that is going to make a huge difference to businesses across this province. We all know that that cost is huge to them.

Chambers understand that investing in safety and medical-grade masks is just good business. Medical-grade masks are three to five times more effective than cloth masks. I'm wearing an Eclipse mask right here in the chamber today.

We have to up the ante on masking in our workplaces, and we need to get procurement right. We need to get

Ontario-made masks into businesses, into hospitals. This is something that we should all agree on, on a go-forward basis.

SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Rod Phillips: I rise in the House today to share an update celebrated by Lorraine Sunstrum-Mann, the CEO of Grandview Kids, a children's treatment centre in Durham region. Grandview Kids expressed its sincere gratitude in response to the recent announcement by the government of Ontario and the Minister of Children and Community Services, who are investing \$240 million into programs and services for children and youth with disabilities.

Since 1953, Grandview has proudly provided high-quality, family-centred therapy services for children and youth with physical, communication and developmental needs in Durham region.

After 11 years, the sector is receiving the funds it needs to meet the ever-growing demand for its services. This life-changing money will enhance the lives of thousands of children and youth with disabilities and their caregivers throughout the province, including in Durham region. It will help unlock and unleash the potential for even more children and youth with disabilities to undoubtedly contribute to a more prosperous Ontario.

Today, I'm also proud that, with the support of our community and all levels of government, a new 130,000-square-foot facility will be located in Ajax to service 10,000 children and families every single year. In addition to \$31 million of capital committed by this government, the federal government committed \$17.5 million, and the town of Ajax generously donated the land that will house this important new facility.

This state-of-the-art facility, targeted for completion in 2024, will support the seamless and coordinated provision of family-centred care. There will be open, welcoming and inclusive community-based pediatric services, including supporting integration, rehabilitation, medical and clinical services, as well as education and research. The new, larger facility will enable Grandview Kids to expand and enhance existing services and introduce new ones.

It is important to recognize that this journey began in 2008. Through ongoing advocacy and impressive collaboration and partnership across Durham region, municipal, provincial and federal governments—and countless individuals, including Durham area MPPs—we are close to realizing this long-awaited vision. The future is bright for Grandview Kids and for Durham region.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. A reminder to all members that the time allotted for member's statements is 90 seconds.

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I rise today in this House to speak on behalf of the families in St. Catharines

and to tell their story. This story conveys the cost of the cycle of lockdowns and the cost of not making the investments to make schools safe in the first place.

I have two residents, Steve and Bailey, who have two beautiful young girls, one in kindergarten and the other in daycare. Mom and Dad have already used their vacation guessing about lockdowns. Dad guessed he would be off on March break, but that was cancelled; he was wrong. Mom guessed about spring break; however, that now has been extended. She was wrong, but she was right.

The last shutdown in January, Mom and Dad could continue work because the girls' grandmother helped with child care. That's not true this time. This means Bailey will have to take time off work and the family will now have their income cut in half. The mother and family will have to sacrifice.

This story is not unique. Every family has had to make exceptions. I just want to make it clear what the cost of the cycle of lockdowns is when we do not have the required child care spots available to support families.

There are solutions. To every member of this House, we need to make hiring ECEs a priority, we need to pay them fairly so we can retain those workers, and we need to make child care universal and affordable.

BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I often have referred to COVID-19 as World War III, a worldwide battle that we are all fighting together, but today, I want to take a look all the way back to 1917, specifically World War I. The Battle of Vimy Ridge, which actually has just had its 104th anniversary this past Friday, took place in the north of France and was part of the wider battle of Arras. The battle lasted three days, starting on Easter Monday, April 9, 1917.

Now, many link the success of Vimy Ridge to symbolize the birth of Canadian national pride and awareness. It was a huge military victory for Canada, but sadly, it came at a price. Out of the 40,000 Canadians who were involved in the attack, 3,589 were killed in action and an additional 7,000 were wounded. Their sacrifices were not wasted, clearing and capturing the summit of Hill 145, a strategic point for the German army and now under Canadian control. It was the first time where all four divisions of the Canadian corps attacked as a composite formation.

I want to take this moment to mention a few Canadian heroes from around the Chatham area who fought at Vimy Ridge: Private S. Brown of the 102nd Battalion, killed in action; Private A.S. Gomme of the 21st Battalion, killed in action; Private J.R. Henry of the 18th Battalion, killed in action; Private R.R. Morris of the 20th Battalion, died of wounds; Private K.L. Parker of the 2nd Battalion, killed in action; and Sergeant W. Gray of the 21st Battalion, killed in action.

To these brave soldiers who paid the ultimate price so that we can live in peace, may they rest in peace. Lest we forget.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Miss Monique Taylor: Last week, we hosted an online round table discussion to hear from people with disabilities and their loved ones in my community about the challenges of accessing the COVID-19 vaccine. I heard a lot of concern, confusion and worry.

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I heard from a mom who has an adult son with developmental disabilities, how they have kept family deaths and the loss of a family pet a secret to not add to the loneliness and confusion of why they are still locked down.

I heard that the vaccine booking website is not accessible. Screen reader applications used by people who are visually impaired can't read the site, and vaccine appointment calls are difficult for the deaf and hard of hearing. One person in my meeting shared that he kept receiving phone calls about the scheduling of his vaccine appointment, but he is deaf so he could not book the appointment in that fashion. These accessibility barriers are just unacceptable.

I also heard that the coordination between the LHINs and family doctors wasn't working and that many family doctors have no idea about the process. Overall, the level of confusion, inconsistency and poor information from the province has left people in my community unsure if they qualify for a vaccine. And if they do qualify, they are unsure of how to access it. We have already called on this government to prioritize people with disabilities. Today, I'm calling on the government to make sure that people with disabilities are accommodated and that barriers to getting the vaccine are removed.

Thank you to Anthony Frisina, Aznive Mallett and our ASL-English interpreter Adele Routliff for participating in our town hall.

RAMADAN

Mr. John Fraser: As Muslim families in Ottawa South and across Ontario begin their observance of the holy month of Ramadan, I want to extend my warmest greetings to each and every one. Ramadan is a time for Muslims to focus on the five pillars of Islam: faith, prayer, alms, fasting and pilgrimage. It's a time for fasting and sacrifice; a time for prayer, reflection and spiritual growth; a time for charity. And it's a time to strengthen ties with family and community.

Once again, this year it's going to be hard to get together as we always have. This pandemic won't last forever, but we have to do what we have to do to keep each other safe and healthy. I hope next year to be able to attend in person the many iftars that there are in Ottawa South. For now, it's important for us to connect virtually again with family and friends.

To our Muslim friends and neighbours, thank you for giving your children the gift of faith; it will sustain them. I wish for you and your families a blessed month of Ramadan. Ramadan Mubarak.

EDWARD SMITH

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Small communities depend on our firefighters. They depend on people like my friend, North Perth Chief Ed Smith. Ed served our community for 44 years. He began at age 21 when he joined the Elma Logan fire department, later to become part of the North Perth Fire Department. He became its first full-time chief in 2001. Just this morning, the municipality of North Perth announced Ed's upcoming retirement.

As chief, he oversaw construction of the new Listowel and Monkton fire stations, he developed a highly trained department and he established a training committee and training standards. His commitment to fire prevention and safety is legendary, not just in North Perth but across Ontario. His work led to my private member's bill, the Rea and Walter Act, named after the North Perth firefighters who perished in the line of duty. A word about that fire 10 years ago: It was because of his steady leadership that the department and the community got through those dark days. We are grateful.

In 2015, Chief Smith was nominated by his peers for the Alf Stone Award for leadership, honesty and respect. Leadership, honesty and respect: There are no more fitting words to describe Chief Smith. Thank you, Ed, for your 44 years of service. We wish you the very best.

LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY

Mr. Jamie West: Speaker, today I only have 90 seconds to describe the carnage of the CCAA process at Laurentian University. Ninety seconds may not be enough time to tell you about the workers who lost their jobs: workers who told me they were fired on a Zoom call with 16 other people on the line; workers who told me they were six months pregnant and the breadwinner in their family.

Speaker, 90 seconds might not be enough time to tell you about the nearly 70 French and English programs that were cut, programs like civil engineering, génie mécanique, génie minier, entrepreneurship, études de l'environnement, science économique, mathematics, mid-wifery/sage-femme. The only French and English mid-wifery program in Ontario was cut, Speaker.

Ninety seconds might not be enough time to tell you about the students who were affected: international students who gave everything to come here; Indigenous students who said they were betrayed again; northern students who said, "I don't want to lose my education because of this"; NOSM students worried that shuttering nearly 30 francophone programs will affect the future of French-speaking doctors in the north. Ninety seconds might not be enough time to remind you that Conservatives promised to do everything in their power to support students at Laurentian, but 90 seconds is long enough to remember that the Conservatives chose to do nothing. Ninety seconds is long enough to remember that Conservatives aren't defending francophone and Indigenous programs. Ninety seconds is long enough to remember that

the Conservatives are responsible for every single one of these job losses. And 90 seconds is long enough to remember that the Conservatives can stop this now and are simply refusing to get off the sidelines.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, this past Friday I had an opportunity to host a town hall meeting with dozens of businesses in Milton. I want to thank Scott and his team at the Milton Chamber of Commerce for organizing this discussion. During these unprecedented times, I feel it is extremely important to be there to be able to listen and to answer any questions that constituents and small business owners have in our ridings.

One small business owner in my riding made the following statement—and I wanted to share it with everyone in the House. Troy from Troy's Diner, which is a landmark in Milton: "As I woke up and drove into work this morning, I started to reflect on the last year of ups and downs, open and closing of the restaurant...."

"I don't want to dwell on the negativity and the financial impact it has had on small business owners. But I'd rather focus on the positive.

"How family, friends, employees and customers have been there for us, supporting our businesses, offering words of encouragement. Just being there for us.

"I will not allow this pandemic to bring me down.

"Everything is possible. Nothing is impossible.

"Stay strong, we will get through this."

I echo Troy's comments. We need to stay strong, because we will get through this. I want to thank all of my constituents, including small business owners, farmers, families and students in my riding, for doing their part during these very difficult times.

ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION

Mr. David Piccini: Across Ontario, in April we celebrate Be a Donor Month in support of organ and tissue donation awareness. I encourage all Ontarians to show their support by registering their consent for organ and tissue donation. The province-wide registration rate for organ donors is at 35%, and in my riding it's at 50% thanks to champions like Sarah Marshall. But I know as a province we can do more.

One organ donor has the potential to save eight lives and enhance 75 more through the gift of tissue. Since 2003, over 20,000 Ontarians have received life-saving transplants. Almost 1,600 Ontarians are currently waiting for a life-saving organ, including 26 in the riding I represent, Northumberland–Peterborough South. Every three days someone dies a preventable death waiting for a transplant. Any Ontarian resident 16 or older with a valid Ontario health card is eligible to register.

I close my remarks today to honour Cassidey Ouellette, who tragically lost her life in a car accident. A resident of my riding, a daughter to Christine Milligan. Nobody should have to bury their child.

Cassidey, you're gone but not forgotten. You live on through the lives of those you've touched and selflessly given to through the gift of organ donation.

Mr. Speaker, in Cassidey's honour, we should ensure that nobody can strip their loved ones of their ability to consent. We should ensure that we all are opted in to organ donation in this province, and we don't have to opt out.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Before I start, I just want to wish Ramadan Mubarak to all of the Muslim folks in our province. It's a month of religious observation and great grace for that community.

My first question is to the Premier. On Sunday the government told parents that schools were safe to open, and then on Monday they turned around and closed the schools. My question to the Premier is, why would you tell parents on Sunday that schools were safe, less than 24 hours before closing them?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): In response, the government House leader.

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Hon. Paul Calandra: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. As the Leader of the Opposition would know, we have consistently been working very hard and the Minister of Education has been working very hard to make sure that our schools are safe. They have remained remarkably safe through all three waves of COVID that we've been fighting, and it's because of the investments that we've made.

Obviously, the minister has continued to work with the Chief Medical Officer of Health—and not only Dr. Williams, but across all 34 public health units in the province—as he committed and has always committed. He said that we would continue to work with the Chief Medical Officer of Health and with the public health regions across this province and take their advice. The advice had come that, despite the fact that schools are safe, despite how important it is to keep our kids in school, recognizing that we would continue to help and assist to try to keep the numbers down that we're seeing in the community spread in the third wave—that's why the decision was made to act quickly in order to ensure that more people were staying home and that the advice of the medical officers of health across the province was listened to.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The government had been warned for months and months and months on end that schools needed to be made safer, that we needed to see smaller class sizes, that there needed to be investments in better ventilation and the ability even for classrooms to open their windows, that we needed mass testing in our schools. Yet the government ignored those warnings each

and every time. In fact, they even cut education in their last budget. Speaker, why does this government continue to ignore warnings and the advice of experts, leading us right into crisis after crisis?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, the Chief Medical Officer of Health has been absolutely clear, as has every medical officer of health in this province: The plan in place to keep schools safe and open has ensured that students—1.5 million each and every day—were able to go to school. The issue that we responded to yesterday as a government singularly exists with rising transmission in the community, creating a threat, potentially, to our schools—in fact, to every member of this province. This is precisely why we have followed the advice and taken decisive immediate action to prevent a challenge in our schools.

In the words of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, he said yesterday that schools have been safe. This intervention is designed to keep them safe, to get them back open. Our collective resolve is to make sure that Ontarians follow the rules and that we keep strong protocols in place and reduce the transmission in the community to get Ontario schools back open.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This government's lack of action has led to uncertainty, has led to stress. It's led to anxiety. This is anxiety and stress and uncertainty for parents and for kids and for teachers and education workers, because this government didn't want to listen to the experts and refused to spend the money to keep our schools safe. Now the warnings are upon us that in fact child care might be next in terms of closing.

Why is it that this government refuses to listen to the expert advice? When will they actually do the right thing, fix this mess, reverse the cuts to education and invest in our schools, our kids and our education workers?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We have followed the advice of the medical experts. In the words of the CEO of the Hospital for Sick Children yesterday, "I don't think we can open schools right now. We have to just now do our part and not fail our children and do everything we can to drive down community transmission so that schools can be the first doors to open."

We certainly agree, which is why we've taken action in this province with the stay-at-home order and with a variety of actions designed to reduce transmission in the community. This issue rests exclusively with rising transmission in the province, as well as our ICU capacity, really to breaking point. That's why this decision was made, pivoting quickly to remote learning, where this government has invested. We've also ensured the continuity of mental health access for these kids, recognizing that they should be in a class.

Our commitment on this side of the House is to work every day with the Chief Medical Officer of Health to do

everything we can to reduce transmission, to protect our health care heroes and to get kids back in class.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Families and child care workers are very worried that the closure of child care centres in this province is inevitable. The calls for prioritizing the vaccination of child care workers, ECEs, are growing. The calls are growing.

Yet here we are again. The government had no plan to keep our child care centres open. They had no plan to vaccinate the front-line child care workers to keep them safe and be able to keep the centres open.

When will we hear a plan from this government? Is there a plan that the government can share with us today to keep child care centres open and vaccinate those front-line child care workers?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Again, the Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The commitment of this government is to get every front-line worker a vaccine as supply gets to this province, because we continue to face challenges in getting it to Ontario. That is a matter of fact. If we have more, we would have expanded it to every single front-line worker already.

What we have done, however, in the second phase, which we are in, is accelerated prioritization to education staff, our EAs, our ECEs, our school bus drivers and our teachers who work within our schools, particularly within the hot-spot areas of Toronto and Peel, as well as for special education staff province-wide. With respect to child care workers, they are also in phase 2, and our aim, as more supply gets to this province, is to get them to the head of the line. We know the critical role they play in keeping families and the children they care for safe. That's why we're committed to getting them supply, getting them access to the vaccine they deserve as soon as Ontario gets the vaccine from the federal government.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Premier: This Premier is behaving with a very dangerous pattern of denial. This week, schools were safe, until they weren't. Last week, a stay-at-home order wasn't necessary, until it was. Back in February, the government ignored the advice of all of the experts and instead started to open too fast and without investing in extra health precautions and protections.

When is this government going to get ahead of the crisis? When is this Premier going to stop saying "Things are pretty good" and actually ensure that things start getting better for the people of Ontario?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where the Leader of the Opposition has been for the last year, but Ontario has been leading the way when it comes to fighting the coronavirus.

What yesterday and what last week represented was the Ontario government and the people of Ontario finally moving away from defence and to offence to fight and defeat the COVID virus once and for all. We started fighting back by increasing our testing capacity from 5,000 to 75,000. We inherited the ability to do 5,000 tests a day; it's at 75,000. We started fighting back by increasing hospital and ICU beds in the system. We fight it back by increasing 3,000 beds. We fight it back by increasing critical care capacity in the province. We fought back by increasing long-term care. We fought back by adding beds in long-term care. We're fighting back by bringing the vaccines into the communities that are the hardest-hit and we're fighting back by bringing it into the workplaces that are so essential to keeping this province going.

We are fighting back. That's what the next 28 days is all about, and the Leader of the Opposition should help us to do it.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Once again, this government refused to act until it was too late. They refused to spend the money on making schools safe and now the schools are closed. They refused to spend the money to vaccinate essential front-line workers and, guess what, the spread of COVID-19 occurred in our province. They refused to make smaller class sizes in our schools. They refused to vaccinate front-line education workers, and now, of course, our schools are closed.

My question is, when will this government undertake the measures necessary to deal with the crisis that we're in? When will they give us paid sick days? When will they give workers paid time off to get their vaccines? When will they make sure those essential front-line workers are getting vaccinated? When will this government get ahead of the crisis that we're all dealing with?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The Leader of the Opposition will know full well that this government inherited a mess from the previous Liberal government and left us with the inability to fight the pandemic from day one. That is why we had to be on the defence for so long. That is why we made important investments in health care. That is why we made important investments in long-term care. That is why the Minister of Finance has made important investments to keep our small, medium and large job creators going. That is why the Premier fought so hard to ensure that there were 20 paid sick days for the people of the province of Ontario. That is why the Minister of Education ensured that there was over a billion and a half dollars for our students so that our schools could return safely, Mr. Speaker.

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That is what we have been doing since day one of this pandemic, and we are fighting back, Mr. Speaker. We are fighting back despite the fact that, month after month, the federal government has disappointed us with vaccine supply. We are fighting back and taking the vaccines that we've got into the communities that are most impacted,

into those essential businesses, and we're getting the job done. There's more work to do and we will get it done, despite the Leader of the Opposition.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is for the Premier. Last week, the government announced the list of hot spots, but that list left out some of the hardest-hit areas in Hamilton. Hamilton's chief medical officer asked that additional postal codes be added. She was denied, so she added them herself.

Our public health units are trying to implement this government's announcement, but they need support. Right now, Hamilton is behind some of the neighbouring regions when it comes to vaccinating eligible groups. Will this government provide Hamilton public health whatever support it actually needs to get this job done?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant, the member for Eglinton–Lawrence to respond.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Our government has been clear: Phase 2 of our vaccine rollout will be focused on older adults, those at risk of serious illness and our hot spot areas. This approach is designed to save lives, protect those at risk of serious illness and to stop the virus from spreading.

Let me be clear: Hot spots have been identified based on historic and ongoing rates of COVID-19 deaths, hospitalizations and transmissions, and on outbreak data, research and analysis conducted by the COVID-19 science advisory table, low-testing rates, sociodemographic barriers that may result in vaccine hesitancy. All of these things go into picking the hot-spot areas. We have a number of them picked out, and we have been going at those communities to try to make the vaccinations more widespread in those communities, including communities that are represented by the MPP for Hamilton Mountain and the MPP for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas that have been identified as hot-spot areas. As soon as we have more vaccines, we will be in more communities, getting those vaccines out.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: Back to the Premier: When the government announced the list of hot spots, it also shared confusing information about who is eligible. I am constantly hearing from residents in my community who don't know if they're eligible and they don't know how to get an appointment. This government has to stop making policy by press conference and actually provide public health units the support they need.

Hamilton is still working on identifying people with high-risk medical conditions. These residents are still waiting to get an appointment. Will the government provide Hamilton public health more support in getting this done instead of making their work harder and making confusing announcements?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Our government has been clear: Phase 2 of our vaccine rollout will be focused, as I said,

on older adults, those with serious illness and those in the hot-spot areas.

We also know that certain communities have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, and we understand that administering vaccines to people who live in these areas is critical to reducing the impact of COVID-19 as quickly as possible, which is why as part of our second phase of our vaccine rollout, we have identified specific hot-spot areas in postal codes in 13 public health units around the province. Right now, anyone in Hamilton over the age of 50 in those hot-spot areas can register and get a vaccine in those hot-spot areas. Across the province at pharmacies, everyone over the age of 55 can get a vaccine.

There's lots of vaccines available. We want people to get out there and get the vaccines as quickly as possible. We're doing everything we can to make that happen in Hamilton and across the province.

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Donna Skelly: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Last week, our government issued an emergency stay-at-home order to continue to keep Ontarians safe. That means more people will be forced to work from home, learn from a distance and connect with loved ones virtually. To do this, they need access to the Internet, but residents in Flamborough–Glanbrook, my riding, need better broadband.

I'd like to share part of an email from a constituent in Lynden. She writes, "I am married with four children. I, along with most in my area, am struggling with getting adequate Internet access at my home. With heightened need for decent home Internet because of online school and working from home due to COVID, my frustration is growing."

This isn't the first time that I've received an email like this and I look forward to the day when I receive the last of these messages. When can I tell my constituents who are in dire need of Internet that better connectivity is coming their way?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Infrastructure.

Hon. Laurie Scott: The member is absolutely right, and I thank her for the question. There is no time more important than right now to get more households connected to high-speed Internet. That's why we're taking a groundbreaking approach to build broadband faster so that everyone in Ontario can get reliable Internet, no matter where they live.

It's undeniable that the lack of broadband Internet is detrimental to the daily lives and livelihoods of too many Ontarians. Can you imagine that as many as 1.4 million people in Ontario live without broadband in this day and age? On this side of the House, that is 1.4 million people too many.

That's why I introduced the Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act, 2021. This legislation addresses the onerous barriers faced by the telecommunications sector when it comes to building broadband faster.

I am thrilled to say that finally this cornerstone legislation has been passed by the members of this House. Now the telecommunications sector can get those shovels moving and those households connected.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: A 2019 report by the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce on digital infrastructure notes that significant investments are needed to bring the current infrastructure up to speed. The president and CEO, Keanin Loomis, said, "In this digital age, the ongoing improvement to Hamilton's digital infrastructure is essential to the economic prosperity of our city. Businesses in Hamilton rely on high-speed, dependable, low-cost Internet connectivity to operate and remain competitive." Although this report was written two years ago, the need for more Internet connectivity still prevails and has been made much worse by the COVID-19 pandemic.

That's why I was pleased to learn that Ontario's 2021 budget commits a historic new investment of \$2.8 billion in broadband infrastructure to ensure that every region has broadband services by 2025.

Would the minister please share with this House what we can expect from this investment?

Hon. Laurie Scott: Thank you very much to the member again for her question. Mr. Speaker, our government's primary focus is to protect every life and every job we possibly can from COVID-19. Without healthy people, we can't have a healthy economy.

That's why we introduced Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy. This is the next phase of Ontario's response to COVID-19. Part of the investments in the budget go directly to getting more Ontarians connected to the digital economy, ensuring that no one gets left behind.

As the member noted, I am proud this government is committing an additional \$2.8 billion, for a near total of \$4 billion, to accelerate broadband expansion across all regions of this province. Our historic investment will benefit regional economies, farmers who can connect and use technologies for their industry, entrepreneurs, small businesses, and the list goes on, Mr. Speaker.

We're stepping up to the plate to fill the digital infrastructure gap left behind by members across the aisle.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday, we learned that lobbyists and long-time PC Party insider Kory Teneycke apparently used his regularly scheduled caucus presentation time to warn Conservative MPPs about leaking decisions to journalists before the Premier's press conferences. Speaker, Mr. Teneycke's firm is registered to lobby in Ontario on behalf of companies like Amazon, so his presence at caucus raises serious concerns about how the Premier makes his decisions.

Speaker, my question, through you to the Premier, is: When ICUs are overflowing, when schools are being

cancelled, when our small business community is collapsing and when COVID cases are burning out of control, why are you bringing in lobbyists to warn your MPPs about anything other than how badly you're handling this crisis?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member will know full well that the reason why we're having such a challenge and we had such challenges in the first and second wave was because of the lack of investment that was made by the previous Liberal government across many different sectors, whether it was the health care sector, whether it was the colleges and universities, whether it was the small businesses which were fleeing the province of Ontario in droves. We lost over 300,000 manufacturing jobs.

1050

In 2018, the people elected a government that would focus on their priorities. Their priorities were job creation, health care, education—and in all of those areas, before the pandemic, we saw thousands of jobs returning to the province of Ontario. We're making historic investments in health care, because we need to increase our ICU capacity that was left to us by the Liberals as one of the lowest per capita in North America. We want to end hallway health care, and we are going to do that. It is the NDP who—as the member for Brampton South had said once, the only time the NDP are happy is when people are sad. We're going to make sure that people are happy—

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: The government House leader's response—or spin, rather—reminds me of our late, great friend Paul Dewar. That answer was definitely face-palm-worthy. You gave us nothing tangible in that answer.

The Premier told himself and everyone else yesterday that he never makes a decision himself. I guess that's what makes sense now that we know that lobbyists and PC Party insiders are the ones who are really calling the shots around the conference table. So, again, my question to the Premier: For the next meeting, can the Premier tell us whether he can convince Kory Teneycke or any other PC Party insider-turned-lobbyist to put paid sick days or more support for hot spots on the agenda? We're just asking for an entire province here.

Hon. Paul Calandra: That's ironic coming from a member of Parliament who has accomplished the sum total of nothing in the time that he has been here. It took this government, this Minister of Health, this Premier to finally get a hospital for the people of Windsor-Essex, something that they have fought for, for so long. It was not a priority when the NDP shared government with the Liberals in the minority area. It was never a priority. Long-term care was never a priority of that member and of the NDP when they shared government with the Liberals. It was auto insurance, and they settled for what? A stretch goal, Mr. Speaker.

This is a party, the NDP, that has never been trusted to govern the province of Ontario but one time, and they were

so bad at it that the then Premier abandoned their party to join the Liberal Party. They have never, ever come close to gaining the confidence of the people of the province of Ontario. We have, and we will get the job done.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier. Today, there are 623 patients in Ontario's ICUs, and today's COVID positivity rate in Ontario is a dangerously high 10.3%, guaranteeing that ICU admissions are going to continue to rise. ICU doctors, nurses and staff have been working flat out for a year. They're exhausted. They're tired. They're burnt out.

Yesterday, the minister said we're going to add another 350 ICU beds. Those beds will require staff, staff that we do not have. As critical care doctor Michael Warner says, eventually we'll run out of space to move patients because we don't have the staff to care for them.

So, once again, it feels like we're not ready and that there's no clear plan. Speaker, through you, can the Premier assure Ontarians that we will have enough trained staff to support the additional ICU beds that are going to be required for the rest of this pandemic?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: How can this member, representing a party that governed this province for 15 years, a member who was the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health, get up and criticize this government, which has had to do everything in its power to catch up because of what we were left?

We inherited a system that had one of the lowest ICU capacities per capita in North America. We inherited a system that did not have a staffing protocol. We inherited a system that allowed us to do 5,000 tests a day. And what have we done? We have invested in ICU capacity. We're increasing it. We've added 3,000 beds to the system. We've added critical care capacity to the system. We took our testing from 5,000 to 75,000.

We're doing that for the people of the province of Ontario, because even before we were elected, we knew the devastation that Liberal cuts to health care were causing the people of the province of Ontario. It's not just about new hospitals in Windsor–Tecumseh. It's not just about new hospitals in Brampton. It's about making investments to make the system better for the long term.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, I think we need to take it down a notch or two today about what's happening in Ontario. I want to talk about something a little closer to home. We know the danger of the variants in the third wave, but every day in this place, we ask 300 people to come into this building, on public transit or walking, and it poses a risk for them.

Now, the opposition—all three leaders have asked for a virtual question period. We do committee virtually. Municipalities, the federal government, Legislatures

across the province are doing that. I implore the government to make some plans for that. But, more importantly, there is no threshold by which we decide when we pull the trigger on closing this place down, so we don't pose a risk to all these people who are here, people who have helped us every day as members, people who come here every day to protect us, to inform us. It's not right.

Speaker, through you: Will the government House leader commit to meeting with us to make some plans for about when we pull the trigger and how we manage that after?

Hon. Paul Calandra: First and foremost, Mr. Speaker, I'll say this: There is no other provincial Legislature that has gone virtual. The member opposite will know that because the previous Liberal government made absolutely no investments in the running of the Legislative Assembly, it is the investments that we have had to make that will allow our committee rooms to be made public through video conferencing.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, I will remind the honourable gentleman that this House passed a motion, one of the first things it passed when we returned, that took away the right of me to adjourn the House and put it in the hands of all the House leaders. So the protocol is this, which he agreed to, which was unanimously agreed to in this House: that, if it should be required, all House leaders will approach the Speaker and we will pass a motion to adjourn the House.

But I will say this: As long as essential front-line workers are going to work, as long as you can get a coffee at Tim Hortons, as long as ECE people are working, Mr. Speaker, I think the people of the province of Ontario expect their members of provincial Parliament, who are making incredibly important decisions for them, to be here working, and we will continue to do that in a safe way.

Interjections.

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

Hon. Monte McNaughton: You're entitled to your entitlements, John.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Labour, come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development, come to order.

Interjection.

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

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Forget about that poor Tim Hortons worker.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa South is warned.

Start the clock. The next question.

SPECIAL-NEEDS CHILDREN

Mr. Robert Bailey: My question is to the minister of children and youth. Mr. Speaker, for years, families of children and youth who have special needs have struggled to access the clinical assessment and services their children need. These are not new problems. Many of us on this side of the House watched for over a decade as demand grew and the previous Liberal government continued to underfund the system. Families have been challenged even further by COVID-19, which has made accessing appropriate supports and services especially difficult for those caring for children with special needs.

Mr. Speaker, would the minister tell this House what the government is doing to address the challenges that families of children with special needs are facing?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks very much to the member from Sarnia-Lambton for a great question this morning.

Speaker, supporting children with special needs and their families is a top priority for our government, not just during COVID-19, but beyond. We announced a number of new initiatives that are going to improve the lives and outcomes of children and youth with special needs in Ontario through budget 2021, which was introduced by our great finance minister, Minister Bethlenfalvy, just a few short weeks ago. These include significant investments in buildings, like brand new children's treatment centres in Chatham-Kent and also the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, CHEO, in Ottawa, and a renewed investment, as well, to the Abilities Centre in Whitby.

But we didn't stop there. We announced a groundbreaking investment of \$240 million over four years to ensure that children and families have access to early intervention and children's special needs. I look forward to talking about more—

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

1100

Mr. Robert Bailey: Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, I'm very glad to hear about the focus our government has placed on ensuring that children and families have access to early intervention and children's special needs services. The science shows that children's special needs services are most effective and result in better outcomes for children and families when they include early intervention, proactive life planning and support for families.

Would the minister please provide this House with more details on this new investment and whether it will address these critical areas?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks again to the member from Sarnia-Lambton. Speaker, that member is absolutely correct, as he usually is: Early intervention is a critical piece in delivering children's special needs services. Our new investment will focus on areas key to improving long-term outcomes for both children with special needs and their families, providing early and timely connection to supports, proactive and holistic life planning, and supports for natural transitions such as into school and also into

adulthood. Focusing on these areas will help families access services earlier, improving the quality of available services, and get better results for families in areas like community inclusion, as well as participation and success in education and employment.

Speaker, improving the quality and accessibility of supports for children with special needs is a top priority for our government, and we'll continue making progress on improving the system to get better outcomes for those kids.

LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY UNIVERSITÉ LAURENTIENNE

Mr. Jamie West: My question is for the Premier. The NDP had cautioned the Premier and the Minister of Colleges and Universities about massive cuts to Laurentian for months. Instead of taking action to protect northern Ontario, the Conservative Party chose to stand on the sidelines and do nothing.

Yesterday, over 100 faculty members received termination notices at Laurentian University. The university is also cutting nearly 70 programs, including whole departments, many of which are unique Indigenous and francophone programs which Laurentian is mandated to support. They're cutting programs like engineering, math, economics, entrepreneurship, nursing and midwifery.

Laurentian University is Sudbury's third-largest employer. My question is, how is the Premier going to address the many people who are losing their jobs amidst the pandemic because the government refused to fund and protect this public university?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Northumberland–Peterborough South and parliamentary assistant.

Mr. David Piccini: Indeed, it is deeply disturbing, the situation Laurentian University has found itself in—a situation where such drastic and immediate action is needed to ensure long-term sustainability.

Obviously, Mr. Speaker, the priority of this government continues to be the students and the families affected by this. It's why, as a government, in addition to looking into this specific issue at Laurentian University, we continue to expand funding for francophone supports and we expand funding for Indigenous supports as an institution.

This deeply concerning situation is before the courts, so it would be inappropriate to comment further.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Nickel Belt: supplementary.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Right now in my community, instead of being focused on their final projects and studying for their year-end exams, Laurentian students are worried about their future. The Minister of Colleges and Universities keeps promising that the Conservative government would protect Laurentian students and ensure that their studies were not disrupted; however, thousands of students woke up Monday morning to learn that their

program, their entire department, had been cut, that their teacher, their supervisor, their mentors had been laid off.

La Laurentienne est désignée sous la Loi sur les services en français. Les programmes en français sont protégés par cette loi. Est-ce que le gouvernement va respecter la Loi sur les services en français, ou est-ce que la communauté francophone devra amener le gouvernement en cour pour qu'il respecte ses propres lois?

Mr. David Piccini: This government remains resolute in ensuring pathways to graduation for all students. That is exactly what we'll do.

With respect to francophone programming that the member opposite spoke about—let's talk about that: \$17.6 million to expand French-language supports for the post-secondary sector; \$74 million to support over 30,000 students who enrol in French-language programming across Ontario; moving forward with Ontario's first-ever francophone university, governed by and for francophones; and 10 other post-secondary institutions that provide hundreds of French-language programs across the province of Ontario.

It's those members who voted against expanded supports for our Indigenous institutes, who voted against increased funding for those institutes and who have voted against supports for historic reductions in tuition that are benefiting francophone students, Indigenous students and all Ontarians across this province. That's their record, which they'll have to defend to students in their ridings.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

M^{me} Lucille Collard: My question is for the Minister of Health. Last week, I wrote to the minister to ask for improved vaccine accessibility in my riding of Ottawa–Vanier, which has been particularly hard-hit by the pandemic. Over the last five months, the neighbourhoods of Vanier and Overbrook in my riding have had the third-highest total of individuals with COVID-19 in Ottawa. Since then, we've learned that a number of the hot-spot communities identified by the government to receive priority vaccines are less hard-hit by COVID-19 than the average neighbourhood. This is frustrating news for residents in high-risk areas, and we need transparency on how the government has made these decisions.

Can the minister explain what data was used to identify which communities would be prioritized to receive the vaccine?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply on behalf of the government, the member for Eglinton–Lawrence and parliamentary assistant.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. As I said earlier, our government has been clear that phase 2 of our vaccine rollout is focused on older adults, those at risk of serious illness and our hot-spot areas. The approach is designed to save lives, protect those at risk of serious illness and to stop the virus from spreading.

Let me be clear: Hot spots have been identified based on historic and ongoing high rates of COVID-19 deaths, hospitalizations and transmission. I'd like to point out to the member opposite that these communities were identified based not only on the high rates of COVID-19, but also on outbreak data, research and analysis conducted by the Ontario COVID-19 science advisory table, low testing rates, and sociodemographic barriers that may result in vaccination hesitancy.

Of course, as we get more vaccines, we're going to be able to open up to more areas. We want to get vaccines out to every community as quickly as possible and in the arms of every Ontarian as soon as possible. We're working hard to make that happen.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Again my question is for the Minister of Health. It's clear that the government's choices of hot-spot communities were not informed by all the necessary data. For example, in Ottawa, our local unit had not identified any high-priority neighbourhoods in one of the hot-spot regions this government chose. It was, in fact, doing pretty well compared to others.

My question is, will the minister commit to working with local public health units to identify high-risk communities and designate hot spots to improve access to vaccines in vulnerable neighbourhoods to control the spread of COVID-19?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Our entire strategy works with local public health units. We've worked with local public health units from the beginning. We know that they know the situation on the ground in their communities, and that's why we're working together. Although some people have suggested that's not the right way to approach things, we believe it is, because local public health units have on-the-ground knowledge.

As of April 11, almost 98% of those 80 or older have received a vaccine and over 22% have received their second dose in the Ottawa area. It should be noted that last year, Ottawa was one of the first public health units to receive a shipment of the Pfizer vaccine in the province. We're working very hard on all vaccines across the province. I want to point out that right now, 87% of Ontarians 80 and over have been vaccinated, 80% of Ontarians 75 to 79 have been vaccinated, and 60% of Ontarians 70 to 74 have been vaccinated. We're working very hard to get the vaccines out to people, especially in priority areas. We're only constrained by our supply.

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

Ms. Donna Skelly: We all know that this past year has been very difficult for all Ontarians, including staff and students at our post-secondary institutions. I'm proud that our government has always put students at the centre of our education policy, and that has not changed during the pandemic. In particular, I was pleased that our government

was making post-secondary education more accessible for Indigenous learners.

Can the minister please provide an update to this House on what the government is doing to support access to education for Indigenous learners?

1110

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

Mr. David Piccini: I want to thank the member for Flamborough–Glanbrook for that really important question. She's absolutely right. It's vital that we continue to work closely with our Indigenous institutes to support them as institutions and to support the learners that walk their hallways.

The government has increased access to education by expanding OSAP eligibility for programs at Indigenous institutes, starting in 2020-21. The financial assistance will help ensure Indigenous learners have access to a culturally responsive and high-quality post-secondary education experience. We will prepare them to meet the labour market needs for tomorrow. This is an important step, as previously students didn't have that access.

We're going to continue to find ways to support our Indigenous students across the province of Ontario and work closely with our Indigenous institutes to explore increasing labour market opportunities.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: I'm very proud that our government is taking concrete steps to support Ontario's Indigenous population by supporting access to culturally responsive and high-quality post-secondary education offered by Indigenous institutes and independent of other Ontario colleges and universities.

Would the minister elaborate on why this important work by our government is so necessary in supporting Ontario's Indigenous learners?

Mr. David Piccini: I want to thank the member for that important question, again. We know that we must expand post-secondary education opportunities for Indigenous learners. We know that approximately 53% of Indigenous peoples aged 25 to 64 hold a post-secondary credential, compared to 65% of the non-Indigenous population, according to the 2016 census.

Mr. Speaker, thanks to the remarkable work of our Indigenous institutes, thanks to the remarkable work of elders, of others who have informed the curriculum there, enrolment in our Indigenous institutes has increased by nearly 40% since 2018, something I desperately hope the members of the opposition would support and not heckle as well.

Our government believed it was necessary to take important steps to support our Indigenous institutes by expanding OSAP eligibility. In addition, we've expanded capital funding, base funding for our Indigenous institutes.

As minister Romano noted, there is widespread agreement by Indigenous leaders, communities and education

professionals that investing in culturally responsive learning in post-secondary education opportunities for Indigenous learners will have tremendous benefits—

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

MERCURY POISONING

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Ma question est pour le premier ministre.

With gold prices soaring, there are 4,000 mining claims in the territories of Grassy Narrows First Nation, north of Kenora. Meanwhile, two sites of potential mercury contaminations poisoning the rivers, the wildlife and the people of Grassy Narrows have yet to be acted on by this Conservative government.

Will the Premier please tell the people of Grassy Narrows and Ontario, does he think that being open for business should come at the expense of the health of the people of Grassy Narrows?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Obviously, mercury contamination in the English and Wabigoon Rivers has had a profound impact on the communities and must be properly addressed. The member will know that Indigenous communities are assessing the extent and location of mercury contamination, using funding approved by the English and Wabigoon Rivers Remediation Panel, from the \$85-million trust. The ministry is holding Domtar responsible for assessing the extent of the mercury contamination in and around the mill site, including addressing the infrastructure and stormwater management issues.

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

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Back to the Premier: Another Star investigation, with the support of the community, has again undertaken to do what this and the previous government never bothered to do. That is to clear out the contaminated soil that was found behind the Dryden mill in the exact spot where a former mill worker reported dumping barrels of mercury. Instead, this government has been quick to consider mining claims, while the fish are still unsafe to eat and the people of Grassy Narrows are hesitant to drink the water.

Will the Premier commit today to honour the land declaration that Grassy Narrows enacted in 2018 to ban industrial or mining activities on their territories? As Chief Randy Fobister told me, “Let my people live in peace.”

Hon. Paul Calandra: Of course, we will continue to work with our First Nations partners, not only in this but across—whether it’s housing, whether it’s education, whether it’s health care with our First Nations partners.

Look, we are going to continue to work closely with them because we understand how important it is to develop in the north, but we understand how important it is to do it safely. That is why the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines has been working so

closely with our partners in the area. It is a source of jobs and opportunity for our First Nations partners in that area.

But the member is quite correct: It has to be done safely. It has to be done in co-operation with our partners in the area. He is also very correct that the previous Liberal government failed the north, failed our First Nations communities. We’re going to continue to advance policies in the north that benefit not only our First Nations partners but benefit all of the people of the province of Ontario, and we’re going to do it in a manner that respects the rights of our First Nations partners.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Roman Baber: My question is to the Minister of Health. The minister locked down our province and is now risking the lives of thousands of Ontarians by cancelling surgeries to preserve intensive care units from being overwhelmed. So Ontarians deserve to know: Is there some clarity about the number of available unoccupied ICU beds? I’m only talking about ICU beds now. I’m not looking for an answer on acute-care beds or the 3,100 acute-care beds they built last year, but the real ICU numbers right now.

Critical Care Services Ontario says Ontario has 2,412 ICU beds—2,412. On the weekend, CCSO showed 1,851 patients in Ontario’s ICUs. That puts provincial ICU occupancy at 76%. My question to the minister: Am I correct, just over 2,400 beds, 1,851 patients on the weekend equals 76% provincial ICU capacity? If I’m incorrect, which one of those numbers I cited is wrong and what is the real number? And if I am correct, then please confirm that Ontario’s ICU occupancy before she cancelled surgeries was under 80%.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant and member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. From the start of the pandemic, our government’s top priority has been to protect the health and well-being of all Ontarians. In response to escalating case counts, which have led to increased hospitalizations and ICU occupancy rates, which are already over the peak of wave 2, our government has implemented a stay-at-home order and declared a state of emergency. The stay-at-home order and other new and existing public health and workplace safety measures will preserve our public health system capacity, safeguard our vulnerable populations and allow for more progress to be made with vaccinations to save lives.

I’d like to remind the member opposite that to ensure that everyone who requires care in a hospital receives the high-quality care that they know and expect, we’ve invested \$1.8 billion in the hospital sector for 2021-22, bringing the total additional investments in hospitals since the start of the pandemic to over \$5 billion. Recently, on January 18, we provided \$125 million to expand critical care beds, adding over 500 critical care beds, and I’ll have more in the supplemental.

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

Mr. Roman Baber: The answer, or the non-answer, speaks for itself. If the minister locks us down at home, imposes a stay-at-home order, and closes schools and cancels surgeries because ICUs may be overwhelmed, the parliamentary assistant should come to the House prepared to give us an answer.

Ontario's ICU occupancy is under 80% before the cancellation of surgeries. Yes or no? Maybe the member for Eglinton–Lawrence can answer that in the supplementary.

To my second question: We're locking down everything and cancelling surgeries because ICUs may be overwhelmed, according to this government. If so, whose fault is it? Space is not a concern. According to Dr. Benoit, many of Ontario's ICU-trained physicians don't have full-time jobs. According to Dr. Strauss, most ICU doctors in Ontario are underemployed. The shortage appears to be in nurses.

Right before the second wave, the province laid off some nurses, including in the minister's own riding in September. They issued pink slips to nurses in Newmarket. It takes four months to train a nurse to become an ICU nurse. So my question is—and I'd like a clear answer, please—how many net new ICU nurses did Ontario train in the last 12 months?

1120

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Our hospitals and health care organizations are working together to make sure that we have the necessary health human resources required to respond to any potential surge event in COVID-19 patients. We're also allowing for the redeployment of health care workers to sites experiencing significant capacity pressures.

These efforts, with the ramping down of elective surgeries and other non-urgent or emergent clinical activity, will add an additional 700 to 1,000 beds, with 350 coming online this week, and ensure that our health system has the tools and resources needed to provide world-class care to every Ontarian who requires hospitalization. That is our commitment to the people of Ontario; that's what we're working on.

We're working with all of our health care resources to provide a team-based approach to providing those services and the health human resources we need in the ICU units across the province, and we're going to make sure that people have the care that they need when they appear in hospital. I think everyone understands that's the priority.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Faisal Hassan: My question is to the Premier. I have stood in this House many times speaking about how my community of York South–Weston has been neglected and left behind in this government's COVID response. It took until September 28 of last year to get a COVID testing facility in York South–Weston.

Our community is once again anxiously awaiting a permanent vaccine facility in my riding. My office has been involved, helping Humber River Hospital with pop-up clinics at seniors' buildings. Now I hear reports from families that the government's pop-up rollouts in our community are being met with chaos and confusion about when, where and how to get registered or book an appointment. When is the government going to get its act together and realize Ontario is not "doing great" and everything isn't "fine"? People's lives are at stake.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Again, the member for Eglinton–Lawrence and parliamentary assistant.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Our government has been clear. Our vaccine rollout is focused now on phase 2: older adults, those at risk of serious illness and those in hot-spot areas like the member opposite's community. We also know that COVID-19 has disproportionate impacts on certain neighbourhoods, like your community, across the province, and we understand that administering vaccines to people who live in these areas is critical to reducing the impact of COVID-19 as quickly as possible.

I was at the opening of the Downsview Arena vaccine centre with Humber River. I understand Humber River is working with the Black Creek Community Health Centre to set up an immunization clinic going in, and I read about immunizations happening in your community in the newspapers recently. We're doing everything we can to ensure that vaccines are being delivered and administered in your community and to make sure that people get the vaccines as quickly as possible.

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

Mr. Faisal Hassan: My question is again to the Premier. Folks in my community of ages 18 and above cannot book an appointment in our own community. I quote the Premier: Ontario is not "doing great" now; everything is not "fine." In fact, this government is always a day late and a dollar short in its COVID response. Hot spots and high-risk communities like York South–Weston are treated like an afterthought instead of an urgent priority.

Why this inequity? Why are our residents, those essential workers and seniors, not getting equal access to vaccines from the government? When will you fix your pop-up organizational mess, and when will York South–Weston receive a permanent vaccine facility?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Everybody is getting vaccines as quickly as we're able to deliver them. The number one issue is how many vaccines are available. We're still having some issue with supply coming in from the federal government. As soon as we have more supply, we get those vaccines out to people.

Your community is a hot-spot area. It has been identified as such. Many resources are going into that community, including the Downsview Arena, which was opened up recently with Humber River Hospital, as I mentioned before. There will be pop-up community

clinics available as public health units have the resources and the vaccines to go into those communities. They're moving around, and the vaccine availability in those communities will be advertised locally to the people in those communities when the clinics are going to be there. I've read also today that they have been knocking on doors in some communities and bringing people down, and that's what's going to happen. We're getting out there as quickly as we can to all of those communities when we have the vaccine supply.

COVID-19 RESPONSE RÉPONSE À LA COVID-19

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Ma question est pour le ministre de l'Éducation.

Just Sunday, the Minister of Education wrote to parents across Ontario telling them that all publicly funded schools would remain open after the April break, repeating that schools were safe. Then one day later, the Premier closed them for weeks.

The constant contradictory messaging from the minister and the Premier is putting our children and education workers at risk. It's time to end the chaos once and for all by making schools safe. When will the minister adopt the expert recommendations, like capping class sizes at 15, investing in urgent repairs to ventilation in classrooms and vaccinating all education workers over the April break, so that schools can be safe and stay open for good after this closure?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Under our plan, Ontario has one of lowest case rates in the nation for children under 20. That is because we put the investments in place, we've followed the medical advice and we've led in that respect. The only reason why schools are closed today—and the member knows this—is because community transmission has spiked. The seven-day average is well over 3,000. We had 4,000 cases for four consecutive days. The Chief Medical Officer of Health came forward, brought forth recommendations for this closure, recognizing we're pivoting to online learning. There's the continuity of learning for these kids, which is important. Of course, they continue to get access to mental health supports.

We recognize the necessity of children being in school, but we also recognize—as I think all members of this House and, I would argue, all parents recognize—that we will not compromise the safety of a child, put them into a school when transmission is so high that it can, at that point, create risk for families, further compounding the spread of COVID-19. So we made a difficult decision and a decisive one, quickly pivoting as required in a pandemic, to protect the lives of families. We will continue to do that.

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

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Le ministre parle d'enseignement en ligne comme si c'était une option partout dans la province.

The minister speaks of online learning as if it were an option everywhere in this province, but it isn't.

La réalité est tout autre. Dans plusieurs de nos régions rurales, comme chez nous, ce n'est tout simplement pas possible. Nous devons avoir des salles de classe sécuritaires. Nous devons limiter le nombre d'élèves à 15. Nous devons investir dans la ventilation des salles de classe. Nous devons vacciner tout le personnel d'éducation maintenant.

Pourquoi le gouvernement n'a-t-il pas utilisé cette semaine de relâche pour vacciner tout le personnel d'éducation? Les recommandations sont claires. Pourquoi continue-t-il d'ignorer les experts?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The government is committed to getting every front-line worker within our schools and child care settings a vaccine. How the member opposite could help us constructively is to call her federal Liberal members and urge them to get this province the vaccines we need to defeat this pandemic. If the Liberal Party wants to be constructive, they will work with us and urge the feds to get the province and our communities, particularly those high-risk communities, the vaccines we need to defeat this pandemic. It's the only way forward.

For our schools, for example, a case study: Based on the limited supply of this province, we've had to focus in on starting with vaccinations for special education students province-wide and for education staff within the high-risk neighbourhoods in Toronto and Peel. Then we intend to expand it to Durham, York, Hamilton, Halton and Ottawa, and then of course province-wide.

If we had more vaccines, quite obviously, we would have opened it up to every Ontarian. But we have to make choices. So in the interest of saving lives, we've started there. Our intention is to scale up so that every worker, every educator, every Ontarian gets the vaccine they deserve.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Suze Morrison: My question is for the Premier.

Shane is a retail worker in my riding with an underlying health condition. Shane contacted my office last week, frustrated that he still had no idea when he'd be getting his vaccine. Shane lives in the M4Y postal code, which was not included on the province's list of COVID hot spots. M4Y, though, is also the same postal code for the Church and Wellesley Village, a community with higher infection rates than the postal codes that were prioritized in PC-held ridings. I'm particularly struck by the cruelty of this government that is politically gerrymandering vaccines, but worse, doing so without taking into account the historical inequities of queer and trans communities that were abandoned by every level of government during the last pandemic this community went through: during the AIDS crisis.

Speaker, our local hospital and public health unit recognize the historical harms that were done and the high risk of this community and have been working to fix the province's mess. M4Y residents are now eligible for vaccines at pop-up sites, but residents are still confused

and exasperated by this government's slow and sloppy rollout. Why did the Premier announce that he would prioritize postal codes, with no plan to actually follow up on his commitments?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond, the member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Any insinuation that there has been any political input into any of these decisions about hot spots is shameful. Let me just read out, because I've said many times today how we prioritize based on data, some of the areas that are getting additional doses as hot spots:

- the MPP for Hamilton Mountain;
- the MPP for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas—
I'm only reading out NDP MPPs here, just for the public;
- the MPP for Niagara Falls;
- the MPP for Ottawa South—sorry, that's a Liberal;
- the MPP for Brampton East;
- the MPP for Brampton North;
- the MPP for Brampton Centre;
- the MPP for Guelph—that's a Green member;
- the MPP for Windsor West;
- the MPP for Windsor–Tecumseh;
- the MPP for Essex;
- the MPP for Scarborough–Guildwood;
- the MPP for Scarborough Southwest;
- the MPP for York Centre;
- the MPP for Don Valley East;
- the MPP for Don Valley West;
- the MPP for Humber River–Black Creek;
- the MPP for York South–Weston—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Question period is over.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Sudbury has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Colleges and Universities concerning cuts to jobs and programs at Laurentian University. This matter will be debated today following private members' public business.

DEFERRED VOTES

2021 ONTARIO BUDGET

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We now have a deferred vote on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The bells will ring for 30 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes. I'll ask the Clerks to please prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1134 to 1204.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government has been held.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 50; the nays are 16.

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

Motion agreed to.

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT, 2021

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

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

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

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next, we have a deferred vote on third reading of Bill 238, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997. The bells will now ring for 15 minutes—

Interjection: Same vote.

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

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 50; the nays are 16.

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

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There being no further business at this time, this House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1205 to 1500.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated April 13, 2021, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 111(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT
AMENDMENT ACT (PROVINCIAL
DIVERSE VENDOR STRATEGY), 2021LOI DE 2021 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LA GESTION DE LA CHAÎNE
D'APPROVISIONNEMENT (STRATÉGIE
PROVINCIALE POUR LA DIVERSITÉ
DES FOURNISSEURS)

Ms. Fife moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 275, An Act to amend the Supply Chain Management Act (Government, Broader Public Sector and Health Sector Entities), 2019 / Projet de loi 275, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2019 sur la gestion de la chaîne d'approvisionnement (entités gouvernementales, parapubliques et du secteur de la santé).

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll invite the member for Waterloo to briefly explain her bill, if she wishes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: The Supply Chain Management Act (Government, Broader Public Sector and Health Sector Entities), 2019, is amended to require the development and implementation of a provincial diverse vendor strategy which recognizes the importance of diversity among vendors.

New section 2.1 requires that the Standing Committee on Justice Policy prepare a report with recommendations relating to the strategy.

New sections 2.2 and 2.3 require that the minister adopt a business case study relating to diverse vendor procurement and to establish a diverse vendor advisory board.

Sections 2.4 and 2.5 set out the requirements respecting the strategy.

Section 2.6 requires the minister to prepare an annual report on the strategy and table the report in the Assembly.

Other related amendments are made.

I'd like to thank Emily Trudeau from my office for her assistance with this bill.

DARVEY HOLDINGS LIMITED
ACT, 2021

Mr. Fraser moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr48, An Act to revive Darvey Holdings Limited / Projet de loi Pr48.

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): Pursuant to standing order 89, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

PETITIONS

ÉDUCATION POSTSECONDAIRE
EN FRANÇAIS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm really proud to be presenting this petition.

« Pour une université francophone par, pour et avec la communauté franco-ontarienne du Moyen-Nord...;

« Alors que la communauté franco-ontarienne exige des institutions postsecondaires de langue française depuis les années 1960;

« Alors que les manifestations du 1^{er} décembre 2018 ont montré l'engagement et la volonté d'avoir des institutions postsecondaires gérées par et pour la communauté francophone;

« Alors que le 12 mars 2021, l'Université de Sudbury et l'Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario ont annoncé le souhait que l'Université de Sudbury devienne une université de langue française; »

Ils pétitionnent « l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario pour qu'elle appuie ce projet d'université par, pour et avec la communauté franco-ontarienne du Moyen-Nord en approuvant au minimum le rapatriement des programmes et du corps professoral francophones présentement à l'Université Laurentienne en soutenant la certification de l'Université de Sudbury et en assurant les ressources nécessaires à ce projet de génération. »

J'appuie cette pétition, je vais la signer et je l'envoie à la table des greffiers.

ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank Brad Mallette, who collected these petitions on behalf of Myles Keaney, who died from an opioid overdose. The title is "Prevent Overdoses in the North.

"Whereas Ontario is expecting more than 2,200 opioid-related deaths in 2020;

"Whereas opioid-related deaths are up 25% in northern Ontario compared to 2019;

"Whereas death rates in northern Ontario are almost double what they are in southern Ontario;

"Whereas northern Ontario has fewer health resources to handle the opioid crisis than southern Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to declare the opioid crisis a public health emergency in northern Ontario and commit to funding local evidence-based initiatives such as harm reduction strategies, awareness programs, anti-stigma training, residential treatment, and overdose prevention services, including a supervised consumption site in Greater Sudbury."

I agree with this petition. I'll affix my name and provide it to the Clerk.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Stephanie Elise Kent from Dowling in my riding for these petitions.

“Ban Retirement Home PPE Charges....”

“Whereas Ontario’s retirement homes are largely privately owned corporations; and

“Whereas these businesses have a responsibility to provide personal protective equipment (PPE) to their employees; and

“Whereas many retirement homes are adding PPE charges to the residents’ monthly bill, but the PPE is not for the residents but for the employees of the retirement home; and

“Whereas residents of some Sudbury retirement homes have effectively organized letter-writing campaigns and actions to have the PPE charges to residents cancelled and recognized as a retirement home’s cost of doing business;”

They “petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Treat our province’s seniors with respect and ban any additional COVID-related fees, including PPE, to retirement home residents.”

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

ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr. Jamie West: This time, I want to thank Paige Matheson, who collected these petitions on behalf of Sean Holmes. It’s titled “Prevent Overdoses in the North.

“Whereas Ontario is expecting more than 2,200 opioid-related deaths in 2020;

“Whereas opioid-related deaths are up 25% in northern Ontario compared to 2019;

“Whereas death rates in northern Ontario are almost double what they are in southern Ontario;

“Whereas northern Ontario has fewer health resources to handle the opioid crisis than southern Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to declare the opioid crisis a public health emergency in northern Ontario and commit to funding local evidence-based initiatives such as harm reduction strategies, awareness programs, anti-stigma training, residential treatment, and overdose prevention services, including a supervised consumption site in Greater Sudbury.”

As always, I support this petition. I will affix my signature and provide it to the Clerk.

DOCUMENTS GOUVERNEMENTAUX

M^{me} France Gélinas: J’aimerais remercier Carole Noël from Chelmsford in my riding for these petitions.

« Accents en français sur les cartes de santé de l’Ontario....

« Alors qu’il est important d’avoir le nom exact des personnes sur les cartes émises par le gouvernement » de l’Ontario, telle « la carte santé...;»

« Alors que plusieurs personnes francophones ont des accents dans l’épellation de leur nom » ou des cédilles;

« Alors que...le ministère de la Santé » a « confirmé que le système informatique de l’Ontario ne permet pas l’enregistrement des lettres avec des accents; »

Ils demandent à « l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario pour qu’elle s’assure que les accents de la langue française soient inclus sur tous les documents et cartes émis par le gouvernement de l’Ontario.... »

J’appuie cette pétition, je vais la signer et je l’envoie à la table des greffiers.

ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr. Jamie West: This time, I would like to thank Aline Pitcher for collecting petitions on behalf of Myles Keaney, who died from an opioid overdose. It’s titled “Prevent Overdoses in the North.

1510

“Whereas Ontario is expecting more than 2,200 opioid-related deaths in 2020;

“Whereas opioid-related deaths are up 25% in northern Ontario compared to 2019;

“Whereas death rates in northern Ontario are almost double what they are in southern Ontario;

“Whereas northern Ontario has fewer health resources to handle the opioid crisis than southern Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to declare the opioid crisis a public health emergency in northern Ontario and commit to funding local evidence-based initiatives such as harm reduction strategies, awareness programs, anti-stigma training, residential treatment, and overdose prevention services, including a supervised consumption site in Greater Sudbury.”

I agree with this petition. I’ll affix my signature and provide it to the Clerk.

ANTI-SMOKING INITIATIVES FOR YOUTH

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from youth from all over Ontario.

“—In the past 10 years in Ontario, 86% of all movies with on-screen smoking were rated for youth;

“—The tobacco industry has a long, well-documented history of promoting tobacco use on screen;

“—A scientific report released by the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit estimated that 185,000 children in Ontario today will be recruited to smoking by exposure to on-screen smoking;

“—More than 59,000 will eventually die from tobacco-related cancers, strokes, heart disease and emphysema, incurring at least \$1.1 billion in health care costs; and whereas an adult rating ... for movies that promote on-screen tobacco in Ontario would save at least 30,000 lives and half a billion ... dollars” each year;

“—The Ontario government has a stated goal” of achieving “the lowest smoking rates in Canada;

“—79% of Ontarians support not allowing smoking in movies rated” for youth;

“—The Minister of Government and Consumer Services has the authority to amend the regulations of the Film Classification Act...;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“—To request the Standing Committee on Government Agencies examine the ways in which the regulations of the Film Classification Act could be amended to reduce smoking in youth-rated films...;

“—That the committee report back on its findings to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and that the Minister of Government and Consumer Services prepare a response.”

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECTING ONTARIO ELECTIONS ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LA PROTECTION DES ÉLECTIONS EN ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 13, 2021, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 254, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to elections and members of the Assembly / Projet de loi 254, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les élections et les députés à l'Assemblée.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It's a pleasure, as always, to add some thoughts and comments to the debate in this House on behalf of the good people of my riding of Essex and on behalf of our caucus as the New Democratic critic for ethics and accountability, economic recovery and job creation. It's a big title there that I have, but it's kept me busy for the duration of this Parliament because there has been so much to be concerned about in terms of ethical activity and accountability and transparency, and all of that to say that a lot of my job to keep this government accountable and on the right track and focused on the needs of the people is baked into my concerns about this bill.

Let me contemporize at this moment in the first two minutes of my one-hour lead where we are in the province of Ontario as a status. We are in our third province-wide lockdown. We are under a provincially mandated state of emergency—unprecedented times, I think no one would argue. The Premier of the province just announced yesterday that all schools across the province will close indefinitely. The COVID-19 pandemic is ravaging through our communities. ICU rates and numbers are at critical levels. Our hospital system is on the brink of collapse. It is shocking to know where we actually are. This is the worst-case scenario.

These are the things that we attempted to avoid. We counselled this government that these could be the ramifications of their actions and their governance dating back to the beginning of the pandemic last year in March. We warned them, Speaker, that this was the potential outcome, yet, nevertheless, here we are. It gives me no pleasure. I needed, we needed—I wanted—this government to succeed. I needed our Premier to succeed. I still want him to succeed.

I want a robust vaccine rollout. I want paid sick days for the essential workers that endeavour every day to go and put food on their table, regardless of whether they have the benefits and protections that we have here in this House. They get up, they go to work, they do their best to protect themselves and their colleagues, and yet their government isn't there for them and hasn't been there for them, despite so much evidence around what this government could do to protect them. That is where we are today.

We are also at a point where the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, CHEO, a world-renowned children's hospital, 47 years in the business of providing specialized health care to young people, to children in our province, has declared today that it is now making rooms available, making beds available to treat adults with COVID in Ontario.

We have a small business sector in this province that has been devastated. The main streets of our communities are shells of their former selves, in terms of the economic activity. We have foreclosures, bankruptcies. It is the worst-case scenario.

And yet today and over the last couple of weeks, this government has prioritized a bill, Bill 254, that reforms the Election Act to allow itself and all other political parties and entities, and individuals and independents, to increase the amount of money that they can ask for donations and recover as donations from individuals. Specifically, Speaker, they put in Bill 254—previously, we could receive \$1,650 from individuals, which is a large sum of money. It's a large sum of money in the best of times. Today, the priority for this government is to ensure that individual donors can now donate up to \$3,300, because that is the priority of this government.

It just doesn't make sense. I've been a member here for nearly 10 years. I have never seen a bill that is so out of touch and should be, from my perspective, out of order. Although it may be in order legislatively, there is no rationale that this government can make for making these decisions and putting this forward today.

We need laser focus. Every bill that comes forward in this House should be focused on helping the people get through this pandemic in a healthy way, sustainable, helping small businesses, helping families. There is a plethora, there is a never-ending list of ways that this government can help people. This bill helps politicians. There's no question about it, Speaker. It doesn't put vaccines into the arms of Ontarians. There is nothing in this bill that will allow more vaccines to be distributed. There is nothing in this bill that allows for a more robust rollout of vaccinations in our communities. To think that this government has the gall to table a bill—tabling a bill would be offensive enough, but to run it through the actual function and the mechanics of this House? It's egregious.

1520

Speaker, we are literally offended at the fact that they have used the time of this House to embolden their electoral fortunes. That comes through some of the schedules of this bill that I had already outlined: increasing the maximum donation that an individual can give to a

politician from \$1,650 to \$3,300. In the midst of the worst economic crisis that this province has had, the government that is now the carrier of the largest subnational debt on the planet—this is the bill that you bring forward? This is what you want to focus our attention on?

I mean, there are words that can't be used in this House to describe what this is. Nevertheless, Speaker, I will never be more proud to stand in this House and vote against a bill than I will on this bill, because there's so much more the government could be doing. There are so many other aspects of society that need our help today.

The front-line workers who, through challenges that they never could have imagined, continue to persevere, continue to sound the alarm, continue to care for residents and each other: Those are the front-line workers who last year, at the beginning of the year, pre-pandemic, saw this government limit their annual salary raises to 1%. You did that. You said that nurses in this province were only worth about a 1% annual raise, and you brought in legislation to do that. And yet, we see legislation here that gives politicians the ability to raise more than 50%.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Really?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Really, really. That's what's happening in this bill.

And look, I heard the Solicitor General talk this morning about how in other provinces the limits are a lot higher, and we're going to be somewhere in the middle of the pack, and in some provinces, in fact, there is no limit. (1) We're in Ontario; (2) we're not doing too well, despite what the Premier says; (3) none of those other provinces, to my knowledge, have enacted any legislation to change and to increase the donation limit in the midst of the pandemic. Only Ontario, only Doug Ford's PC government, has done that in the last 12 months.

Again, I never thought that this place could be so out of touch with the needs of the people. I mean, we've all seen some bills come through the House that really are partisan in nature and self-serving. We saw the broadband bill that was just passed the other day that gives the government the ability to arbitrarily initiate ministerial zoning orders—to pave over paradise to put up a parking lot, essentially. We saw that. Those are almost to be expected. They're the bottom of the barrel, but we know that they are beholden to their interests.

You know, I don't begrudge them. They are fully able to table legislation that they believe is in the interest of their electoral fortunes. They can do whatever they want. It is their prerogative to do so. My contention, Speaker, as the critic for ethics and accountability, is that this is the wrong time to do it. If there was ever a wrong time to increase the donation limit to politicians, the money that you can receive from big-pocketed donors, now is the wrong time: April 13, in the midst of a pandemic, under a state of emergency, when you've just closed all the schools across the province, when people are losing their jobs, when small businesses are decimated in our communities, this is the bill that you brought forward. I can't believe it. It seems surreal. It seems like the power of this province, the ability, the resources that we have could be

used in such a better way; in ways that could give people the ability to go and get their vaccine and not miss a pay-day, in supporting and promoting vaccination by saying, "Look, it's worth so much to society. We are so serious about getting our people vaccinated and supporting you to get vaccinated, we're going to make sure you don't lose a paycheque to go do it. We're going to support you to take a paid day off to get vaccinated." The return on that investment is unimaginable. We can only dream that this government would take on that initiative.

It's not as if we haven't told them about it. It's not as if we haven't given them ideas on how to create a safety net around our long-term-care centres. It's not as if we haven't told them how to take care of the workers who toil and share their expertise and compassion and passion for the elderly in this province. It's not as if we haven't told them how to take care of those people.

We'd love to see a bill that came forward that imbedded a permanent raise to PSWs in this province, not something that's going to expire when the pandemic goes away. Something that says, "We value you. You are a hero. We know the work that you've done. We could not have gotten out of this without you, and we appreciate it." But, no, we see a bill, on April 13, 2021, tabled by the Progressive Conservative government of Ontario led by Premier Doug Ford that increases the amount of donation that deep-pocketed donors can give to politicians from \$1,650 to \$3,300.

Speaker, I have run, as you would know—although I am today 43 years old, I've run in six election campaigns, three federal campaigns with the late Jack Layton as our leader. I was honoured to do that. It gave me just an enormous amount of experience and passion for politics and our party. It also gave me the ability, regardless of whether I won or lost, to knock on doors and to meet my community.

Democracy is a beautiful thing. We all cherish it, we all want it to flourish and we all want to protect it. One of the ways to do that is to become a candidate and be involved, or join your riding association. But, under the auspices of protecting Ontario elections, this government has decided that the way to do that is to increase the amount of money that they can recover from donors. It doesn't jive with my experience as a politician and as a candidate.

I ran three times federally; I ran three times provincially. I've been involved in dozens of campaigns over the years, as my parents were always involved with the NDP and our community, so I understand what it is to fundraise. Believe me, I am not one who's inclined to try to pick pockets here. I welcome people wanting to contribute to our campaigns, but it is not a hard sell. If you want to be involved, we'll take you to knock on doors, you can fold pamphlets, you can make phone calls. We're not in it for the money. New Democrats are quite notorious for not being pushy on fundraising. Of course we need funds to run our campaigns, but we don't ask people who actually—the people who have \$3,300 to donate to a political party, they typically aren't New Democrats, let's just be frank. They're working class people, the ones who support

New Democrats. They're low-wage earners, they're precarious workers, they're unionized workers who fight for their contracts, who understand collective bargaining.

1530

So to us and to me personally, this is more than egregious. This is a way to tip the scales in their favour, because they know their donor base: They know they're big, corporate types, with deep pockets, Speaker. It's well documented, the lineage between the PC Party donors and the policies that the government enacts. They are mostly tilted in favour of the rich; that's just the way it is. They believe in trickle-down economics. They're disaster capitalists. I don't begrudge them for it. It is in their DNA.

But, Speaker, this government has decided that this is the opportune time. Maybe because COVID provides a cloak to them: It provides a blanket where people are just focused on their own health and their own safety and their own economic security at home. They may not be paying attention to some mundane schedule in a fairly elaborate bill. I don't fault them for that, but it's our job to let viewers know and to let Ontarians know that, at this time, on April 13, 2021, in the midst of a pandemic, under a state of emergency, when the government has just announced all of our schools have been closed, that on this day, the government has tabled a bill that allows them to recover more money from donors to enrich their political coffers in anticipation of the next election. They're not thinking about today; they're thinking about themselves in June of next year, to make sure that those coffers are as full as possible. Because I believe there is a retroactive clause in this that allows them—so folks will now be able to, once this does pass—and it will pass, because they have a majority government so they can ram this thing through in whatever way they want.

We cannot defeat this bill, unfortunately—and my goodness, Speaker, I would love to. In a minority government, we would have the ability to call confidence on the government. There would be an opportunity to say we have lost confidence.

I can't tell you how much I sense that the people of Ontario have lost the confidence of this government, wholeheartedly. I mean, we can look at polls. We know the polls today. You can see that reflected in the polling. But from the people I talk to, long-time Conservatives in my riding, folks that have actually worked on campaigns for the Conservatives, there are some storms a-brewing ahead for this government. So I can understand why there is such a need for them to try to ram this thing through at this moment, before we get to an election. They need these changes enacted and in place for those who are still on their team, for those who have done fairly well throughout the pandemic, for those that—the Kory Teneyckes of the world, who are lobbyists for Amazon. Amazon, I think, has done pretty well during the pandemic. These are people closely connected to the government, so they would definitely influence the policies that come forward in this House.

So, Speaker, at this time, at this moment, on April 13, 2021, when we have 600 people in our ICUs—a little bit

more than 600—when we know that the threshold at which the government will force doctors to decide who receives life-saving support in our hospitals is 800, and we're 200 people away from forcing Ontario's doctors and health care professionals to make that life-or-death decision, this is the bill that comes forward to the House.

It has to be recognized in history, and thankfully, we have our wonderful folks at Hansard that record every vowel and syllable in this House. We are thankful for their ability to have contemporaneous records of what has happened in this place, because this is a moment of shame in the history of the Ontario Legislature, as I see it.

We could be doing so much more. We should be doing so much more. Yet we're forced to take the time, allocated through the standing orders, with government bills, to actually dedicate to talking about why this government thinks that it is beneficial to increase donation limits from \$1,650 to \$3,300.

That's not the only financial increase built into the bill. There are multiple schedules here. For the pleasure of the House, members and my colleagues, this bill did go through committee. Myself and my colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin participated in the clause-by-clause portion of it and proposed some amendments to the bill to make it less egregious.

If I could give this government one thing in this bill that I could support, if it was segregated from the entirety of the bill—one of the aspects is that they have increased early voting by five days. So now there will be 10 days in total in the context of a provincial election to find an early voting station and to vote that way. That makes sense. As an individual, stand-alone aspect of this bill, pass that all day long. Bring that forward, and you'll have unanimous consent—things that make it easier for people to vote, and safer, no doubt.

But what they do is they wrap in what we know quite well here are poison pills, aspects of the bill that just are contentious. They're aspects of the bill that New Democrats, at least, can't support in any good conscience.

One of them: Section 7 of the bill proposes to increase the self-contribution limit for leadership candidates. So if you're running as a leadership candidate for one of the recognized parties in Ontario, you could previously donate to yourself \$25,000; now it will be \$50,000.

So here's how that goes down. Let's say MPP Phillips runs as the next leader of the Progressive Conservative Party. That's something that's not out of the realm of possibility. But let's say that he endeavours to run as a leadership candidate for the PC Party once we turf Doug Ford out of this building. So here's—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Allow me to interrupt the member from Essex and remind him that, in the House, we don't call people by their first and last name; We call people by their title. I would ask you to do so in the next 35 minutes. Thank you.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I so appreciate that intervention, Speaker. It is the honourable member from Ajax, and I appreciate that. I should have consulted my map here. But we're all sitting in different places, so it probably would

have taken me a long time to figure out. But I do appreciate—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I was actually making reference to the Premier, as well. So if you can call him Premier Ford and if you can call the other the honourable member from Ajax, we can continue.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Sure. I appreciate that clarity as well, Speaker.

Back to the scenario here: The member from Ajax decides he's going to make a run at the now-vacant seat that was previously occupied by Premier Ford. We all celebrate. We say, "Oh, my goodness. Look, some new blood; some fresh ideas; someone with a conscience, we hope; someone who has focus on supporting the workers in this province." We put our faith, we hope that he makes the best of this run, and we wish him well, even though we're New Democrats. Look, we understand.

But now that the rules have changed, Mr. Phillips—or the member from Ajax, pardon me. Because he's a well-connected guy. We know he's got a great pedigree. He's been influential in the business sector. He's connected. He's got friends in high places, Speaker. He's made a good career out of politics and he's able to dip into his own pocket and add another \$25,000 to his leadership race—50 grand now he can put into the pot.

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Well, look, guess who he's running against? He's running against the newest Liberal candidate, whoever that may be, who may not be as affluent, who may not be able to scramble 25 or 50 grand together. That doesn't level the playing field. That makes sure that the rich, the powerful, the connected and those that are affluent have an upper hand in participating in our democracy. Twenty-five grand is a whole lot of money as it is, but now to bump it up to 50 grand—look, I don't know about you, Speaker, but I haven't seen inflation rates rise by 50% yet.

To think that today, on April 13, 2021, in the middle of a pandemic, under a stay-at-home order, under a state of emergency, when schools have closed, when our hospitals are at critical capacity, when doctors are being forced to make potentially life-or-death decisions, when small businesses are being decimated in our communities, that increasing the limit that leadership candidates can donate to themselves by \$25,000, up to \$50,000, is the priority of this House, that in that context we're here today doing this, makes this exercise laughable. I can only imagine that constituents outside of this building in all of our communities are just shaking their heads at the rationale around the use of this building and the use of this democracy at this time.

Any of the changes you could make could be made after the pandemic. I would say you should do that. Here is a tip, here's a professional tip, a pro tip, for free: Pull the bill. Take it out. Remove it. You still have the chance to do that. I believe it still could be—it may be—it could be. I would have to refer to some of my colleagues who are experts in the standing orders. Although I have never seen it happen, I would say there has probably never been a better time where it should happen. Potentially, the

government House leader, if he's watching or hears this today at some point, it would be great for him to actually consider that, because I'll tell you, no matter how much money this may enable your party to raise, it is going to be very detrimental to your electoral fortunes. You might have a lot of money in the bank, but your credibility is going to be in the dumps, because this is the type of bill that does that. You lose the confidence of people. You lose the faith of people.

I've seen it before. We saw it with the Liberal government. In fact, the changes that were made previously were because the previous government brought in—they were very, very cordial with big donors. We saw the \$10,000-a-plate dinners, Speaker. They were notorious. They would have events and in one night raise a quarter of a million dollars: astronomical sums. Then eventually, lo and behold, you would start to connect the dots and follow the money and see the legislation that would come through this place and say, "Well, who is that benefiting?" It's very easy: You connect who the big-ticket donors are and what their influence is on the party and what their needs are. We would see contracts going out of this place being signed in a heartbeat with no accountability and no transparency.

I would say that we are on that same track. This brings in the potential of bringing big money and influence back into this Legislature. I would argue that it already currently exists. I would argue that the proposition to increase and enhance the use of ministerial zoning orders is, in fact, exactly that type of legislation. We don't want that. We don't want it in the best of times, but in the worst of times this House should be focused on helping the people that are struggling the most, and it is not—not today, not with this legislation. It is far, far from that.

The bill does make some changes to third-party advertisers. It increases the time in which third-party advertisements can be designated as campaign expenses or election expenses in the context of an election cycle. Previously it was six months; now it expands it to 12 months. So 12 months before an election, any third party, any entity out there like teachers' federations, like parents of kids with autism, families with autism, any association, any group, any non-profit, any charitable group—the Terry Fox Foundation. We heard deputations from the Ontario non-profit association, who talked about the ramifications of changing this and the challenges that they will have in getting their message out because it can be construed as campaign election spending and third-party spending in the context of an election.

Also, there are measures built into this bill that deal with third-party collusion, whereby, let's say, a non-profit printed off material in an election cycle using a commercial printer and another entity used that same printer. They could be deemed in collusion and face up to a \$100,000 fine. These are for charitable organizations in our community that have no big influence. They don't have big, big dollars. They don't have a lot of money to be spending as it is, but they have a need to get their message out and to advocate on behalf of the groups that they do. This will hamstring them.

But I don't think it was specifically targeted to those people. They were just caught up in the schedules of this bill. Who I think this was really designed to muzzle, ostensibly, are those families of people like long-term-care residents, who have been vocal against this government and their blatant disregard for protecting long-term-care residents. I think it's an attempt to muzzle teachers associations, who have for years advocated for smaller classrooms, for safer classrooms, for supports throughout the pandemic and for better ventilation, and those unions that represent them. I think that's what those schedules are built into.

But given all of that, whether it may be warranted or not—of course, we don't want third-party advertisers to have a free-for-all. There has to be some regulations there. But I would argue that the regulations were quite stringent to begin with. And I would point out that, in my memory, I can only really remember one group having been found in violation of third-party advertising rules, and it was a group that came out of nowhere—as the minister called them this morning, pop-up groups. It was a group that came out of nowhere called the Vaughan Working Families group. Does anybody remember this Vaughan Working Families group?

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Yes. So many things have happened since that. There has been a lot in that space. But this group had these full-page advertisements. They're from Vaughan, but they were putting full-page advertisements in the newspaper in Ottawa, right at the time that there were two by-elections happening in Ottawa. And this Vaughan Working Families was attacking teachers and their collective agreement because that was what was happening at the time. The government decided that teachers needed to take a haircut too, so they were going to limit—and did limit—their pay to a 1% annual raise. The government, again, has its own prerogative on who it wants to target and who it wants to put its thumb down on, and at that point it was the teachers.

Then we saw this group, Vaughan Working Families, come about out of nowhere. We figured their advertisements in the newspapers at that time—and they were quite prominent—were going to cost roughly \$180,000, for the ads that we saw them place. Lo and behold, this wasn't a working families group. It wasn't a coalition of moms and dads who were concerned about Vaughan and—

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Mr. Jamie West: It wasn't?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: No, it wasn't, though. It was two guys, Michael DeGasperis and Quinto Annibale. I'd never heard of them before. Did you hear about them? I had never heard of these two gentlemen before.

But then, as our effective media started to dig into it, they found out these are two very prominent PC Party donors and very influential in the business community. Quinto Annibale apparently has donated \$30,000 to the PC Party of Ontario since 2014, so he wasn't a stranger to PC Party politics. In fact, I think he quite obviously was an adamant supporter of the party. But he took it upon himself

to put this group together, didn't register as a third party—and look, we got a hold of it. I sent the inquiry to our Ontario elections officer. They looked into it and said, “Yes, in fact, this group and these people are absolutely, unequivocally in violation of the Ontario Election Act.” The net caught them. We caught them. The mechanism that was there to protect us from unscrupulous pop-up third-party advertisers actually did its job: It caught the people who have no business in actually playing that type of role. They're not advocating for Vaughan working families; they're advocating for their own family, their own individual entities and corporations.

That case now sits on the Attorney General's desk. We wonder—we hope that he will use the full resources of his office and his ministry to look into it and to lay appropriate charges, if warranted. I have yet to hear anything. I hope that there is some movement on there, but the power of sanction rests within the Attorney General as of today.

That all to say, Speaker, that I'm quite confident that the rules and the legislation that protect our elections from third-party influence are quite robust, because we have evidence—very, very recent evidence—of it working for us.

To say that why, in fact, turn back some of that legislation and expand it to entrap other entities that have always played by the rules—the Ontario Teachers' Federation, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, OECTA, presented at committee. They said that this is strictly and clearly meant to muzzle dissent from organizations that have always played an integral role in our elections. Education is one of the top issues that we talk about during election cycles. If the teachers' voice—if those groups, those unions that are legally, lawfully recognized to represent them under the charter can't now speak for them, are prohibited to do so or penalized for doing such, I would say that this will be challenged quite clearly at various levels of our judicial system. In fact, I heard that quite clearly from the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and a representative from Democracy Watch.

Legislation like this was enacted in British Columbia under the Liberals—the previous Liberal government. It was tossed out, and its parameters weren't even as stringent as what this government has brought forward. So, here we are today again with another bill. The last time the Conservative Party brought our government, the federal government, to court to fight the climate change bill, it cost us \$30 million of public money that could be going to front-line workers. It could be going to better PPE for our schools. It could be going to better ventilation in our school system. It could be going to mental health, of which we have an impending crisis, if you hadn't noticed. That \$30 million could go a long way if it weren't tied up in the courts, and now we know quite clearly that Bill 254 will be challenged, unequivocally, because it infringes on the rights of those groups to participate in our elections.

I heard the same evidence that members of that committee did. I took it as quite clear and quite conclusive. It would give me, as a government member, enough pause to say, “Hey, look, House leader, government whip,

Premier: We're going to be in trouble with this bill. It doesn't look good. The optics of it look terrible as it is. It doesn't look good for us as the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario to be increasing our fundraising capacity in the middle of a pandemic." That don't look good. It looks gross. It looks self-serving. It looks incompetent. It looks out of touch.

Nevertheless, members of the government persevere. They will stand in their place and they will vote for this bill, and they will cast a pall of shame on this building, the likes of which I can't remember in my 10-year career here—and I've seen a lot of nasty stuff. This one takes the cake.

Speaker, we proposed amendments at committee. We proposed amendments to turn back all of those financial considerations: the \$25,000 to \$50,000, as I had mentioned to you; the \$1,650 to \$3,300. We asked this government to consider the context in which they were bringing forward this bill. We asked them to consider those who have lost their jobs. We asked them to consider those who are on the front lines. We asked them to consider children who haven't seen their grandparents. We asked them to consider families that have been separated throughout the pandemic. We asked them to consider small businesses that, at this moment, don't know how they're going to keep the doors open.

We asked them to consider all those things, to remove all the schedules and to bring them back to as it stands today, the context of today, to those financial levels in which we've all operated and were all elected under—and I think you all did pretty well. You got here; congratulations. I'm sure you can do it again under the current rules, but I just don't think that this is a bill that is in order.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Did you just say we're all going to win our seats again?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: No, I'm certain that you're going to lose. I'm not sure; everyone else might win, but I'm quite certain that you're going to lose.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Speak through the Chair, please, not across the aisle. And the member for Niagara: I ask you to come to order.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much, Speaker. That's why, maybe, that member from Niagara West is so effusive about his support for this bill: because his track record in this House isn't the greatest. His track record outside of this House isn't the greatest, so he's going to need every dime he can get to try to polish—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Order, please. The member for Niagara West, come to order, please.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: —to try to put a polish on that record, Speaker. Just Google him. You'll see; it's all over the place. Nevertheless, Speaker, I'm sure he—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Excuse me. We were doing fine until a couple of minutes ago, and a couple of members came in and ratcheted it up a bit. Let's not do that. Let's try to get through this for another

14 minutes, and then you'll have a chance to ask questions of the member from Essex, who is making his presentation. If this continues, this type of behaviour, you'll get one warning and then you'll be gone.

Thank you. Back to the member from Essex.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much, Speaker. I know they're sensitive over there these days. I don't blame them; things are not looking good for their government as a whole. And it's unfortunate. I want them to do well. I need them to do well. We all need them to do well, but unfortunately, they haven't. They've let us down, and we're all suffering the ramifications. We only have to look outside of these doors to see the devastation that's around us.

We've given them ideas. I'm giving them one right now. I implore specifically the government House leader: Remove this bill. Take it out. Stand in your place and say, "Look, we understand at this time, on this day, in this place in history, we need to do better by the people of Ontario. We can do better. We don't need to ensure that we can recover more money. We don't need to increase the donation limits to politicians. That's not a priority of this government."

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You can say that. You can take it verbatim. I'll write it down for you. It would be easy, and you'd probably garner a lot of support and good faith. We certainly know this government needs that at this time.

Speaker, another thing that I haven't talked about—I've got 12, 13 minutes left. One of the other things that this bill does is that it continues the public subsidies, the per-vote subsidy that was brought in in 2018, I believe. Subsection 11(1) of the bill amends—these are the amendments. It amends subsection 32.1 of the Election Finances Act, putting the 2021 payment up to the 2018 level, giving parties hundreds of thousands more dollars than the previous amount.

The per-vote subsidy is something that I'm a believer in. I think it actually does level the playing field. You get a dollar amount per vote that you garner, whether you win or lose, and that's a fair way, I think, to finance the process and finance candidacy. It supports people to continue to endeavour to garner more votes because it allows you to fund a more robust campaign later on.

But in 2018, the Premier stood in his place and promised to eliminate the per-vote subsidies. He said, "I do not believe the government should be taking money from hard-working taxpayers and giving it to political parties," and "When I am elected Premier I will stand up for all Ontario taxpayers and eliminate the per-vote subsidy." What do you call it when someone says one thing and does another? What do you call it when—

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's unparliamentary.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It's unparliamentary to say what that is.

The Premier has stated that he sees this as the most egregious form of socialism. He can't believe it. He stood in his place and said that he would eliminate it. In fact, this bill not only doesn't eliminate it, it expands it and

lengthens it indefinitely. They are not only not getting rid of it, they're never getting rid of it for the foreseeable future until I guess they eventually lose and another government takes hold and can do whatever they want with it.

But it just goes to say that this government and this Premier have time and time again said one thing and done another. His government said two days ago that schools wouldn't close; a day later, they closed schools. It is a frenetic government without focus, without competency. They have clearly showed that. The fact that this bill is even a living document in this House indicates quite clearly that their priorities do not align whatsoever with the priorities of the people of Ontario, and I would argue they never will.

This is a government out for themselves, in it for themselves and those who are closest and closely connected to it, because that's where it sees the path to victory. That's what it's all about, Speaker. It's about tipping the scales in their favour because they have the leverage, they have the majority, and they have a moment in time in which I believe they think they can slide this under the radar of the general public.

Look, we're in a House right now that would typically be occupied by dozens of media outlets. The galleries would be full of people that are here to participate in their democracy, and it's a healthy thing. Sometimes they would express their frustration, and we would see them and we would hear them.

This is a Premier who also promised that people would never have to protest on the front lawns again. I've never seen so many protests since he took power on the front lawns of Queen's Park. Nevertheless, what I'm saying is that this place is a different place today under the auspices of COVID and under an emergency order. The ability for the public to fully understand the ramifications of the bills that come through this place is limited.

Now, we hope that people are tuning in. I will certainly take the hour of debate that I presented here today and try to broadcast it as widely as I possibly can so that people understand what our position is as New Democrats. Our position is quite clear: We wholeheartedly opposed this bill. We cannot wait to vote against it. It should never have seen the floor of this Legislature. It's out of touch with the people of Ontario, and it's actually offensive that, in the context of COVID, when people are dying, when our hospitals are at a critical capacity, when our schools are closed, when our economy is crumbling, when our small businesses have been devastated, when families can't reunite, this is the bill that you brought forward.

"Bittersweet" isn't the word, Speaker. I'm proud that I'm able to present an alternative to viewers. I'm proud that I'm able to present, on behalf of the Ontario NDP, what we would see as a priority, and what we have seen. My colleague the member from Hamilton Mountain tabled a bill, which members of the Legislature voted on yesterday. It would have dedicated and deemed COVID PTSD for essential workers as a presumptive thing under the WSIB. We would presume that those essential workers

who are working under COVID conditions on the front lines and who develop mental health issues, that those would have occurred through their work, something that I think would expand and extend mental health support to a lot of people in this province. The government, yesterday, voted against it.

Those are the types of bills that we think are and should be prioritized in this House. Yet the two bills that I've seen—one with MZO's, ensuring that the minister can use the ministerial zoning orders to bypass municipal zoning and planning to develop whatever type of entity they want, wherever they want. That's what we saw previously. Now, this is a bill that allows politicians to recover and fundraise more money from individuals, from \$1,650 to \$3,300.

I don't know too many people today, in my community, who are sitting around thinking, "I've got an extra \$3,300 laying around. Maybe I should give it to a political party." I don't know those people. In fact, I would say, if there are those people, please find a charity to donate that money to. Find an organization in your community to send that money to. Do not send it to politicians. Send it to your local United Way, your local homeless shelter. Send it to groups that are working with people with disabilities. Send it anywhere else. Politicians are not the ones today that need the help, but this bill explicitly does that. That's what it's all about. It's never been more straightforward.

You've got to hand it to this government. They're quite flagrant with their actions. They're not hiding it: "This is what we're doing. We think we need more money, and we're going to entrench it into law so that our donors can dig a little deeper so that we can drop the bucket a little bit farther down the well, because we're connected." You're connected. We know them: the Michael DeGasperises and the Quinto Annibales of the world.

There are more. We've seen reports. You follow the money. I was previously on the government agencies committee. We saw those who are well-connected get named to agencies, boards and committees for a year.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Even that guy who had the French girlfriend?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Even the guy who had—yes, that guy, who promptly quit out of embarrassment because of the work that we did. But he was in for a smooth landing. Thankfully, members of the opposition are doing our job and highlighting where this government has ethical fractures.

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I would say they're not even fractures anymore; they're valleys. They're enormous chasms that have splintered and divided those who have done very well and continue to do very well in this province under COVID and those who have not. This bill is not going to benefit folks who are on ODSP. This bill is not going to benefit disabled people. There is no money out of this bill that is going to support families with autism. No dollar amount indicated in this bill goes to better ventilation in our schools. No dollar amount goes to PPE distribution in our schools. Nothing about this bill helps anyone other than politicians and political parties.

I am a firm believer, Speaker, that if you do the work and you do it right, with the right intentions and the right motivations, with passion, determination and commitment, you get rewarded. If people see that you're trying to make their lives better, you will be rewarded electorally. Call me nostalgic, but that's the way I think it should be: that they see you working, they see you're sincere and they support you at the ballot box. If you can put a campaign together and get some flyers out there, all the better. But you shouldn't be focused on your electoral success every chance you get, and you should not be doing that in the middle of a pandemic when we're under a stay-at-home order, when we're under an emergency declaration, when hospitals in our community are at critical capacity, when the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario is now making room for adults to treat for COVID, when the Minister of Health in the province of Ontario is now asking Atlantic provinces to free up space so that we may be able to send patients to Atlantic provinces, who have fared much better during this pandemic because of the measures that they took, decisive measures that supported their communities, that focused on the people, not on their electoral success. That's where we're at right now.

Speaker, I urge any member across the way with a modicum of respect for this House and this institution and the democracy which we all hold near and dear to vote against this bill. Do not stand in your place, or stand in your place and vote against this bill. Either way, it is not a bill that should see the light of day through this chamber, and it is one that I will be quite proud to vote against.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): It's time for questions. I turn to the government members.

Mr. David Piccini: I thank the member opposite for his speech. I listened quite intently. The member opposite brought up MZOs. I have a direct and specific question for him. Budget 2021 proposed a brand new hospital in the Windsor region. Would the member opposite support an MZO to expedite the development of that brand new hospital: yes or no?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Budget 2021 allocated \$9 million to allow the planning stage to move into the second phase. The new Windsor hospital is projected to cost roughly \$2 billion. So if your government thinks that they're building a hospital for the \$9 million they've adjusted to in the budget, your math is way, way off.

Does the hospital in Windsor require an MZO? No, it required consultation with the community. It has gone through that process. The lands are designated, and we look forward to an NDP government that will build the new Windsor hospital when we form government in 2023.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Government members, come to order, please.

The member for Brampton East has a question.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Essex, come to order, please.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: I want to thank the member from Essex for his really amazing hour lead about the really

crucial problems with this piece of legislation. I want to ask the member if you can expand on how egregious it is and how unprecedented it is to bring in a bill that allows for the Conservative Party to increase their fundraising limits, for all political parties to increase their fundraising limits, at a time of a pandemic, when people should be and governments should be focused on helping people—and instead, we see a lack of priorities. Can you just expand on how really unprecedented this kind of bill is and just how problematic it is?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I thank my colleague very much. How egregious is this bill? Let's think about it: The government has a majority government. They could at any time table any measure of law that brings about a plethora of supports for any group or individual in this province. They could tackle almost any problem that we currently have in this province. The egregious part of this bill is that it exists in the first place, that they believe that this bill is a priority in which they need to ensure that the donation limits for politicians are increased from \$1,650 to \$3,300. That in and of itself makes this bill one of the most—if not the most—egregious bills that I've ever seen in this House.

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

Mr. David Piccini: I didn't get an answer to my last question, so I'm going to try it once again: The member opposite—I think it's important to note the planning process for our hospital, and I'm glad he referenced that. It's important that he understand that, indeed.

The C.D. Howe Institute pointed to the fact that in places here in Ontario, it takes over three times—we're talking hundreds of days—just to get permits for shovels in ground and years to get shovels in ground versus other progressive jurisdictions like Denmark, like Singapore, like Korea. That's a fact.

So again, I'll ask the member: If an MZO were issued at the request of the municipality to expedite that development for a brand new hospital in Windsor, would he support it? Yes or no?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: If the member really cared that much about a new hospital in Windsor, I would have hoped that he would have advocated in the first or second year of his government to ensure that the money was embedded in the two previous budgets. We haven't seen anything. Now we see, through the large efforts of a massive community effort of individuals who have pushed not only this government but the previous government for investments to move us to the second phase—it's thanks to them that we have any funding allocated, not thanks to this government that have in fact essentially wasted a year getting us to this point. We could have been a year ahead of schedule had that member actually lobbied his government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Waterloo has a question.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member from Essex for highlighting why this bill should not be on the floor of the Legislature in the middle of the third wave of a pandemic.

My question for him, though, focuses on the inconsistencies that this government brings to the floor of this Legislature by way of their announcements, by way of their legislation. In fact, you will remember that when the Premier was campaigning, then just a candidate, he regarded the per-vote subsidy as welfare. He actually described this thing that he is now expanding upon and increasing upon as “welfare for politicians.” What do you think? What do you make of this inconsistent and, quite honestly, disrespectful perspective that the Premier has taken in regard to where we are right now, what he said in the past and this now new position that the Premier has?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you to the member from Waterloo. It is a really blatant flop on the Premier’s position. He was quite adamant that no public per-vote subsidy, taxpayer-funded subsidy, should exist in this province, yet this bill, sanctioned by him and his cabinet, not only increases that, but it expands that. So, if this is the Premier bemoaning socialism, he’s right up there with the biggest socialists on the planet that have—no, he will be ostensibly recovering the most taxpayer dollars out of any provincial government in the history of the province.

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

Mr. David Piccini: I’ll try again; hopefully, the third time is the charm. I spoke to the delay in this province in getting shovels in ground for critical infrastructure projects, and the member waffled both times, so I’ll try again. The member said he’d work collaboratively, given the opportunity. He has got a brand new hospital coming to his community. He’s waffling instead of just saying he’d support it, so I’ll try someone from his community. Let’s try the CEO of that hospital, who said, “Premier Ford stepped up to the plate, made a promise in August of last year to our community ... that this was going to be the number one priority and that he was going to be an 800-pound gorilla and make it happen and the 800-pound gorilla delivered.”

So, again, I’ll ask the member opposite, since his entire community supports this: If an MZO helped expedite the build of that hospital, would he support it? Yes or no?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thankfully, we don’t need an MZO to build our new hospital, because it has been in the planning stages for over a decade now, and through consultation with the communities and proper planning and communal work with municipalities and the cities, we are ready to go. We’re following the process.

We certainly don’t want to use an MZO, as this government has done, to pave over wetlands, to accommodate large corporate warehouse owners and developers. That’s why you’re bringing in MZOs: to ensure that your big-pocketed developers are going to cash in on the use of MZOs. The use of an MZO for the Windsor hospital is not needed, not required and will not actually ever be required if the government does the right thing and puts the money where it’s supposed to be.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Nickel Belt has a question.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Very quickly: We are in the third wave of a pandemic. You started your one-hour lead talking about the situation that we are in, talking about home care workers still having problems accessing PPE, talking about essential workers not being able to get a sick day and making the tough decision to go to work because they can’t afford to not get paid, or the rent, and their kids won’t be fed. You talked about the need for daycare, which is something that is becoming more and more needed in order for people to make it through this pandemic.

Was any of this a priority of this government when they brought this bill forward? They say that we have to be here, because it’s a pandemic and people need us. Were we helping all of those people who need us with that bill?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I thank the member from Nickel Belt very much. She has advocated for all of the things that she said, and she has in fact brought them forward—many of those measures—as pieces of active, live legislation in this House that could have been enacted, could have been adopted by the government. They did not, so they didn’t see those issues when you brought them forward to ensure that PSWs were supported, to ensure that we had four hours of hands-on care. They didn’t support that.

Yet we see a bill today which they do support, and it gives politicians access to deeper pockets, to bigger donors and the ability for those donors to give the PC Party \$3,300 during an election cycle.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Mr. Norman Miller: I’m pleased to rise to speak to third reading of Bill 254, the Protecting Ontario Elections Act, 2021. Our government is proposing steps to make it easier and safer for Ontarians to vote and participate in provincial elections. I was pleased that during committee, we heard from Ontario’s Chief Electoral Officer, Greg Essensa, and I want to take a moment here to thank him for appearing before the committee and for the ongoing work that he does to ensure that we have fair elections.

This bill acts on a number of the recommendations from our Chief Electoral Officer, including increasing the number of advance poll days; creating a committee to review voting technologies; allowing the Chief Electoral Officer to levy penalties; setting a minimum threshold that constituency associations and parties will have to meet before they require a full audit; and better defining collusion among third-party advertisers and between third-party advertisers and political parties or candidates. I want to review these recommendations and why it is important we act upon them now.

First, advance polls: At the recommendation of the Chief Electoral Officer, this bill is proposing to establish 10 days of advance polls, as opposed to only five days. This is a change the Chief Electoral Officer has highlighted recently as a way to help Elections Ontario adapt to the need for physical distancing during the pandemic, but it is also something the Chief Electoral Officer was recommending before we had even heard of COVID-19.

I want to quote from the Chief Electoral Officer's 2018-19 annual report: "Current legislation requires five days of advance voting at fixed voting locations during the period that begins on the 12th day and ends on the 8th day before election day. The 2018 general election was the first held under these requirements for advance voting, and the process did not meet public expectations.

"Public polling conducted on behalf of Elections Ontario found that Ontarians are looking for more options to cast their ballot ahead of election day, including a growing desire to vote during advance voting.

"To remove barriers to voting and put the needs of voters first, the Chief Electoral Officer recommends extending advance voting at non-returning office voting locations to 10 days, as well as more flexibility to rotate voting locations to facilitate the needs and behaviours of voters."

As the Chief Electoral Officer said, in the 2018 provincial election there were five advance poll days and every advance poll location was required to be open every day of those five days. Prior to the last election, rotating advance polls were allowed over a longer period of time, and with this bill our government is proposing returning to that system.

As I explained during second reading, this is very helpful in the vast geographic ridings like Parry Sound-Muskoka, where people are spread over roughly 15,000 square kilometres. In my riding residents live in 26 municipalities, many with populations of less than 1,000 people; some unorganized territories; and seven First Nations. I think this is an appropriate time to thank all of Ontario's local returning officers, who figured out how to give everyone the opportunity to vote in all of our ridings. There are challenges in planning and carrying out an election in all of our ridings, and I know we all appreciate the hard work done by our local returning officers and their staff. We wouldn't be here without them.

Getting back to the increased number of advance poll dates, this recommendation from the Chief Electoral Officer has taken on greater importance during the pandemic. In November, Mr. Essensa produced a report about holding an election during a pandemic and once again made the suggestion that we increase the number of advance poll days. We saw during elections in other provinces and in the United States that more people voted in the advance polls. If that's when people want to vote, we need to give them that opportunity. If that is when it is safest for both the voters and the poll officials, we need to allow for more days of advance polls.

Now I'd like to talk a bit about technology. The 2018 general election was historic in Ontario for the use of technology at the polls. I think it was a success and I congratulate Elections Ontario for that success. But we all know that technology continues to change, and it can certainly change a lot in the four years between most general elections. So Elections Ontario needs a formal process to continually review and evaluate new technologies for both voting and counting votes. The Chief Electoral Officer recognized this after the 2014 election in his annual report

since then. In his 2014 post-election report, the Chief Electoral Officer called for a legislative change to "establish common standards and a certification process" for the use of technology.

Here is his explanation of why this is necessary, from the 2014 report: "The Chief Electoral Officer recommends that the legislation that governs elections standards should establish common standards and a certification process for how technology is used in the electoral process at both the provincial and municipal levels.

"Technology has naturally evolved and become fully integrated into our society and business practices, and is increasingly in use in municipal elections. In 2014, 97 of Ontario's 444 municipalities offered networked voting for Ontario's municipal elections. Lack of consistency in technologies and the process of integration into election systems leads to challenges and erodes public confidence in the electoral system. We witnessed problems recently in the New Brunswick election as well as in several other jurisdictions. Yet such problems are not a reason to avoid technology. Technology that is introduced in a principled and measured manner can help solve challenges with the current electoral model by reducing staffing needs, improving the accuracy of results, and delivering improved service to stakeholders. Ontario has the opportunity to lead in this area. We can build the public's trust in voting technologies by creating the first binding standards for their use. A common set of standards will help ensure that elections are administered with proven, well-tested and secure technology that protects the integrity of the electoral process."

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The Chief Electoral Officer repeated this recommendation in his report on the 2018 election and in his annual reports.

Our government agrees that common guidelines and standards for use of technology are important. That's why this bill, if passed, will mandate the Chief Electoral Officer to create a committee made up of representatives of each political party represented in the Legislature and other experts to review any new voting and vote-counting technologies and develop standards for such technologies.

This bill is also acting on some other recommendations that came from the Chief Electoral Officer's reports. Administrative penalties is another topic I wish to cover. For example, this bill proposes to amend the Election Finances Act to allow the Chief Electoral Officer to levy administrative penalties, more commonly known as fines, against individuals and organizations who contravene the Election Act or the Election Finances Act.

Elections Ontario has made this recommendation in a number of their annual reports. The following explanation comes from the 2016-17 annual report:

"The Chief Electoral Officer recommends that the Election Act and Election Finances Act be amended so that the Chief Electoral Officer has the power to levy administrative penalties.

"When it comes to the Chief Electoral Officer's attention that an individual or group appears to have wilfully

violated the Election Act or Election Finances Act, the only sanction is for the Chief Electoral Officer to report the activity to the Attorney General for prosecution as an offence under the Provincial Offences Act. Apart from deregistration, the only penalties that can be imposed are fines upon conviction in court. Other regulatory agencies including Elections Canada, are entrusted with a greater range of administrative penalties they can apply to uphold compliance with their stakeholders.

“In the 2014 general election, as one example, Elections Ontario received several complaints alleging that political advertising was missing the proper authorization or that candidate campaign materials contained incorrect information. The Chief Electoral Officer believes this sort of minor transgression is important to penalize but that a full-blown prosecution and conviction in court may not necessarily be a proportionate outcome. Broader powers for the Chief Electoral Officer, like those exercised by other regulators, including the authority to levy administrative fines, to impose temporary suspensions, or to issue public reprimands could help promote compliance and would help instill public confidence in the electoral process.”

During committee, I had the opportunity to ask the Chief Electoral Officer about this amendment, and here's what he had to say:

“Currently, there are a number of what I would call minor transgressions of the current statute, both the Election Act and Election Finances Act. Under the current regime, the only avenue available to me is to refer that to the Attorney General, which takes up considerable court time, considerable work by the crown, and often will result in, effectively, a judge issuing a \$50 fine. What I'm indicating here, what I've been advocating for is, like my colleagues at Elections Canada and in BC and Alberta, that for these minor transgressions, I'm afforded the ability to issue administrative penalties in that regard.”

If this bill passes, the Chief Electoral Officer will still be able to refer major violations to Ontario's prosecutors. However, allowing the Chief Electoral Officer to act on minor violations by issuing fines should increase compliance with the rules and help ensure fair elections for everyone.

The bill sets significant maximum fines, but also lays out how penalties are to be determined based on a number of factors, including intentionality, harm done, benefit received and whether there is a history of contravention. These fines could be issued to political entities, third-party advertisers or others such as the media. Fines could be used to enforce rules such as submitting financial reports; abiding by spending limits; failing to register as a third-party advertiser; advertising during a blackout; and publishing polls on election day.

The bill now also includes a provision for someone who is issued a fine to appeal the decision of the Chief Electoral Officer. This will allow a person or entity who receives a fine and who disagrees with the findings of the Chief Electoral Officer to appeal that decision to the Superior Court of Justice within 30 days of receiving the order to

pay. This ability to appeal a fine is an amendment that was made in committee as a result of the feedback from presenters. It is similar to an appeal provision in other provinces, such as Alberta.

A smaller but important change that was also recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer is to establish a minimum threshold of financial activity before an audit is required. Currently, any candidate, constituency association or party must appoint an auditor as soon as they are registered, even if they have little or no money or financial activity in their accounts. It makes no sense to audit an account that doesn't have any money in it or little financial activity. And because Elections Ontario subsidizes the cost of audits, these unnecessary audits are costing the taxpayers money.

In recommending a minimum threshold before an audit is required, Chief Electoral Officer Greg Essensa noted that in the 2018-19 fiscal year, Elections Ontario paid out more than \$2 million in audit subsidies. At committee, Mr. Essensa told us that he was very supportive of this amendment because “we have a number of nil campaigns where a candidate will effectively spend nothing, but we're still paying an audit subsidy because the current legislation requires that they have an audit even though they have a nil campaign. Clarifying that is a considerable savings to my office.” Specifically, Bill 254 proposes that constituency associations, parties and candidates be required to appoint an auditor only once those accounts have received \$10,000 in financial activity.

Now I'd like to talk about third-party advertisers. Finally, the bill further refines the rules around third-party advertising in Ontario. Third-party advertising has been growing since the 1990s. Ontario's regulation of third-party advertisers started in 2007 and has evolved slowly, often at the recommendation of the Chief Electoral Officer. But it wasn't until only a few years ago that there were any limits on what third-party advertisers could spend before or during an election.

In his 2014 general election report, the Chief Electoral Officer noted, “Since regulations regarding third-party advertisers were introduced in 2007, the number of third parties has more than tripled—from 11 in 2007 to 19 in 2011 to 35 in 2014.” After the 2018 election, the first election where there were limits on ad spending by third-party advertisers, Elections Ontario reported registering 59 third-party advertisers, who spent more than \$5 million in the lead-up to and during the election period.

This bill continues the evolution of Ontario's third-party advertising rules by further defining what constitutes collusion among third parties or between third parties and political entities. This is something the Chief Electoral Officer has recommended for some time. I found this recommendation in Elections Ontario annual reports going back to at least 2012-13.

In his 2016-17 annual report, the Chief Electoral Officer noted that despite his recommendations to strengthen the anti-collusion measures for third-party advertisers, the government of the day had not addressed that in their legislation. He was referring to Bill 2, the Election

Finances Statute Law Amendment Act, introduced by the Liberals in September 2016, which finally put a limit on third-party advertising, but failed to address the definition of “collusion.” This bill proposes clear definitions regarding collusion in the context of Ontario’s elections.

Speaker, we are proposing rules to address collusion that focus on the sharing of resources, not merely sharing a message. In developing the definition of “collusion,” our government looked at the federal definition. During committee, the Chief Electoral Officer told us, “One of the most challenging aspects of the current legislation is determining collusion between third parties and political parties. The current test in the legislation is to prove knowledge and consent, which has proven to be extraordinarily difficult over the past 12 or 15 years. So I am supportive of a bill that defines more clearly what collusion means, something that indicates a more equitable understanding for regulators like myself. I am supportive of the definition that is currently before the Legislature.”

Later on, in response to a question from the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook, Mr. Essensa told us, “I have always been recommending that a better definition of collusion be struck by the government or by the Legislative Assembly.”

While I’m speaking about restrictions on third-party advertising, I should note that this bill will also increase the window of time in the lead-up to an election when limits apply to third-party advertising from six months to 12 months. I also asked the Chief Electoral Officer how he felt about this, and he told us, “I have seen, over time, third parties begin advertising well in advance of the six-month period that is currently in place, as much as up to nine or 10 months before an election. So I am in support of extending the period to 12 months.”

Beyond the recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer, this bill addresses a number of other issues. One of those issues is the role of independent MPPs. This bill, if passed, will allow independent members of the Legislature to create a constituency association. This will allow them to raise money between elections so they can continue to engage with volunteers in their community in the same ways as other MPPs, among other benefits.

The bill, if passed, will increase the limit on political donations allowed, allowing individuals to contribute up to \$3,300 to a political party, riding association or candidate. To put this in context, limits across Canada range from no donation limit in Newfoundland and Labrador and Saskatchewan to a \$100 limit in Quebec. Nova Scotia and Manitoba have a \$5,000 limit; Alberta, \$4,243; PEI, \$3,100. New Brunswick has a limit of \$3,000. BC has a limit of \$1,268. As you can see, this change would put Ontario very much in the middle of the pack for political donation limits. And I want to reinforce that this in no way changes Ontario’s ban on corporate or union donations. The point of this overall is to keep individuals at the centre of the electoral process.

I should note that the Chief Electoral Officer was asked for his opinion on the donation limit, and he stated that he felt a donation limit is something that should be set by the Legislature.

Social media has become a big part of all of our lives and how we all communicate, including for MPPs. The rise of social media has created a challenge for MPPs. The rules about how to manage our social media accounts before, during and after an election aren’t clear because the Members’ Integrity Act doesn’t address social media specifically. Should we all have two separate sets of accounts, one that we use to communicate with constituents between elections and one that we use to communicate with voters and supporters during an election? Basically, this bill clarifies that MPPs can maintain one social media account throughout the transition into and out of elections as long as we follow the rules and guidelines that apply to MPPs and ministers respectively with regard to things we post while we are in those roles.

Ontario’s Integrity Commissioner, David Wake, spoke to the standing committee about this and explained, “The amendments call for the establishment and approval of social media guidelines by the Legislative Assembly for all MPPs and for cabinet ministers. This is something I have recommended in two of my last reports.”

The specific rules for MPPs will be determined by committee and will be passed by the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, I seem to be out of time, so I will wrap up, but thank the Legislature for the opportunity to speak on this bill this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I thank the member for his presentation, and I thank all members here today for listening intently without interruption.

It’s now time to pose questions to the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka. The first question goes to the member from Sudbury.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you as well to the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka for the debate. It’s interesting: Earlier today in the debate I learned that we’re going to maximize political donations to \$3,300 as the max yearly donation. Also, I learned today that if you want to run as leader, the max that you can donate to yourself has been raised from \$25,000 to \$50,000.

I’m just wondering, to the member opposite: Does this sound like legislation designed for the little guy, or legislation that is designed for the wealthy and well connected?

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member for that question. As you know, there was legislation that was introduced in 2016 that made some very important changes in terms of the use of money in elections, and that was the ban on union and corporate donations. I think that’s very important, and I support that. This change that is happening is a change in the amount of personal donations, and it brings Ontario very much to the middle of the pack for provinces across our country. As I mentioned, there are a few of the provinces that have no limits whatsoever and others that have some lower limits. I think it’s appropriate, and it’s something that we’re still—it’s individuals, not corporations or unions that are having to dig in their pocket to make the decision to make a contribution.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question goes to the member from Niagara West.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you to the member for the presentation this afternoon. It's clearly a very important piece of legislation, one that safeguards and protects something we all hold very near and dear to our heart.

One of the fundamental aspects of democracy, of course, is being able to vote. I'm wondering if you could speak a little bit about the accessibility that has been expanded here in this legislation to ensure that everyone has that opportunity to vote, that they are able to make it out, whether they're busy on election day or not. There are more opportunities, I think, brought in through this legislation. I'm wondering if you could speak to that and explain it to the House a little bit more.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member for that question. The legislation acts on some of the recommendations from the Chief Electoral Officer; specifically, as I mentioned in my comments, increasing the number of advance poll days from five to 10 and making them much more flexible as well. I think that's important. It's certainly important in a riding like Parry Sound–Muskoka, where it's quite huge.

Another important change is for the technology aspect of it, which allows people to vote easier as well. This legislation appoints a committee with representatives from all parties and experts as well to look at the changing technology, because every four years, of course, the technology does change. That makes it easier to vote. It make it easier for people with disabilities, for example, to be able to vote as well. I think these are important changes to make our elections fair and to make it easier for the people of the province to voice their vote.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Nickel Belt has a question.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I, too, listened to the member. He happens to be a neighbour of mine. My riding's south boundary is his north, and we share a few events in the communities. I was just wondering, either during the last election or any elections—since the pandemic has started, has anybody come to you and asked for any of those changes? I'm quite connected to my community, and not one person has asked me for those changes. I can tell you that not one person in Nickel Belt has asked for the limits to go from \$1,000 to some \$3,000, and even less for a leadership race to go from \$25,000 to \$50,000. Has anybody in his riding asked for these kinds of changes to be a priority for the Legislative Assembly?

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member from Nickel Belt for that question. I would say, these days, I'm certainly getting lots of questions in the constituency office with regard to issues mainly regarding COVID. Of course, there are aspects of this bill that are important because of COVID. We've seen some of the elections, like the one in Newfoundland, where they had a lot of challenges. This bill is going to be bringing into effect safer ways to vote. We're all, of course, hoping we're getting near the end of COVID, but we don't know what next June—which is the next election—will bring. This

bill is acting on many of the recommendations from the Chief Electoral Officer to make sure that when that election happens, it's safe for people, and people are able to exercise their vote.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Back to the member for Niagara West.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Through the Speaker, I think the members in the opposition asked a really interesting question, and I want to build on that question. One of the things I'm very curious about is, we've seen the opposition really stand up and defend special-interest groups, stand up and defend the importance of third-party advertising according to that party. Although I'm not sure, we've also seen them really speak about the importance of ensuring that that continue. I'm just wondering, have you had anyone in your constituency ask you to increase amounts for special interests and third parties to be able to donate?

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you for that. Yes, the issue of third-party spending in elections is dealt with in the bill. And, no, I have not had anyone come into my constituency office and ask specifically about that either, as I haven't had about limits as well. But I think Ontario is unique in the country in that the spending by third parties in elections is not thousands of dollars; it's millions of dollars. As you heard in my comments, it was over \$5 million in the 2018 election.

These rules, I think, are quite reasonable. In the 12 months leading up to an election, each individual third party can spend—I believe it's \$637,000 leading up to the writ period and then over \$106,000 in the election. If they can't communicate their message spending that sort of money, each individual third party, then they are not doing a good job communicating is what I would say, and the rules are quite fair to them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Brampton East has a question.

Mr. Guratan Singh: My question is to be very clear: How, at a time like this, an unprecedented pandemic, when people are facing economic devastation—we know that right now, in terms of provinces and territories, Ontario is eighth-lowest in per-capita vaccinations. With all the issues that we're facing, how can the Conservative Party, in good conscience, focus on increasing the limits to donations instead of focusing on helping people when they need it the most?

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member for the question. I would say the government is very, very much focused on the pandemic and doing everything in its power to do things like vaccinations. Up to this point, we've had to wait for the federal government to get us a supply of vaccinations. Hopefully, that's increasing, and we'll get many more people vaccinated.

But elections are important as well, and the Chief Electoral Officer has talked about having a safe and fair election in the time of COVID. He has made a number of recommendations, and this legislation is acting on those recommendations, increasing the number of advance poll days, creating a committee to review voting technology, allowing the Chief Electoral Officer to levy penalties,

setting a minimum threshold that constituency associations and parties will have to meet before they require an audit, better defining collusion between third parties and political parties. These are all important things that are important to keep an election fair.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for one more question.

Mr. Dave Smith: Speaker, through you to the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka, the Chief Electoral Officer would be given some stronger suites of enforcement tools in this. It's based on what's happening with Elections Canada, but there are a couple of exceptions to it. Could the member please describe what those exceptions are?

Mr. Norman Miller: Sure. Thank you for that question. Yes, there are some exceptions:

(1) There will not be a commissioner responsible for administering the penalties, as there is federally; rather, it's going to be in the hands of the Chief Electoral Officer;

(2) The maximum penalties for third-party advertising violations will align with Alberta to ensure compliance with our third-party advertising rules; and finally,

(3) We are not proposing a monetary penalty for failure of a constituency association to appoint a new chief financial officer or for failure of a party to not post a fundraising event in advance to the event, because we realize that it's the volunteers who take on such tasks and we don't want to deter people from volunteering in our local campaigns.

Thank you for the question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to join the lively debate this afternoon on Bill 254, the Protecting Ontario Elections Act, possibly one of the most misnamed pieces of legislation in the province to date, especially given where we are right now as a province. I hope the members opposite have seen the latest COVID-19 cases that are in Ontario. They're not encouraging; 17 more people died, from yesterday to today.

In this context, in this current situation, we have the government of the day, the so-called government of the people, bringing forward a piece of legislation which actually increases the amount of political donations that can come to us as politicians. There is absolutely no doubt that the people of this province find this piece of legislation offensive on so many fronts.

I really look across at the members of this Legislature, and I ask them what you were hearing in your offices last week when we were on constituency week. Did anybody come into your office, send you an email, call you, tweet at you and say, "You know what? The member from Peterborough needs more money as a politician"? Of course this is not happening right now. The province of Ontario is in one of the worst health care and economic crises that we have ever experienced. This is not a debatable issue, Mr. Speaker.

What Bill 254 proposes is quite interesting, because I appreciate that some of the members on the government side were not here for the past debate on increasing big

money in politics. This was a hard-fought war that we had with the Liberals of the day. I remember well because I was the finance critic and I had to deal with the House leader on this issue. They basically were forced into a corner to acknowledge that big money was buying influence, was buying policy, was buying legislation and was buying government contracts and procurement. So we have important lessons to share with the government on this side. It's so disappointing that they have been so reluctant to listen to us. Our critic on this from Essex, who did his one-hour lead—this morning, when the Attorney General got up in his place and talked with earnest emotion about how important this is and how great it is that we're working with them—they shot down almost every one of our amendments.

Interjection: All of them.

Ms. Catherine Fife: All of them. So at least you're consistent. You are consistently oppositional to any progressive idea that comes into your avenue.

We see this very clearly. Let me be as clear as I can be, just so people fully understand that we see that this is the PC government of Ontario bringing big money back into politics. It's worth noting, Mr. Speaker, how we got here and also what other members in this Legislature have said in the past. It's good that there are some of my former colleagues in the House at this time as I raise some of these issues.

For many years, I was the finance critic, and the member from Nipissing was also the finance critic. We used to have this great camaraderie. I talked to my husband about the culture and the nature of this place and how it has shifted so drastically over the years. I will tell you that, having shared some of the stories of what has happened in this place, he told me—and he's a poli-sci graduate. I'm the English major and he's the poli-sci guy from Queen's. He said, "Listen, it sounds like it's almost like a gladiator sort of mentality right now in the province of Ontario in our Legislature."

It wasn't always that way, and I think that that's really important. It's not the fact that the former PC members used to sit here and the NDP used to sit here; it's just that we actually used to have a collegial relationship, where we would exchange ideas and try to make things better. In fact, I worked with the PC member from Kitchener–Conestoga, Michael Harris, for years on the GO train issue. We did a stand-up together. Can you even imagine that happening right now, so acrimonious is the relationship right now between parliamentarians in this place?

But it's worth noting that when the PC members sat on this side of the House—and I'm going to quote from Hansard for the member opposite who takes great exception to this. This is the member from Nipissing; this is what he said on electoral fundraising on September 29, 2016: "We've seen the quota system widely publicized in many media systems. I do thank the media. They dug deep into this. The Toronto Star, the Globe and Mail—they both dug very deep into this. It really is like a root canal, and, according to this government, it's about as painful as a root

canal to them.” He goes on to say, “What the Toronto Star and the Globe and Mail have exposed is that they fundraise”—and this is what he’s talking about with the government of the day, which was the Liberals—“on this side and then it appears that they award contracts to the same people they fundraise from. That’s the distinction here.”

1700

And so, you look at where we are right now, how the pieces of legislation that have come before this House, particularly around how contracts are awarded, who gets contracts, who gets influence—when we were looking at the human trafficking bill, Mr. Speaker, I went through the lobbyist registry, and I found out that Airbnb had been lobbying the government and they’re not included as having to have regulatory burdens in the piece of legislation. Is that a coincidence? Well, how would we know? There’s such a lack of transparency in this place. But they are there. They’re there as a lobbyist, but they get a pass on the legislation. Now, if you care about human trafficking in the province of Ontario, as all of us should, you would be concerned. If you knew that human trafficking happens in motels and hotels, and they have to maintain a registry, and then you look at Airbnbs, where 50% of the human trafficking happens, but they don’t, then is it a logical thing for us to come to a conclusion that for some reason Airbnbs have been excluded from having regulatory burdens and that, as the legislation was being crafted, they are excluded from this process? Is that a coincidence? That’s a good question.

The member from Bay of Quinte—a very strong orator in this House, I must say—said on May 10, 2016: “Then we learned about these little soirees with the finance minister and the Minister of Energy that rake in \$165,000 for the Liberal Party, and you wonder why people continue to wonder if this government is on the up and up? It’s because of stories like that, or because of the story that was front-page in the Globe and Mail today, where we learned there wasn’t just a handful of these private soirees; there have been 98 of these private soirees raking in \$13.5 million between when this Premier took office and the end of 2014.” Now, these are not spaghetti dinners, Mr. Speaker, and you know as well as I do that the Premier likes to talk about his \$25 spaghetti dinners. These spaghetti dinners are not happening right now in the province of Ontario. In fact, when this legislation passes, it will cost you \$3,300 to have access to this Premier or to have access to a cabinet minister. I shared the concerns that the member from Bay of Quinte articulated just a few years ago, in 2016. It feels like a long time ago—I’m a lot older, somewhat wiser.

And then he goes on to say, “That’s why people are skeptical about the intentions of this government,” speaking about the Liberals at the time. “The people of Ontario are paying the soaring electricity bills, not these guys.” So he acknowledged as a member of the opposition that when big money enters politics, the people lose out. This is a lesson that we know well in the province of Ontario, which is why the original election contributions were altered.

I have to say, there have been some strong opposition voices to this piece of legislation, Bill 254, the so-called Protecting Ontario Elections Act. One of these voices says, “Three years ago, when the Liberal cash-for-access story broke”—so this is some time ago—“Conservative MPPs hammered the government of the day. Ultimately, all parties supported fundraising reform.” All parties—we were all on the same page. We understood that this kind of financial influence was not in the best interest of people. But this quote goes on, from Hansard: “But tonight, the Ford government is bringing back cash-for-access. Media reports allege the government is pressuring lobbyists to sell \$1,250 tickets to the Premier’s swanky dinner or lose access.” Now, \$1,250 is a lot of money, but so is \$3,300, Mr. Speaker. The Premier goes on to brag about his spaghetti dinners, which we obviously know are not happening right now.

“Cash-for-access is bad for democracy.” I hope—there was a time and a place where we all understood this. Do you only understand it when you’re the opposition? Is that what we’re dealing with here? The question of where the money, how the money, influences is real.

Finally, just to get it on the record—I’ve quoted the Bay of Quinte member, the Nipissing member, but the member from Chatham-Kent-Leamington has said this. This is from Hansard, just so you’re clear: “What did Premier Wynne suggest we do to fix the problem of the Wynne Liberals selling themselves off for intimate dinners? The Premier actually suggested that her party should be given millions of dollars from taxpayers in the form of a per-vote subsidy. The Globe and Mail estimates that the Liberal Party of Ontario alone would receive more than \$5 million per year as a result of a generous per-vote subsidy. It’s beyond parody at this point, Speaker.”

It is beyond parody, because now, the member from Chatham-Kent-Leamington fully supports increasing not only the per-vote subsidy for us in the middle of a pandemic, but also the amounts that politicians will get and can bring into their own coffers to secure their electoral fortunes.

The one thing we have going for us in this huge mess that is now the province of Ontario, under the leadership of this esteemed Premier, is that the people of this province have been activated. They know what’s going on. They’ve had a senior go into the long-term-care system and have not seen an iron ring anywhere in sight. They have experienced their sister, their brother, their daughter or their son in the health care system work countless hours and now get shipped by emergency order to another community, without any sort of consultation or consent. This is actually happening right now in the province of Ontario—and I will remind the Speaker this happened on the same day that the Premier of this province said that things are going pretty well.

What I said yesterday around the finance bill was around confidence. It really comes down to trust. If you have a Premier who will stand in his place and say one thing on one occasion and then, not just six hours later, say another thing, that ultimately compromises the entire state

of affairs for the people of this province. They lose confidence in us. And when people lose confidence in their politicians, they also lose confidence in their democracy.

I will say that my colleague from Kitchener Centre has been very vocal in this regard, not only because she's the critic for anti-racism and she sees how this pandemic is disproportionately affecting communities. Last night, for instance, she was on a town hall with the member from Sudbury—I believe the member from Nickel Belt was there—and they were talking about what's happening at Laurentian University, where, I think, 200 people lost their jobs last night, because this government has decided that Laurentian is expendable. Laurentian has a strong francophone tradition, a strong francophone education program that values Indigenous communities and has embedded that learning, that history—that real history, not the fake history that we're hearing about Indigenous communities in the province of Ontario; the truth. Maybe it doesn't have a great commercial value for this open-for-business kind of government, but it has great value for the people of the province who are seeking a greater educational experience.

To let Laurentian just go by the wayside—when I was talking to the member from Kitchener Centre, and I know the member from Sudbury as well—just think of it from an economic perspective. Think about what the loss of a university does to a community, to the supply chain to that university, to the local businesses, to the culture of a whole place. I mean, how can a government, in the middle of a pandemic, just let it go, just say, “You know what? We're going to cut you loose,” just like you did with small businesses? For all those small businesses that didn't qualify for the small business grant, they just doubled down and said, “You didn't qualify the first time, and we're not going to include you the second time. Thanks for coming out. Thanks for doing your best. Thanks for stepping up and creating personal protective equipment, shields and sanitizer. But you know what? We're not even going to let you into the supply chain for the government procurement process, because you did your job, you saved us once, but now we're going back to China.” We're going to create some jobs in China, Mr. Speaker.

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The fact that the government has brought forward a piece of legislation like Bill 254 in the biggest health and economic crisis that this province has ever seen indicates to us—and it certainly indicates to the people of this province—that you're completely and utterly out of touch with the province of Ontario, with the people we serve. It's ironic on some levels, Mr. Speaker, because you know we take an oath as politicians. I take that oath seriously. I know my colleagues take it seriously. I know that it weighs on us when we deal with our constituents who are seriously being—their ability to reach their potential is actually being compromised by the actions of this government. I know that weighs heavily on me.

I also know that we say a prayer in this place every morning where we pledge to put the people that we serve above ourselves. We say a prayer in the Ontario Legislature where we say that we are going to do the best thing

for the people of this province. Do you think that the people of this province think that us, as politicians, being able to raise \$3,300 per person is a priority for the people of the province? It is not. It is not, and you should, as our critic suggested, table this. You should put it on the table, and we should not look at it until our long-term-care system is back and running at an ethical perspective, until the health care system is meeting the needs of the people we serve, until our students and our educational system are actually supported by the government of Ontario, until those who are most vulnerable, those who suffer from various disabilities, be it mental health or physical health, are supported by this government.

What have you done? You've brought this piece of legislation to the floor of Ontario's Legislature during a crisis that demands all of us to work together. I think that at the beginning of this, we were all there with you, but then you showed who you were. You showed who you were by bringing forward a piece of legislation which gives a complete advantage to the government members.

So to be focused on an election right now when our ICUs are at capacity or above capacity; where, as my colleague has said, CHEO is now displacing children to accommodate adults to deal with the COVID-19 crisis; to know that schools are now closed following the spring break and parents across the province are struggling—child care is possibly next. Child care workers have been relegated as those other people for so long in this province of Ontario. It should make everybody angry that they're still not vaccinated, when we will have no economy if child care is not a factor in our economic recovery. Why do you not get that?

We will proudly vote against this bill. I will use your own voices against you in this because you said the right thing. When the Liberals were trying to influence politics and influence legislation and policy, you did the right thing then. Why are you not doing the right thing now for the people of this province?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have an opportunity for questions. The first question goes to the member from Parry Sound—Muskoka.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member for the presentation. One aspect of the bill is that these proposed changes in the bill, if passed, would create a more level playing field for independent members. It would allow them to have constituency associations and do fundraising. I believe that makes it a more level playing field. Does the member support this part of the bill to provide constituency associations for independent members?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you for the question. Honestly, one of my most favourite members of all time from the PC caucus also hails from one of the most beautiful places in Ontario. That said—you know there's always a but—one of the first things that the government did was reduce party status for the independent members. Do you think we don't remember this? Everything that we say in this place stands forever. It is history.

One of the first things the government House leader did for the Ford government was—it used to be party status

for eight independent members. What did you do? You bumped it up to 12. So do not lecture me on valuing independent members of this Legislature, because I've got a long memory and I've got Hansard to prove it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Nickel Belt has a question.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was interesting to listen to my colleague, especially when she made reference to what is happening at Laurentian University. Laurentian University is laying off hundreds of workers from the university. They are closing 69 programs. This is a crisis. This is the biggest university in northern Ontario. We are losing the possibility for northerners to go to university, and not a peep came out from the government side. They did not lift a finger to help. They never said anything.

If you look at this piece of legislation that we are debating and the crisis that is happening at Laurentian, which one would you figure should be the priority?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much to the member from Nickel Belt. I know she and the member from Sudbury have been staunch advocates for supporting Laurentian, supporting the entire community and that whole ecosystem which actually will support our economy.

You know, if you're talking about economic recovery, as we should be, we should be planning and not just reacting and lurching from crisis to crisis. We should be factoring in all of that expertise, all of that academic power and all of that knowledge transfer to commercialize a new economy. What has this government decided to do—probably one of the weakest ministers in the history of the province of Ontario, just to stand by and let a whole university fall down. It will be his legacy, regardless of where you vote on this piece of legislation.

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

Mr. David Piccini: My question to one of my favourite members across: I don't think she'll say the same thing back, but I'm going to ask a question nonetheless.

I've got family in Newfoundland and we were talking a bit about the electoral process, and by no means is this at all a slight on the beautiful and wonderful province of Newfoundland, but they had very real difficulties with their election. They saw historically low numbers in the riding of Torngat—a beautiful area; I hope to get there camping one day. Specifically among the Indigenous fly-in communities, there were some serious issues over over-reporting. It rocked the confidence in the electoral process, really.

My question is—I mean, I'm hoping we can just zero in on the advance balloting piece. Does the member support increased accessibility through the extended advance polling days in this legislation?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Listen, I would like you a lot more if I had known you were from Newfoundland because Newfoundland is, you know, just a hop, skip and a jump to Cape Breton and I'm a Cape Bretoner from an old mining/steelworker town.

So, listen, there are important lessons to be learned from what happened in Newfoundland. You know who is looking really closely at those lessons? It's our Prime Minister, unfortunately, because he sees a moment where he thinks that he can drag this country into a federal election in the middle of a pandemic for electoral benefit. I find that reprehensible; I really do. Perhaps we may agree on that.

Preparing for an election is paramount to actually having a fair election—totally agree on that. Increasing the money that we as politicians get? Not so much. So that is the divide. That is where we differ on this piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Maybe at some point all of us with Newfoundland roots can get together and have a Newfoundland caucus.

The next question.

Mr. Jamie West: I thank the member for Waterloo as well for her comments about Laurentian University. I think about the time that we're spending here debating this, something that is going to happen and not affect us literally until next year, while yesterday at Laurentian University hundreds of people lost their jobs and students are scrambling for their future.

You've been longer than I have. Can I ask you, please, as someone with more tenure as an MPP, what are we doing here, and why hasn't the government stepped up for Laurentian University?

1720

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much to the member from Sudbury. This actually came up in my AGM meeting last night because we have two universities in our town and a college, Conestoga College. Both of my kids attended there. What is happening at Laurentian—the government thinks that this is just an isolated affair. It is not. It is a signal to where you are taking the direction of post-secondary education, which, in our minds, is something that should be accessible to everyone. There is really no good rationale, there's no good electoral rationale for you to let Laurentian fall by the wayside. There is no good economic argument for you to let Laurentian fail. There is no community support whatsoever for this. So it points to a larger issue of where you see post-secondary education in the province of Ontario.

I will say, to the member for Sudbury, it's very concerning that they're willing to let it fail, that they're willing to let it die when it plays such an important role—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you very much.

The member from Peterborough—Kawartha has a question.

Mr. Dave Smith: I heard the member from Waterloo speak a fair bit there. One of the things that she brought up was something about the independent members. This bill actually does something for independent members that are not part of a party. It levels the playing field for them. It gives them access to what would be the equivalent of a riding association. Does the member think that is something that would be bad, then, for those independent

members, to level the playing field so that those who have the desire to contribute to the political environment here in Ontario actually have a level playing field and can be part of the election process properly?

Ms. Catherine Fife: To the member for Peterborough: It's interesting, because my point in referencing what the government has already done to independent members by preventing them from having official party status was to point out the inconsistency in your government, which is really the most consistent thing that you have done. Right now, especially with this piece of legislation, you are prioritizing those big dollars and how those big dollars will have influence in your mandate, in your direction as politicians. What I tried to point out to you is that the people of this province will not tolerate it. They don't have patience for it. They do not have patience for that. Perhaps you'll be an independent member one day. Perhaps you'll benefit from this piece of legislation. I don't know. But the theme here is your own inconsistency.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Time for a quick question and a quick answer. The member for Essex.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I thank the member from Waterloo. Look, how does this bill get more vaccines into people's arms? That should be our priority. How does this bill make that a reality?

Ms. Catherine Fife: That's a perfect question for 40 seconds: It doesn't. It doesn't prioritize the people of this province. It doesn't demonstrate that the government is actually laser-focused on addressing the pandemic. It demonstrates what your true priorities are, which is your own political fortunes. That is a breach of your ethical and moral responsibility as legislators. I urge the government to table this piece of legislation. Get it out of here. Let's focus on the vaccines.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Mr. John Fraser: It's really nice to come down here this afternoon and hear such healthy debate about something that's not particularly critical at this point in time.

Look, there are 623 people in ICUs, the positivity rate is 10.3%. It's going up. If you talked to anybody on the street or you brought them in and sat them down here or up in the gallery, they'd be going, "Why are they talking about this? Why is this important right now?" It's not to say this stuff isn't important and that we shouldn't get it right, but why right now?

Why was Bill 257 so important right now, when people are looking to be led through this pandemic? I don't think that anybody who came in here to see that would say, "I think the government is doing the right thing. I think they're debating the right thing."

This stuff is important, and the principle behind it is about making democracy accessible to everyone, to level the playing field. I don't think we've achieved that here.

But I do want to say one thing before I continue. I really appreciate the member from Waterloo's support for the independent Liberals. I only wish the opposition House leader at the time shared that same sentiment, because he

teamed up. He didn't want us there either. But I feel heart-warmed to know that we had that support. It came from a really good place. Look, the last time we had this debate back in 2018, 2017, it was like mutually assured destruction. We couldn't wait to one-up the people on the other side, and we ended up with a mess. We tried to fix that a bit, and now we're trying to fix it again.

I'm just going to be clear: I think the way we should go is lower limits and subsidies. We already spend millions and millions of dollars on supporting the political system through political tax credits. I don't know that doubling the limit levels the playing field. It gives some people more ability to participate. If you look at municipalities like Ottawa, they put limits.

The good thing is, we didn't put corporate and union donations back in this. I'll say that's a good thing. I'm glad the government didn't do that.

Interjection: Hear, hear.

Mr. John Fraser: There we go.

But what I do know in the city of Ottawa is, they have a subsidy, and that subsidy is if you give \$100, you get \$75 back. If you give anything more than that up to, I think, about \$800—you get nothing. We're not doing that here. We're doing what we did last time but in reverse, a little bit of everything. There are some good things in here, but I can't support it because of some of the things that are in here. I don't think doubling limits is the right thing to do if we're trying to level the playing field.

The other piece that I want to talk about is how we handle third parties. We know the influence of third parties, and we know there needs to be some disclosure of who's giving the money. We all agree that's important. It's in here. But here's the thing: All of us, we still have real-time disclosure. We have to let people know when we get money as soon as we get it. Third parties don't have to disclose until after the fact, and there are no limits on them other than the amount of money they can spend. There's no limit on who can contribute, and there are very limited teeth in this legislation to ensure that misinformation isn't spread. I know my colleague from Ottawa-Vanier put something forward at committee; it didn't pass.

I'm just going to end it at this, because I think that if people saw us debating this this afternoon, in the gallery or watching on TV, they'd go—

Ms. Catherine Fife: "What the hell is going on?"

Mr. John Fraser: That's exactly it. "Just what the hell is going on?" People are concerned and worried out there about their families, about going to work.

I won't be supporting this bill, and I want to thank you very much for your time, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Normally we'd go to questions, but I understand the member from Milton has a point of order.

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, you will find we have unanimous consent to see the clock at 6 o'clock.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Mr. Gill is suggesting that unanimous consent is there to see the clock at 6. Are we agreed? Agreed.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

1730

**PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS**

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE
DISCLOSURE ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021

SUR LA DIVULGATION DE LA VIOLENCE
ENTRE PARTENAIRES INTIMES

Mrs. Stevens moved second 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 Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member will have up to 12 minutes to make her presentation. I turn to the member from St. Catharines.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I would like to thank the House for allowing me to present Bill 274, An Act respecting the disclosure of information related to intimate partner violence, today for its second reading.

The act that I am presenting today will be familiar to most people by its origin name, which is Clare's Law. Clare's Law has been introduced in the past in other provinces. Earlier this month, Alberta enacted a similar law, and Saskatchewan passed a disclosure act to protect against domestic violence in 2018.

The intent of the Intimate Partner Violence Disclosure Act is to allow, in defined circumstances, people at risk of domestic violence, or a third party with intimate knowledge, to obtain information on a partner's history of violence. This law will allow people to make informed choices about potentially harmful relationships and will be an important tool in protecting our communities from intimate partner and gender-based violence.

Speaker, I was talking to a local radio station in St. Catharines, NewsTalk 610 CKTB, hosted by Tom McConnell. He asked who in this chamber would vote against this type of bill. That is what you would call a leading question, as it was particularly rhetorical because he knew the answer: no one—at least, no one I can think of. That is because this is a non-partisan bill.

I am hopeful it passes second reading today, because with the rise of domestic violence incidents across this country due to a pandemic, this bill moves us in the right direction. It is one that makes sense and will provide support to some women in situations of domestic violence and intimate partner violence.

Even this morning, I was virtually discussing the legislation with four incredible women: Pamela Cross, the legal director of Luke's Place; Marlene Ham, the executive director at the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses; Deb Singh, chair of the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres; and Chief Kimberly Greenwood, executive board member of the Ontario

Association of Chiefs of Police. As a cross-section of community, we were discussing the merits of this legislation, encouraging it to go forward. That is not to say that there is no more work that needs to be done on this legislation, and it is important we use the inter-disciplinary lens when we evaluate any legislation. I know there is work still to be done. It will require more consultation, especially with vulnerable communities, and it requires ancillary sector support and funding from this government.

Yes, there will be women in Ontario and in my community of St. Catharines who will definitely benefit from this legislation right now; however, the real work is to recognize that to properly support this sector, it requires connecting in the subject matter experts and the service providers, while ensuring they have resources needed to help women leave situations that involve intimate partner violence.

I will talk more about that later, but I want to discuss why we need legislation like this and, more importantly, about intimate violence today and why the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the problem in the community. Let me be crystal clear about the landscape today: COVID-19 has disproportionately affected women across this province. In addition, incidents of intimate partner violence are on the rise. Data from 17 police forces across the country show that calls related to domestic disturbances rose by nearly 12% between March and June 2020, compared to the same four months in 2019, according to Stats Canada. This is because the COVID-19 pandemic has further isolated women from their social networks and access to community organizations, which makes providing tools to women even more valuable.

I am adding in some quantitative data here about the landscape, which I asked my team member to take from Chief Greenwood's speech earlier today. The Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police is supporting this bill, so I feel okay standing on the shoulders of a subject matter expert.

Even before the pandemic, across Canada, intimate partner violence accounted for one quarter of all police-reported violent crimes. In addition, the average is staggering when they report nearly 70 victims are murdered each and every year by their intimate partners. These victims, while not always the case, are overwhelmingly women.

It is estimated that as few as one in five victims report their abuse to the police. When you factor in the reality that 33% of women experience intimate partner violence and other forms of gender-based violence throughout their lifetime, intimate partner and gender-based violence is a non-partisan societal issue that affects us all. This violence is present in all cultures, religions, ethnic and racial communities.

Although the prevalence is undeniable, only 30% of these crimes are reported to police; 80% of the victims disclose to family members or friends, and 67% of Canadians know a woman who has experienced physical or sexual abuse.

Throughout this pandemic, Canada's Assaulted Women's Helpline filed over 50% more incoming calls versus the previous year. So when I spoke to the service providers in my community, they rang the alarm bells that services have become less accessible and more inequitable, given the challenges of the pandemic. I heard from the Kristen French Child Advocacy Centre, Pathstone Mental Health, Gillian's Place women's shelter. There is a high demand for their services and a challenge to deliver their message during the pandemic.

Speaker, this brings me around to an important topic. I would like to speak on consultation for a moment. I've spoken to advocates for rape crisis centres, women's rights lawyers, executive directors at transitional housing organizations, advocates against sex trafficking, the Ontario police chiefs, women's shelters, Indigenous rights advocates and so, so many more. It is clear that in order to effectively make this legislation that will work, we have to include many voices and have a robust committee process.

This legislation is one tool in the tool box and provides the right-to-ask provision to aid women in selecting healthy relationships. It is important that the language matters here. We should make acknowledgement that subject matter and expertise matters here. It is important to understand that this will help some women, but not work in every instance. This is why we added a few components to the legislation that I look forward to fleshing out more thoroughly in committee.

It is clear that the secondary victimization and further stigmatization are concerns when reporting crimes or seeking help. That is why we made it crystal clear in this law that it is the right to ask, and the onus for knowledge it not on the shoulders of women; it's not their responsibility. We're going to make sure that we strengthen immunity the best that we can and lower the bar as far as possible to ensure women feel comfortable accessing this legislation.

Another important component is that third-party organizations will be able to apply on behalf of women, with consent, to request information. It ensures that women who might not have a trusting relationship with police services can still access their resources. It also ensures that service providers in the community are able to connect with clients and help them with the next steps. It is about wrapping around access.

It is clear that police training is important, but this has to occur with engaging the community. We put a need for training straight into legislation, which will later be moved to another legislation in committee.

Finally, going back to what I said a moment ago: language matters. We have a very clear preamble that uses feminine language to address the problem, and speaks clearly to intimate partner violence and gender-based violence and that the solutions require more support. While this is an important tool, it is only one tool in the tool box. It requires more support and real commitments to do more.

This is why further consultation matters. In fact, we were not able to adjust the legislation in enough time. However, already there are amendments from the OACP

around perfunctory pieces, like moving the police training to another legislation and ensuring we strengthen language around using the model set out in other jurisdictions around disclosure protocols. That is why it is important we pass this legislation from second reading and take it to committee.

1740

I'm going to steal a few words from the Saskatchewan Justice Minister and Attorney General, Gordon Wyant: "I encourage all other provinces to take this step to ensure that all Canadians are able to access the information they need to protect themselves and their loved ones from interpersonal violence." He said that recently after celebrating that the RCMP has moved to implement Clare's Law federally after finishing their privacy assessments, paving the way for more access to the legislation in communities that are served by the federal RCMP. They have cleared the hurdle that Ontario will no longer have when we pass this legislation. This is positive, because we already know that Ontario police chiefs support this legislation, as I have a letter of support from Antje McNeely, president of OACP. The beginning of it says, "The adoption of Bill 274 could interrupt violent assaults before they occur, offering a layer of protection never experienced before.

"The OACP, which represents Ontario police leaders, is not alone in advocating for the important provisions embodied in the proposed legislation."

Speaker, before I close up, I would like to leave with a reference to a meeting that my team had with the Niagara YWCA executive, Elisabeth Zimmermann. She said, "This legislation could also be a tool to support women who are potentially being groomed for the purposes of sex trafficking. By having the opportunity to access information through this legislation, it possibly could prevent women from becoming a victim."

I started down this path when I was doing wellness checks for local organizations, and it has become about women in my community. There is so much more we can do to protect women from intimate partner violence. This bill is one more way to protect women and empower them to protect themselves. But it starts today with passing this legislation, going to committee and continuing the conversation about what this intimate partner violence sector needs to support this legislation, and about the women we might be able to protect in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Speaker, I want to start by saying domestic violence, gender-based violence, violence against women—whatever form it may come in—is absolutely abhorrent. Every single person deserves to not just feel safe, but be safe, no matter where they go. They especially deserve to be safe in their own home.

The prevalence of violence against women and girls in Canada is totally unacceptable. Our government and I know everyone in this House stands with victims and survivors of assault and abuse in this province. This is a non-partisan issue.

We also know that rates of domestic violence—which is already too frequent—have further increased throughout the pandemic. It is an atrocity and a great concern of mine personally and of our government.

Our government has taken intentional steps to raise awareness and support those who have been impacted by violence. Just a few weeks ago, the Attorney General, Doug Downey, announced an additional \$2.1 million to expand victim and sexual assault services in underserved communities. This is on top of the \$3.6 million we invested last year in rural and remote services to help more women get the supports they need in their communities.

We have also created a paid social campaign to raise awareness and let those who are fleeing domestic violence know that they are not alone. Rather, shelters have remained open throughout the pandemic.

I know that Marlene Ham, the executive director of the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses, was with the member this morning. I want to give Marlene a special thank you for her hard work, especially in this past year. It is a privilege to know her and work with her on such an important issue. By working together, we were able to keep shelters open, provide additional funding for infection prevention and control and also help organizations transition to remote work where possible, such as counselling. Marlene is a true champion for women, girls, 2SLGBTQIIA individuals and anyone else fleeing violence.

I also want to echo some of Marlene's comments about gender-based violence and its prevalence in society.

Fundamentally, this is a complex social issue that doesn't have one solution or one approach to solve. Rather, it requires the work of many sectors for localized supports, because what supports are needed in downtown Toronto are not the same ones needed in Chatham-Kent, in the member's riding of St. Catharines or in my own riding of Simcoe North.

I am proud that our government has worked collaboratively on this issue. Whether it is through the work of the Minister of Education Stephen Lecce speaking about healthy relationships and human trafficking in our education curriculum or through the work of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing providing transitional and supportive housing to those fleeing, we all recognize that it requires all of us.

We all need to be considerate of Black, Indigenous and other racial minorities, as well as the 2SLGBTQ+ community and their needs as well.

Speaker, the intent of this bill is noble. It is something I strongly support. Protecting potential partners of an offender is a good thing. Keeping more individuals safe from potential harm is a good thing. I also appreciate the member raising the issue of partner violence, which is an issue that I personally feel does not get the amount of attention it deserves in the general public. Those who go through this unimaginable harm need to know that they are not alone and not forgotten.

However, the execution of this bill is what concerns me. There are many holes and unanswered questions in this bill

that I struggle with. My first concern is something I mentioned earlier, which is how this impacts minority communities, low-income communities and the 2SLGBTQ+ communities across the province. The way this proposed legislation is written leads me to believe there wasn't sufficient consultation with organizations in these spaces. Anti-human trafficking advocates, Indigenous leaders, Black leaders, 2SLGBTQ2+ leaders and others would be valuable resources in understanding the impact this would have in their communities. This includes to the potential victims, the children and youth who may be involved and those who have had interactions with law enforcement.

This leads me to another concern, which is privacy—privacy in how and who information is disclosed to. Does there need to be cause for someone to ask? Do officers proactively disclose information? What is the threshold for disclosure? Is it an accusation or a charge? Is there a time limit?

For example, if someone has had multiple interactions with police officers, such as noise complaints from arguments, even if none of them were validated in any way, those would be on their record. So does a loud argument with a partner constitute disclosure to the next partner, which leads me back again to the question: How does this impact communities that are more likely to have interactions with law enforcement? Does this lead to the over-policing of some individuals and not others?

Speaker, another question I have is whether the member opposite consulted with the Information and Privacy Commissioner. It does not appear to be the case. These are just some of the privacy concerns that I found with this bill.

Another area that I'm troubled by is that this bill refers to "police service" as defined by the Community Safety and Policing Act, 2019, but does not refer to First Nation police services. Indigenous-specific organizations are also not included as third-party intermediaries who may be provided disclosure information. I feel that that is a great oversight.

Through the work our government is doing in conjunction with the Indigenous Women's Advisory Council particularly on the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls response, providing culturally appropriate supports is essential, especially relating to domestic violence. As a result, both First Nation police services and Indigenous-specific organizations need to be not just consulted but included in this legislation. This extends further to Black communities and other minority populations. This also includes lower-income individuals.

Speaker, there are more concerns I have, including how this relates to children, youth and others who have been trafficked. The term "intimate partner" seems limiting, especially since we know that children and youth are often groomed by human trafficking predators and they may not relate to physical harm or sexual interactions. Under this legislation, I'm not convinced those individuals would be considered high-risk individuals, and if that person is also

a minor, what are the privacy implications of disclosing that information?

1750

I haven't even got to the potential impacts this legislation could have involving the child welfare sector. Their input regarding how this may relate to children and youth who may be involved is also not addressed. We all know that the child welfare sector is often very intertwined with the gender-based violence sector. Not addressing them is another omission in this bill that needs to be addressed.

Fundamentally, Speaker, I think that much more consultation is needed on the legislation: consultation with Black, Indigenous and other racial communities; consultation with those in the anti-human trafficking space; consultation with the Information and Privacy Commissioner; and consultation with police organizations.

Again, Speaker, I want to thank the member for bringing this bill forward and this concern. Protecting women and girls against gender-based violence is so important. I fully support the intent of this bill but, unfortunately, there are significant flaws that could lead to a lot of unintended consequences, especially for those who are fleeing violent relationships. Without more consultation, I fear this proposed legislation could be harmful to minority communities and many others that it is actually meant to help.

I'll now pass it to my colleague the MPP for Flamborough–Glanbrook.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Unfortunately, you didn't say you were going to share your time, so we're going to go over here. I don't think you can share your time in that case, in any event.

The member for Waterloo for further debate.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I am shocked at the minister's reluctance to embrace this piece of legislation that has been brought by the member from St. Catharines. The member from St. Catharines brings her whole heart to this place, whether it's veterans, business, health care workers or the most vulnerable, and it seems like the minister is actually looking for any excuse to do nothing, Mr. Speaker, which is wholeheartedly disappointing.

I've reached out to my local agencies who know the violence against women crisis in this province on a first-hand and emotional level. This is what Jennifer Hutton from Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region says:

"We recall a case conference where a police officer disclosed some information to a woman about her partner that created a light-bulb moment for the woman. It really helped her see things in a different light and understand the potential danger that she is in. This could be especially helpful to highlight the risk level of women."

They go on to say, "Not all victims of domestic violence recognize that they are in an abusive relationship, especially if they haven't experienced physical abuse. This is in part due to the high levels of manipulation and control the abusive partner has over them. Women do not always have a full sense of how bad things are or can get due to

this high level of control and information, so stepping back and getting outside information can be helpful."

This is a mechanism to actually prevent women from being sexually and physically assaulted, Mr. Speaker. That is why the member from St. Catharines has brought it to the floor of this Legislature.

The women's crisis centre goes on to say, "Policy is only as good as how it's put into practice." So they're open to consultation, but they think it's a good first step. Why would any minister turn their back on a solution to prevent physical assault?

From the Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo Region, Sara Casselman says, "With violence against women so prevalent in our society, I believe providing women with information so that they can make informed choices for themselves and for their children only makes sense."

Our critic on this file, the member from Kitchener Centre, our anti-racism critic, has reviewed this piece of legislation, as has our women's critic. There is an equity lens placed on this piece of legislation. Why the reluctance to actually do something, especially right now when we know—and the minister has actually referenced this—that during this pandemic, women are even more at risk in the province of Ontario, Mr. Speaker? How can doing nothing be an option during this time and this space?

This agency that we have as legislators to actually ensure that women have one tool to know if their partner has had a violent relationship in the past—we can figure this out. We are legislators. Do not vote against this private member's bill in this House at this time and betray the women of this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate? Now we turn to the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in the House this afternoon to speak to Bill 274, An Act respecting the disclosure of information related to intimate partner violence.

Mr. Speaker, this proposed legislation allows police officers to provide information to a person at risk even if that person has not applied for it. We agree with the objective that would give women the tools to protect themselves against a violent intimate partner; however, we believe this proposed legislation is poorly written. We believe the bill contains errors and is incomplete.

For one thing, this bill does not include First Nations police forces, and that is a glaring omission. Studies from Statistics Canada report that the rate of spousal assault against Indigenous women is three times higher than that against non-Indigenous women. Studies indicate that Indigenous women are more likely to experience more severe and potentially life-threatening forms of family violence. The perpetrator is most often an intimate partner. Mr. Speaker, 44% of Indigenous women reported fearing for their lives in their own homes.

Another issue is that this bill does not consider privacy rights. Our government is in the process of enacting privacy legislation. The Information and Privacy Commissioner has not even been consulted for the legislation

proposed in this private member's bill. Similar proposed legislation was introduced in Saskatchewan. It was rejected in Saskatchewan because it was viewed as being a violation of Canadian privacy laws. The RCMP in Saskatchewan had serious reservations about the legislative proposals introduced in that province because of potential privacy violations. This bill would give police forces additional powers, but there has been no indication the police requested or even want such powers. We know that the Information and Privacy Commissioner wasn't consulted. The question is, were police forces consulted?

We know that Indigenous, racialized, newcomers, members of the LGBTQ2S community and women with disabilities are at even greater risk of being victimized by a violent intimate partner. Was any consultation done with these groups that represent victims of domestic or intimate partner violence? Was any consultation done with Indigenous groups? Was any consultation done with minority groups? Was any consultation done with members of the LGBTQ2S communities? Exactly what was the extent of community consultation in preparation for this bill?

Mr. Speaker, the intent of this bill is a laudable goal. Our government applauds initiatives that empower women. The risk of domestic and sexual violence is one that girls and women live with every day in this province. Our government and our Premier have zero tolerance for violence against women in any form. But, Mr. Speaker, after reviewing this bill, the provisions simply—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Unfortunately, the time has expired.

Further debate.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: I want to start by first of all just really thanking the member from St. Catharines for bringing forth this piece of legislation. She is a champion for her community. She's a champion for human rights. She is someone who is so vocal for standing up for people who frankly need more justice and more access to justice. Her bringing forth this bill I think epitomizes what her work has been in this Legislature. She has been someone who is always fighting to help those who need it.

When we think about who in our society needs help the most, I think of violence towards women and girls. I think intimate partner violence is some of the most pervasive and evil violence that will exist in our society. We need, frankly, every single tool in our tool kit to fight against this kind of violence. Any single step that we take in this House that advances justice, protection towards women, anything we do in this House that fights against violence towards women and girls, and condemns and prevents intimate violence towards partners is something that we all need to get behind. It is a non-partisan issue. The member from St. Catharines has said this time and again.

When we look at violence towards women statistically, disproportionately, the victims, when it comes to circumstances in which there's violence towards women, are BIPOC individuals: Black, Indigenous, people of colour. When we bring in a measure that protects women and girls, when we bring in protections for victims of intimate partner violence, it is going to inherently create more protections for Black, Indigenous and people of colour.

1800

I want to say this: When we look at where we are right now, we're a year into this pandemic. The very moment we saw the statistical increases in violence towards women, the government should have acted immediately—at that exact moment. And now, when the government has an opportunity to stand up for victims of intimate violence towards partners, to stand up for women and girls, we see the government turning their backs.

Frankly, you don't have this kind of time. We don't have the time to waste. We all need to act now. The Conservative government needs to act now, and if they acknowledge there are benefits to this piece of legislation—which I think is an amazing piece of legislation, and I want to thank again the member for St. Catharines for bringing this piece of legislation forward—then there's no excuse to not move forward immediately, because any delay opens up further violence towards women and girls. That is something which is inexcusable in our society. It is inexcusable in Ontario. That's why I'm so proud to be standing behind our member for St. Catharines, who is bringing forth this piece of legislation that needed to come in, frankly, so much earlier, but the government didn't bring in these kinds of provisions. We are so thankful to have a member like the member from St. Catharines to bring it forward.

I'm urging the government to move forward on this piece of legislation. Support it. Let's do everything we can; let's use every single tool in our tool kit to fight against violence towards women and girls.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Speaker, I can tell you that I was so proud of the member from St. Catharines when I saw her bringing this private member's bill forward, the Intimate Partner Violence Disclosure Act.

As many of you know, I come from the health care system—25 years. I used to work in an outpatient orthopaedic clinic. Three cases came to mind right away when I saw her bill. The first one was a young woman who came. She has told us that she had sprained her ankle, but she had five metatarsal fractures. Her story did not match the injuries that she was presenting with. She got treated. The surgeons did the surgery. She was in a cast and all of this. But as she came back for follow-up after the cast and everything, we were able to connect her with the social workers who had been added to the orthopaedic clinic, and the story was not true. She had never twisted her ankle. It was her partner who had broken her foot by stepping on her foot so hard that all the metatarsal bones had broken.

Another case that stuck in my mind was again a woman but elderly. At the time, I was younger. She was in her 50s—young now—but a woman in her 50s who—the same thing—told us that she had fallen down the stairs and that was the reason why her shoulder was dislocated, except that when you fall down the stairs, your shoulder gets dislocated backward, and hers had dislocated forward. The same thing: By talking to her, following her—it was her partner who had twisted her arm so hard behind her

back that her shoulder had dislocated. But when she came to the hospital, she was ashamed to tell us the real story.

The last one that sticks in my mind is a really bad hand fracture in a fairly young woman. The same thing: She told us that she had fallen, but the story did match the fracture. It was her partner, her husband, who had squeezed her hand so hard that he had broken and dislocated all of the fingers in her left hand. I'm sharing the stories with you because when I was there years ago, when a woman came in with stories like this, it was one in 13 women in orthopaedic surgery who were victims of intimate partner violence. Now, through the pandemic, when I talk to my friends who work there now, it is one in eight. For every eighth woman who comes to an emergency department needing orthopaedic care, it's because of intimate partner violence. Those are only the ones who get bones broken and dislocations and that kind of stuff. There are many other injuries that would never make it to those clinics.

We have an opportunity today with this bill to help them. It didn't take us long, working in the clinic. We knew who were the violent offenders in our community, just because of who was coming through. The police know who they are, and for some reason, they seem to be able to get into relationships with women and continue to hurt them.

Is the bill perfect? I would say I have never seen a perfect bill being presented in this House, and I've been here for 14 years. That's why we have a process that allows for first, second and third reading. We go into deputations, we have an opportunity to go clause by clause and we make it better. This is what legislators do. This is our job. We take a piece of legislation, we go through the process and we end up with something better in the end, when we want the end result.

Voting against this bill is saying that in the time of a pandemic, when we know that more women need our help, when we know that we could make a difference, we have to say yes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for St. Catharines has two minutes to reply.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I'm appalled by what I've heard from across the floor. More consultation is just an excuse because, in my opinion, more consultation is exactly what I asked for. I stressed that I have spoken to the chiefs of police, Mr. Speaker. The member from Flamborough–Glanbrook should be ashamed for what she said. This is about women. If she was listening, she would know I have talked to women's rights lawyers, executive directors, transitional housing organizations, advocates against sex trafficking, the Ontario provincial police chiefs, women's shelters, Indigenous rights activists and so, so many more.

The Associate Minister for Children and Women's Issues: We have a committee process for a reason, and that is to correct legislation that is brought to this floor. If we cannot go to committee with this act, with this bill, you all across that floor should be ashamed of yourselves because I'm telling you something: What we really need to have happen for us, for you, this government, is to invest in

housing, to invest in women's rights. What has happened in this pandemic has been highlighted, and this bill is just putting one more tool in the tool box. All I'm asking is for you to support it going to committee so we can make it stronger and we can look after the women who are impacted by intimate partner violence. That's all I'm asking. Let's move it to committee. What are you afraid of? Can I ask you that? What is this government afraid of? You want to do two-step plans all the way through? Well, this is your second step: Take it to committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Mrs. Stevens has moved second reading of Bill 274, An Act respecting the disclosure of information related to intimate partner violence. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

1810

A recorded division being required, the vote on this item of private members' public business will be deferred until the next proceeding of deferred votes.

Second reading vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Pursuant to standing order 36, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Sudbury has given notice of dissatisfaction on an earlier question put to the Minister of Colleges and Universities. The member will have up to five minutes to state his case, and the parliamentary assistant from Northumberland–Peterborough South will have up to five minutes to respond. We turn to the member from Sudbury.

Mr. Jamie West: Speaker, I have spoken about this situation at Laurentian University dozens of times in the Legislature. I've explained why the CCAA process should have never been used. I've warned that the CCAA process could lead to cuts of up to one third of all programs and staff, and I have begged this Conservative government to either halt the CCAA process or provide interim funding to lessen the damage.

Today I explained again that Laurentian University is Sudbury's third-largest employer. I explained that over a hundred faculty members were served termination notices at Laurentian University, and then I asked the Premier and the minister: How are they going to address the many people who are losing their jobs amidst the pandemic because the government refused to fund and protect this public university?

The parliamentary assistant responded by saying that their priority is with students and the families affected, and he couldn't comment because it was before the courts. I'm sick of it. Like everyone in northern Ontario, like every member from Sudbury, like every graduate, every student, every employee and their family members, I'm sick of this Conservative government thinking that we're foolish enough to believe that their priority is with the students and families affected.

I haven't heard one word about Laurentian University from the Premier or the minister, but from their actions—their lack of action—they don't seem to believe that the students, the staff, the community around Laurentian are worth the investment. On this side of the House, as New Democrats, we believe that they are.

Yesterday, over a hundred people received termination notices at Laurentian University. As a reminder, Speaker, the parliamentary assistant said their priority is with the students and the families, so where were they? Where were they for the families of the workers who learned they're being fired on a Zoom call with 16 other people on the line? Where were they for the family of the worker who told me that they were six months pregnant, that they were the breadwinner for their family, and now, because of the CCAA process, they have no benefits, no sick days, no nothing? Where were they for the international students who gave up everything to come here? Where were they for the Indigenous students who said they were betrayed again? Where were they for northern students who said, "I don't want to lose my education"? Where were they for the Northern Ontario School of Medicine students who worried about the loss of francophone programs affecting the future of French-speaking doctors in the north?

Fabrice Colin, the president of the faculty association said the faculty union feels abandoned by Queen's Park, and in particular the Minister of Colleges and Universities: "This disaster today could have been avoided if the government decided to show up," but they didn't.

I don't have time during the debate to list all of the nearly 70 French and English programs that were cut, but let's look at a few of the names: civil engineering; génie mécanique—that's "mechanical engineering" in French; génie minier—that's "mining engineering" in French. The nickel capital of the world is Sudbury. We have more than a hundred years of mining excellence. We're the best miners in the world, and you're cancelling mining engineering. Entrepreneurship, economics, mathematics—they rambled on for two years about math and teachers, and they're cancelling math. Midwifery, sage-femme—they're cutting both the French and English midwifery programs, the only French-and-English midwifery programs in Ontario, and nursing. In the middle of a pandemic, they're cutting nursing.

Justin Vaillancourt was a sessional member of the faculty of nursing. He said, "When you or your loved one is admitted into critical care, you have to understand that a competent critical care nurse, from deciding to pursue nursing, to graduating and learning to care properly for a COVID ICU patient, takes six years. Now is not the time

for CCAA-appointed non-nurses to cut the foundations of our program."

The parliamentary assistant said, "I can't comment because it's in front of a court," but he's missing the point, Speaker. It shouldn't have been in court in the first place. The CCAA is designed for a private company. It's about what's best for bankers, not what's best for students or communities. Do you know what they should have done? The Conservative Party should have pre-empted the university's application under the CCAA. They should have employed an administrator and taken control over Laurentian University, then had the administrator put the university's finances, programming, student services and overall administration in order. There are many precedents for this: municipalities, school boards, hospitals. The best one, though, was in the 1970s. The Davis government, a Conservative government, appointed the Whiteside commission to take over administration of Algoma University College, in the minister's backyard, to restructure that institution and get it back on its feet. Fun fact, Speaker: It worked.

So where are they? Look under your chair, look in your desk; they're nowhere to be seen.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The minister's parliamentary assistant, the member for Northumberland-Peterborough South, has up to five minutes to reply.

Mr. David Piccini: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise in the House today to speak further on the very concerning situation unfolding at Laurentian University in Sudbury. I just want to say that I can appreciate and understand absolutely that what is happening at Laurentian University is very personal. It is indeed a very difficult situation for students, faculty and staff. I share in the frustrations of so many about this situation.

The truth is, the deeply concerning and regrettable situation that Laurentian University finds themselves in and the actions they've had to take—such drastic measures to get their fiscal house in order. Speaker, we know that universities are autonomous institutions, and we respect their autonomy, but I want to be clear that this government remains resolute in ensuring pathways to graduation for all students at the university.

Mr. Speaker, given the gravity of the situation and the need for impartial analysis, the Minister of Colleges and Universities appointed special adviser Dr. Alan Harrison to provide advice and recommendations to the minister regarding the financial situation at Laurentian and to also offer a perspective on governance and Laurentian University's current strategic planning process. Dr. Harrison will work to develop an independent analysis as well as recommendations for how the government can proceed with providing the most responsible supports.

There are a few things that are important to point out. The first is to dispel any notion that Laurentian University has not been properly funded by this government, because, Mr. Speaker, the facts are that it has. Proportionally, we provide far more funding to Laurentian University than to any other institution, with ministry-provided grants

accounting for more than 40% of Laurentian's total revenue in 2019-20, which is almost double the average of 23% for other universities in the province.

The ministry has also provided several ongoing and time-limited funds to support Laurentian, including the northern Ontario special purposes grant, the teacher education stabilization program, the graduate expansion and the Northern Tuition Sustainability Fund. There have been consistent operating grants to Laurentian University of close to \$80 million a year for the last five years. In addition, Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to support the sector and students of the north throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and throughout the last three years in government.

To support students in the post-secondary sector, the Ontario government has made significant investments. And I ask that member, where was he during all of these strategic investments over the last number of years? We provided \$106.4 million for publicly assisted colleges and universities to help address the financial impacts of COVID-19. We've helped address critical maintenance and repairs, upgrades and renewals at publicly assisted colleges and universities, with over \$466 million over three years, starting in 2020-21. Mr. Speaker, this is among the largest investment in capital infrastructure for our publicly assisted colleges and universities in Ontario's history.

We distributed \$25 million in funding at the start of the pandemic to help publicly assisted colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes with the immediate impacts of COVID-19. Where was that member? We invested \$10.2 million more than in previous years to bolster mental health supports for our post-secondary students. We launched a \$50-million virtual learning strategy to help expand access to high-quality, market-responsive and

globally competitive Ontario-made education. And we announced over \$59.5 million over three years to support our first-ever micro-credential strategy.

We could go on for days on the back and forth, those accusations of, "Where were you?" or "Where was I?" The bottom line is this government over the last three years has engaged in systemic, strategic investments in this sector. We've worked time and time again with our francophone partners, our Indigenous partners, and our colleges and universities to make these investments, and consulted them extensively throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, I want to address the resolute commitment to northern, francophone and Indigenous college and university programming. I'm proud that our government has invested over \$17.6 million to expand French-language programs and supports in the sector and \$74 million to support over 30,000 students who enrol in French-language programs across the province of Ontario. We've moved forward with the historic, first-ever francophone university, governed by and for francophones in Ontario. We continue to support each one of the 10 post-secondary institutions that provide hundreds of French-language programs across the province of Ontario.

I understand COVID-19 has had a very real impact. Mr. Speaker, our institutions are autonomous. We work closely with them and their boards of governors. These many investments—I would ask that member: Work with us. Support these investments into the sector, and together—

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

There being no further matter to debate, I deem the earlier motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1821.

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Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Fullerton, Hon. / L'hon. Merrilee (PC)	Kanata—Carleton	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Parm (PC)	Milton	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gravelle, Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Hardeman, Hon. / L'hon. Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hassan, Faisal (NDP)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor—Tecumseh	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hillier, Randy (IND)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Solicitor General / Solliciteure générale
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Karahalios, Belinda C. (NBP)	Cambridge	
Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Ke, Vincent (PC)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
Khanjin, Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Kramp, Daryl (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	
Kusendova, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre	
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
MacLeod, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa (PC)	Nepean	Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries / ministre des Industries du patrimoine, du sport, du tourisme et de la culture
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Miller, Norman (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Mitas, Christina Maria (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough- Centre	
Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Morrison, Suze (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Park, Lindsey (PC)	Durham	
Parsa, Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Phillips, Rod (PC)	Ajax	
Piccini, David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie, du Développement du Nord et des Mines Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Roberts, Jeremy (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa- Ouest—Nepean	
Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associé délégué au dossier des Petites Entreprises et de la Réduction des formalités administratives Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Associate Minister of Transportation (GTA) / Ministre associée des Transports (RGT) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Walker, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Associate Minister of Energy / Ministre associé de l'Énergie Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakubski, Hon. / L'hon. John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
Yurek, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
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

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Présidente: Goldie Ghamari
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Mike Schreiner
Jill Andrew, Robert Bailey
Guy Bourgouin, Stephen Crawford
Goldie Ghamari, Chris Glover
Mike Harris, Sheref Sabawy
Amarjot Sandhu, Mike Schreiner
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Président: Gilles Bisson
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

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Président: Kaleed Rasheed
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vijay Thanigasalam
Rima Berns-McGown, Michael Coteau
Faisal Hassan, Logan Kanapathi
Michael Mantha, Jim McDonell
Christina Maria Mitas, Sam Oosterhoff
Kaleed Rasheed, Donna Skelly
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Taras Natyshak
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Deepak Anand, Toby Barrett
Jessica Bell, Stephen Blais
Stephen Crawford, Rudy Cuzzetto
France Gélinas, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Taras Natyshak
Michael Parsa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Logan Kanapathi
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Fraser
Will Bouma, John Fraser
Logan Kanapathi, Vincent Ke
Laura Mae Lindo, Paul Miller
Billy Pang, Jeremy Roberts
Dave Smith, Daisy Wai
Jamie West
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Deepak Anand
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

**Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight /
Comité spécial de la surveillance de la gestion des situations
d'urgence**

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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