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CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Tuesday 11 May 2021 / Mardi 11 mai 2021

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act, 2021, Bill 288, Mr. McNaughton / Loi de 2021 ouvrant des perspectives dans les métiers spécialisés, projet de loi 288, M. McNaughton	
Ms. Catherine Fife.....	13463
Ms. Jane McKenna.....	13464
Mr. Taras Natyshak.....	13464
Ms. Donna Skelly.....	13464
Mr. Faisal Hassan.....	13465
Mr. Randy Pettapiece.....	13465
Miss Monique Taylor.....	13465
Ms. Donna Skelly.....	13465
Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens.....	13468
Mr. Mike Harris.....	13469
Mr. Taras Natyshak.....	13469
Ms. Jane McKenna.....	13469
Ms. Doly Begum.....	13469
Mr. Faisal Hassan.....	13470
Ms. Jane McKenna.....	13472
Ms. Doly Begum.....	13473
Mr. Mike Harris.....	13473
Second reading debate deemed adjourned.....	13473
MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS	
Anti-racism activities	
Ms. Catherine Fife.....	13473
Bernie Daynes	
Mr. Dave Smith.....	13473
Nurses	
Mr. Faisal Hassan.....	13474
Ramadan	
Mr. Rod Phillips.....	13474
Nurses	
Mr. Taras Natyshak.....	13474
Anti-racism activities	
Mr. Michael Coteau.....	13474
Ferguson Arthur Jenkins / Anti-racism activities	
Mr. Rick Nicholls.....	13475
Nurses	
Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens.....	13475
Volunteers in Northumberland–Peterborough South	
Mr. David Piccini.....	13475
GO Transit	
Mr. Mike Harris.....	13476

QUESTION PERIOD / PÉRIODE DE QUESTIONS

COVID-19 response	
Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	13476
Hon. Paul Calandra.....	13476
COVID-19 immunization	
Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	13477
Hon. Christine Elliott.....	13477
COVID-19 response	
Mr. Gurratan Singh.....	13478
Hon. Monte McNaughton.....	13478
Hon. Christine Elliott.....	13478
COVID-19 immunization	
Mr. Stan Cho.....	13479
Hon. Sylvia Jones.....	13479
Small business	
Ms. Catherine Fife.....	13479
Mr. Stan Cho.....	13479
Anti-racism activities	
Mr. Michael Coteau.....	13480
Hon. Sylvia Jones.....	13480
Border security	
Mr. Stan Cho.....	13480
Hon. Sylvia Jones.....	13481
COVID-19 response	
Ms. Rima Berns-McGown.....	13481
Hon. Monte McNaughton.....	13481
Small business	
Mr. Mike Schreiner.....	13482
Mr. Stan Cho.....	13482
Border security	
Mr. Stan Cho.....	13482
Hon. Sylvia Jones.....	13483
COVID-19 immunization	
Miss Monique Taylor.....	13483
Hon. Paul Calandra.....	13483
COVID-19 response	
Mr. Roman Baber.....	13483
Hon. Christine Elliott.....	13484
Affordable housing	
Mr. Wayne Gates.....	13484
Hon. Paul Calandra.....	13485
Child care	
Mr. Stephen Blais.....	13485
Hon. Stephen Lecce.....	13485
Hon. Todd Smith.....	13486

COVID-19 immunization

Mr. John Vanthof.....	13486
Hon. Christine Elliott.....	13486

**REPORTS BY COMMITTEES /
RAPPORTS DE COMITÉS****Standing Committee on Government Agencies**

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott).....	13486
Report deemed adopted.....	13487

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS /
DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI****Anti-Racism Amendment Act (Anti-Asian Racism
and Incidents of Hate), 2021, Bill 291,
Mme Collard, Mr. Coteau / Loi de 2021 modifiant
la Loi contre le racisme (racisme envers les
Asiatiques et incidents haineux), projet de loi 291,
Mme Collard, Mr. Coteau**

First reading agreed to.....	13487
Mr. Michael Coteau.....	13487

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR**Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act,
2021, Bill 288, Mr. McNaughton / Loi de 2021
ouvrant des perspectives dans les métiers
spécialisés, projet de loi 288, M. McNaughton**

Miss Monique Taylor.....	13487
Mr. Faisal Hassan.....	13487
Mr. Lorne Coe.....	13487
Mr. Jamie West.....	13488
Ms. Jane McKenna.....	13488
Mr. Mike Harris.....	13488
Ms. Rima Berns-McGown.....	13491
Ms. Goldie Ghamari.....	13491
Ms. Doly Begum.....	13491
Ms. Jane McKenna.....	13492
Mr. Gurratan Singh.....	13492
Mr. Robert Bailey.....	13492
Mr. Jamie West.....	13492
Ms. Jane McKenna.....	13496

Mr. Faisal Hassan.....	13496
Mr. Rick Nicholls.....	13496
Ms. Rima Berns-McGown.....	13497
Mr. Robert Bailey.....	13497
Mr. Dave Smith.....	13497
Mr. Jamie West.....	13500
Mr. Robert Bailey.....	13500
Mr. Faisal Hassan.....	13500
Mr. Lorne Coe.....	13501
Mr. Jamie West.....	13501
Ms. Jane McKenna.....	13501
Ms. Doly Begum.....	13501
Ms. Jane McKenna.....	13503
Mr. Faisal Hassan.....	13504
Mr. David Piccini.....	13504
Mr. Jamie West.....	13504
Ms. Andrea Khanjin.....	13505
Second reading debate deemed adjourned.....	13505

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS /
AFFAIRES D'INTÉRÊT PUBLIC ÉMANANT
DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS****Tenant protection**

Ms. Jill Andrew.....	13505
Ms. Goldie Ghamari.....	13507
Mr. Faisal Hassan.....	13509
Mr. Mike Schreiner.....	13509
Ms. Bhutila Karpoche.....	13510
Mr. John Fraser.....	13510
Ms. Rima Berns-McGown.....	13510
Ms. Jill Andrew.....	13511
Vote deferred.....	13511

**ADJOURNMENT DEBATE / DÉBAT SUR
LA MOTION D'AJOURNEMENT****Long-term care**

Mr. John Fraser.....	13511
Ms. Donna Skelly.....	13512

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 11 May 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 11 mai 2021

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES

IN THE SKILLED TRADES ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 OUVRANT DES PERSPECTIVES
DANS LES MÉTIERS SPÉCIALISÉS

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 10, 2021, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 288, An Act to enact the Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act, 2021 / Projet de loi 288, Loi édictant la Loi de 2021 ouvrant des perspectives dans les métiers spécialisés.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): When this House last debated Bill 288, I understand the member for Waterloo had the floor and has time on the clock. I recognize again the member for Waterloo to resume.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, last night we concluded at 6 o'clock, and so I'm happy to spend the next seven minutes finishing up some of the points that I was trying to make at that time.

I did reference the lack of any sort of mention of women or Indigenous people in the bill, signaling that it was not constructed with an intersectional, gendered lens. There are very good reasons, as you know, Mr. Speaker, to include women, especially given the way that women have been negatively impacted during this pandemic. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce refers to it as a "she-cession," and we need a "she-recovery" plan. As we have all acknowledged, the skilled trades are good jobs, and we want women to be part of the economic recovery for the province of Ontario. Having legislation which acknowledges this gap would have been, I think, a progressive move for this so-called progressive government. So, I wanted to get that on the record.

And just a few stats, because identifying a gap and barriers to skilled trades for women and Indigenous folks needs to be acknowledged in this House. We do know from the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum that in 2012 women accounted for only 14.2% of all registrations of the trades. So we have to acknowledge that there is a barrier for women to even be attracted into the skilled trades.

We pointed out yesterday that, of course, the former Premier, Mr. Harris, ripped out and reduced the opportunities for the infrastructure in our schools for shops

and for mechanics, and so that will have to be addressed, because the value, the power of the skilled trades is that it identifies experiential learning opportunities, acknowledging that we all have different strengths as learners. We will need this government to demonstrate that you are willing to invest in the infrastructure in our schools. The shops need to come back. There are good jobs, actually, to be created throughout that process. While you're at it, let's upgrade the HVAC systems in all of our schools so that kids can actually stay in school, and address the ongoing health challenges that many scientists have identified.

Women's representation in many trades, including automotive service technician, electrician and carpenter, is less than 5%. Yesterday, we heard the stat was at 7%, so we would encourage the government to embed an accountability factor in this legislation to track and to set targets, because you can't measure what you're not measuring; you can't identify whether or not you're being successful unless you do so.

The same CAF-FCA report said nearly half of Red Seal trades have no visible minority women and the other half only have between 1% and 12%. So a whole segment of our population of the province of Ontario is not being attracted to the trades, or the barriers are real. One of those big barriers, we know, is affordability. I did talk yesterday that my son Aidan has been on this journey. He's very close to being an electrician; he's about 400 or so hours shy of that 9,000-hour target. It has been a costly venture, in that there's very little financial support for apprentices. The government needs to acknowledge that.

His friend group, who are all 22 now, have had real challenges finding employers to take them on as apprentices. The 2016 Auditor General report identified that those financial incentives—the tax credits, the bonus for completion—were not a successful mode of actually drawing apprentices into those employment opportunities, particularly for those first- and second-career apprentices. When Aidan is doing his trade school component, he's working alongside 40-, 50-, 60-year-olds who have come back into the trade because they see that that's where the jobs are. They want to be successful. They want to reach their potential. I hope you can agree, Speaker, that you're never too old to try to reach your potential. Some of us are still trying to achieve that on a regular basis.

The other component that we have some concerns about, primarily because of a long history of worker safety in the province of Ontario, is maintaining safety protocols throughout that apprenticeship experience. In Waterloo, when I was first elected in 2012, a young man, Nick Lalonde—and I talk about him each and every year,

because he was 23 years old, he was in the construction trades and the training component had been little to none. The construction and the employer were actually fined. He fell 11 storeys to his death, and every day when I'm going along King Street I think of Nick Lalonde, every single time, because there was no training protocol in place for him as an apprentice. The working-at-heights strategy had not been applied.

One of my first real, if you can even say, accomplishments was shaming the then Liberal government to act on the report on working at heights. It shouldn't take that. We all want our workers, and especially those who are learning on the job—and that's the connection for worker safety, Mr. Speaker. We have to acknowledge that there is a power imbalance between the apprentice—the trainee—and the trainer. That has to be a sacred relationship in that the skills that are being imparted to that apprentice—those standards need to be very clear and that safety needs to be first and foremost, because, if you are learning about safety and you're practising those safety measures, they will be part of your entire career as a tradesperson.

I do believe that it is time to streamline the apprenticeship program, having watched what my son has gone through. That process needs to be supported in very real and tangible ways—also financially—and we need, obviously, to address the stigma that still is attached to trades. Listen, my son is going to be making more money than me very soon, and I'm very happy about that. I'm also happy that he has found something he loves doing. Be it rewiring a basement, a kitchen, a bathroom, he loves what he's doing. That's what every parent wants for our children. Let's make sure that every parent in the province of Ontario who has a child who wants to go into the trades—that they do not face barriers along that route.

0910

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

Ms. Jane McKenna: It's great to hear about your son Aidan. I obviously talk about my son Mac on a regular basis. I'll tell you two things I say to my kids all the time: "Don't come and talk to me with a problem unless you have a solution," and, "If you're always looking in the rear-view mirror, you can't move forward." So, I say that in the House today because constantly talking about the past doesn't help where we are today.

But I have a question. You talked about women at 14.2%. We realized, obviously, with my son going through school, but with counsellors—trying to get these kids into the skilled trades was very, very difficult. We've now, obviously, recognized kindergarten to grade 12. My question to you is, do you not agree that we needed a one-stop shop?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's interesting that the member from Burlington says that she doesn't want to look back. I can understand why this government doesn't want to look back, but the past can inform best practices. We need to learn what has happened in the past to correct our future action. That is what we are called upon as legislators, as lawmakers to, in fact, do. That is why we have not just

rolled over on this piece of legislation. We're going to do our due diligence to make sure that there are safety protocols, that it's an inclusive process and that the barriers that still exist, which are systemic, are addressed.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm so pleased to listen to my colleague from Waterloo, relaying the experience that her son is going through currently, real-time experience. It's really wonderful to hear that he's succeeding.

I remember being on crews in the construction industry where, as a rookie labourer, I didn't know very much. I knew how to lift things that were heavy and move things around and put my body to work, but in terms of the skill, I was at the bottom of the barrel. Luckily, I relied on those veteran workers. There were many of them. Nine out of 10 were veterans, and I learned from them and they made me safer.

Does the member from Waterloo believe that a crew made up of veteran journeypersons is a safer crew, rather than inexperienced new workers who are put out without the training and safety protocols that we would expect veteran workers to have?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you to the member from Essex for that. Obviously, the entire experiential learning opportunity and the strength of the apprenticeship program is predicated on the experience that the teacher has. I've had the opportunity to talk to many employers over my nine years here. They want to be those teachers. In fact, they even say that they need to be those teachers. But there is definitely a reluctance to take on apprentices, because there's risk; there's liability.

And clearly, the tax incentives and the tax breaks that the Auditor General had also identified were not sufficient. We need to make sure that those experienced journeymen have a very clear path and have a streamlined process whereby they can impart that knowledge. So I would agree with the member from Essex.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Flamborough—Glanbrook has a question.

Ms. Donna Skelly: When we talk about looking back, I want to throw out Rae days. I think that that's probably one of the reasons why we're sitting over here and there's going to be somebody sitting constantly on that side.

Interjections.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: Let's talk about the journeymen. When I was first running for politics, I had met with a man who owned a plumbing company, and he wanted to hire his son. But because, at the time, the ratio was three journeymen per one apprentice, he couldn't even bring on his own child, to act as a mentor. So we addressed that. The member opposite from Waterloo just raised the fact that it's very difficult for young people to find journeymen to help them with their apprenticeship. Do you not believe that changing that provides more opportunities, changing the ratio from 3-to-1 to 1-to-1 gives young people an opportunity to enter skilled trades?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's interesting, because the member opposite brought up the past; I don't know why they continue to do that. But we have to acknowledge what has happened in the province of Ontario, because if she's going to bring up Bob Rae, I'm going to bring up Mike Harris. He was the Premier who ripped out the shops. You should be embarrassed. He ripped out the shops; he removed the infrastructure to impart the knowledge for the trades. He took this province so far back on the skilled trades front—never mind what he did to our long-term-care system.

Let me tell you this: However this piece of legislation moves forward, we're going to make sure that the steps need to be in place and the due diligence has to happen in order for it to be successful so that people can actually reach their potential in Ontario.

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

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I would like to thank my colleague from Waterloo for her excellent presentation and also talking about the importance of the skilled trades in our economy and also the lack of participation of women and BIPOC people.

I know that this bill doesn't set targets. I would like to ask my colleague from Waterloo the importance of a she-covey and why we need to have set targets for skilled trades.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much for the question. Yes, you will never be able to actually say with any accuracy that you have successfully applied a program if you are not measuring it and setting targets and then reporting back in an accountable measure. Any legislation designed to make the province's skilled trades and apprenticeship system more efficient, more accessible and easier to navigate should especially take into account making the system more accessible for women and other under-represented communities, more of whom are needed to deal with the shortage of skilled workers.

So, yes, to the member, it needs to be a very open and transparent process. That's one of the major criticisms of the College of Trades for many years now.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I, too, have two sons in the trades. One of the biggest obstacles they face is with the College of Trades. This was something that they've had an issue with for as long as they've been—one's an electrician; one's a welder. The OCOT's inadequacy has been apparent from the outset. The member from Mushkegowuk—James Bay has even said that the College of Trades needs to be fixed.

In the face of a new system specifically designed to address said inadequacies by simplifying the overall process, the members opposite now suddenly oppose these improvements. Why do you oppose these improvements?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I wish the member had listened. We are not opposed. We recognize that improvements need to happen. That's why our critic yesterday, for one full hour, identified how we are going to try to make this

legislation actually very workable for the people who we serve. Obviously, as a parent of a young apprentice, I have seen what has been happening with the College of Trades, particularly with the fees.

Now, one of the changes says that the minister may collect fees for registering for training and certification, but various trades wanted to know what became of the fees that have been left over from the College of Trades. The government, to date, has not mentioned what has happened with those fees that have thus far been collected by the College of Trades. Is that money now going into this new agency?

There's a need for transparency around where the finances are going on a go-forward basis.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm pleased to be able to join in the debate a little bit this morning and to thank my colleague from Waterloo for the time that she spent on laying out the concerns that have constantly been within the trades.

One of the things that was issued was the trades being taken out of our high schools. I remember myself being in electrical class, being in carpentry class, and what that did for my knowledge base in being able to perform things today as a single woman and being able to take care of my own home. But the importance for young girls to be able to see themselves in the trades would start from that high school level, would start from that school and that experiential learning.

Would she not agree that putting the trades back into our school program would increase the number of young women involved, but also increase the skilled trades themselves?

0920

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Waterloo has 25 seconds to respond.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you for the question. When I was president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, skilled trades were on the radar. We needed to make sure that guidance counsellors were actually part of that equation. The problem is that the trades are experiential learning opportunities. They are hands-on. You need to have the resources in the schools, and that will require an investment on behalf of this government.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: I'm so honoured to be able to rise in the House today to speak to the Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act. The provisions in this act are designed to modernize and streamline apprenticeship training in Ontario. This proposed legislation will help apprentices prepare for jobs that are in high demand. It will allow apprentices to complete their training faster. The measures our government is introducing will help tradespeople get their certification from one reliable, streamlined destination. They will do this through a new crown agency called Skilled Trades Ontario. That would replace the Ontario College of Trades.

This proposed legislation is intended to make the province's skilled trades and apprenticeship system more efficient, more accessible and much easier to navigate. Under the proposed legislation, Skilled Trades Ontario would become the province's industry-informed training authority to lead the promotion, research and development of the latest apprenticeship training and curriculum standards. It will also provide a seamless one-stop experience for client services, including apprentice registration and the issuance of certificates and renewals. It will also allow assessments to be conducted in one place, with many services offered digitally.

The skilled trades sector is the engine of our economy. Under the current system, responsibilities are shared between the Ontario College of Trades and the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development. This causes confusion and creates an added burden for individuals wanting to pursue a career in the skilled trades. Under a system that creates this kind of chaos, employers struggle to find workers skilled in the trades that they so desperately need. That is why our government is building a skilled trades system that will be easier to navigate and will entice more people into the trades.

These are well-paying and rewarding careers in the trades that can be truly life-changing. My son is a hairstylist who operates his own salon in Hamilton. He provides employment for 12 people: stylists, colourists and support staff. He actually followed in his late father's footsteps.

I have to tell you a story, and it's something that the member opposite from Waterloo talked about. It's about the stigma. When my son finished high school, like so many parents, I encouraged him to go to university, and he did. He went to business school. But he wanted to do something else. I didn't know that he had been cutting hair since he was 14. He'd been doing a lot of things since he was 14 that I didn't know about, but I didn't know he was cutting his friend's hair when he was 14. It was his friend who said, "Why don't you become a hairstylist?" I just about fell off my chair. I thought, "Why would you do that? Why would you want to give up your university degree and pursue hairstyling?" But he did, and now he has 12 people. He pays taxes and they pay taxes; they support their families. I'm very, very proud of him. He kept that legacy of his father's business going.

But the reality is, it was my problem. I think a lot of us who are parents are embarrassed, perhaps, that our children aren't continuing on to university, because we don't hold the glass of wine in the social circles saying, "This is what my son is doing," or "This is what my daughter is doing." But I think most of us now recognize we should be standing here and celebrating that our children have chosen a career that will not only help them buy a home and provide for themselves, their friends and their families with good-paying careers, but it's a choice that they want to do. We should be celebrating that. I think that this legislation goes a long way to addressing the stigma around the trades.

Simplifying the process is another issue. When my son was trying to get a hairstyling certificate, you would swear

he was going to be conducting brain surgery. What you had to do to try and get a certificate to cut hair was unbelievable. It was because of all the layers of bureaucracy and certification, and it was difficult to navigate.

My nephew is also in the trades. His parents reached out to me because they couldn't understand how he could become an apprentice and pursue his desire to get into the trades, because it was so complex. It took a number of people to figure out the process that he needed to follow when he was a 19-year-old young man, wanting to contribute to society, to get into the trades and to follow this career path, but it was just so complex.

We are going to simplify the process for people who want to enter the trades and make it easier for employers to find workers with the right skills. That is absolutely crucial. We know that Ontario is facing a looming crisis in the skilled trades sector. There are more jobs in the trades than skilled workers available to them.

Again, I want to speak to my experience on SCOFEA, the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. When we travelled the province prior to the pandemic, we met with a number of employers across Ontario. It didn't matter what region we were in or what sector; they came to our committee to say, "We need help." I remember being in Timmins. They needed drivers. They needed all kinds of employees. They needed people to work in the mining sector. Regardless, in Ottawa, in Hamilton, in Kitchener, employers would come to us and say, "Help us. We have a significant, serious, critical shortage of people right now. We have the jobs. We cannot find the skilled trades."

That's what this legislation is doing. It's going to present opportunities to a number of young people. It's also going to address that critical shortage that exists in Ontario today. Our economy is facing a huge gap between jobs and skilled workers. The need to replace retiring workers is greater within the skilled trades sector than for other sectors in this economy. In 2016, nearly one in three journeypersons were over the age of 54. And while I think that's young, it isn't, and they're going to be retiring soon. We have to address that. In construction alone, Ontario needs more than 100,000 skilled workers over the next decade. How do we get there?

The current system is difficult to navigate because of the maze between the Ontario College of Trades and the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development. In-demand, high-paying jobs in the trades have been ignored for years because students have been steered, as I mentioned, towards one path, and that is university. It's not surprising that young people don't automatically think of the trades as a career. They'll tell you they know how to become a doctor, but they have no idea what it takes to become a plumber or an electrician. How to become an ironworker or millwright should be as obvious as how to become a firefighter or police officer. Our government wants to make it easier for young people to learn about their options and start on that pathway to their apprenticeship. We want to make young people aware that the skilled trades offer good jobs and rewarding careers that can be lucrative and life-changing.

Ontario's skilled trades and apprenticeship system is a vital component of our province's economy. More than 140 trades not only offer rewarding and lucrative careers, they benefit employers right across Ontario.

As I said just a minute ago, we need to encourage an even greater number of apprentices and employers to participate in the apprenticeship process. That is why our government is introducing these legislative changes. We want to make the system more responsive to the needs of apprentices, employers and to Ontario's economy overall.

Since 2013, Ontario's skilled trades and apprenticeship system has largely been administered by two entities: the Ontario College of Trades and the provincial government. This co-delivery system has led to challenges for the skilled trades, the apprentices and employers. Our government has an opportunity right now to strengthen the skilled trades and apprenticeship system. Our government would do this by introducing a new service delivery model to replace the current co-delivery model and enable the wind-down of the Ontario College of Trades.

Our government is proposing a new regulatory and policy framework to support the new model, including statutory amendments that would maintain the classification of trades as either compulsory or non-compulsory. Restricted activities would be removed altogether.

Early last year, the ministry received approval to move forward with a skilled trades strategy focused on three main areas: as I mentioned, breaking the stigma in an effort to attract more young people, men and women, to the skilled trades; simplifying the system; and encouraging employer participation in the apprenticeship process.

0930

Our government believes that these initiatives will lead to the creation of many more jobs, and our government also believes that jobs—these jobs—truly can change lives. These efforts will support increased prosperity and help get our economy back on track.

The panel was asked to engage with stakeholders and provide advice and recommendations to our minister—recommendations that reflect a broad industry perspective, are responsive to the diverse nature of our skilled trades right across Ontario and will modernize the skilled trades and apprenticeship system. The appointment of the panel was announced last fall. Shortly thereafter, the panel reached out to a broad range of industry stakeholders, including skilled tradespeople, apprentices, training delivery agents, unions, associations, individuals and businesses of all sizes. The stakeholders included organizations from each of the four trade sectors: construction, industrial, motive power and service.

Throughout the submissions and discussions, a number of themes emerged. Many stakeholders stressed their commitment and desire to participate in and advise on various aspects of the trades and apprenticeship system. They identified a need to modernize, streamline and update Ontario's system. Consultations with apprentices, tradespeople, unions, employers and trainers underscored the importance of their on-the-ground experience being taken into consideration. Stakeholders were clear about

not wanting to return to the system that was in place prior to the Ontario College of Trades. The layers of bureaucracy resulted in a system that got bogged down in paperwork. Issues raised would get lost in the system or simply take too long to be addressed. Despite their central role as drivers of the skilled trades and apprenticeship system, the industry had few channels through which to offer input.

There is general recognition that the current co-delivery model has resulted in tremendous confusion across the system, from stewardship and governance to service delivery. This confusion is compounded by the fact that so many simple functions are still being done in person and on paper when they could be completed digitally. Stakeholders overwhelmingly support the creation of digital tools to streamline and modernize how services are delivered. Youth and young adults considering a career in the trades were clear: They would rather work with a system that is digitized.

Now I'd like to focus on the key recommendations. Establishing a new crown agency to simplify and streamline the apprenticeship system was a recommendation from the Skilled Trades Panel's very first report. The recommendation is that the ministry should provide system oversight and be responsible for regulatory decisions and financial supports. It should also take on responsibility for compliance and enforcement of the skilled trades. This builds on existing expertise, best practices and a robust inspection network that's already in place right across Ontario.

Last fall, the Minister of Labour, Minister McNaughton, committed to keeping whole trades, not breaking them up into skill sets and restricted activities. Phase 1 of the Skilled Trades Panel's work provided recommendations on a new service delivery model to replace the Ontario College of Trades. The panel examined which functions should stay and which should go. The panel put out an open call for ideas. They received 67 written submissions and held 24 meetings. It was clear from the beginning that the stakeholders had two main concerns. They had some reservations about some aspects of the skilled trades system administered by the Ontario College of Trades, and they were equally concerned about going back to a system that allowed the Ontario government to manage day-to-day operations.

In those days, multiple government ministries were involved in various aspects of the system. At that time, the government was involved in curriculum and standards, compliance and enforcement, in-class training and certification exams. The skilled trades sector also felt that it did not have a loud enough voice in decisions that directly affected them.

The recommendations in phase 1 of the report stipulated that stakeholders did not want the ministry to be responsible for the entire system. They wanted a regulatory body that was agile and responsive. The panel recommended a clear separation between training and certification, and compliance and enforcement. Regarding training and certification, it recommended that matters

should be under a board-governed crown agency accountable to the minister; specifically, that the agency's board of directors would be appointed by the government to reflect competencies aligned with legislative objectives and that the agency would be led by an appointed CEO. Compliance and enforcement would be under the ministry's expanded occupational health and safety inspectorate. This would reduce perceived duplication of inspections while leveraging existing resources.

Mr. Speaker, additional recommendations were made on features and improvements to programs, services and delivery, and this proposed legislation will incorporate the Skilled Trades Panel recommendations and our government's prior commitments. This new approach is being applauded by stakeholders within the skilled trades sector. Stephen Hamilton, chair of the Ontario Skilled Trades Alliance, says they "welcome a new agency that takes a fresh approach and genuine interest in advancing Ontario's skilled trades and apprenticeship system." The alliance would like to see Skilled Trades Ontario focus "on its mandate to promote the trades and encourage employers to play a greater role in mentoring aspiring tradespeople from the start" of their apprenticeship right through to the finish.

Joe Mancinelli, the international vice-president of LiUNA, who is from my hometown of Hamilton, applauds our government for exemplifying "collaborative and strategic leadership in eliminating red tape for apprenticeship training and" enhancing "opportunities in the skilled trades." Joe Mancinelli goes on to say that the new Skilled Trades Ontario will be a more "responsive apprenticeship model for the future." It will modernize the skilled trades and optimize "career building opportunities." LiUNA is in favour of removing barriers and empowering "Ontario's future workforce."

Patrick Dillon, of the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario, says the new Skilled Trades Ontario will "protect the construction trades classification system."

Our government is being commended by the Central Ontario Building Trades for presenting a plan to streamline and simplify the skilled trades and apprenticeships system by restoring whole trades and establishing Skilled Trades Ontario. Business manager James St. John says he's looking "forward to working with" our "government on the compliance and enforcement framework."

Mathew Wilson, Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, says, "Manufacturers have been proactively advocating for new approaches to streamline apprenticeship processes and improve the training for skilled workers." Mathew Wilson sees Skilled Trades Ontario as "an important step to address labour and skills shortages facing manufacturers by simplifying apprenticeship requirements and attracting new skilled workers to the sector."

The Ontario Hairstylists Association says, "Launching a new system that is easier to navigate is a step in the right direction" in an effort "to help tradespeople move through, and into the system with greater ease." The association is optimistic that this new system will help "grow businesses

and get people back to work," following, of course, our lengthy shutdown due to COVID.

Merit Ontario, which represents the province's open shop construction sector, "welcomes the building opportunities in the skilled trades act." They see it as an opportunity to "further modernize the ... trades and reduce the barriers to entry faced by marginalized groups."

Mr. Speaker, our government has heard loud and clear from apprentices, journeypersons and employers alike that the Ontario College of Trades simply isn't working. At times, the Ontario College of Trades was paralyzed by its bureaucracy and a lack of clear direction. Its governance structure has been criticized for allowing particular groups and stakeholders to dominate the system. Our government has learned that the system must refocus its attention on skilled trades as a whole. And to this end, our government has encouraged the valuable input of stakeholders.

If this proposed legislation is passed, implementation would begin immediately. It would include consultation and development of the proposed regulations, beginning this summer. The recruitment of the Skilled Trades Ontario leadership would be initiated over the summer as well so that the appointments of the board and CEO could be made by the end of the year, and existing college service delivery would be transitioned to Skilled Trades Ontario by December.

0940

By making changes to help apprentices prepare for in-demand jobs and complete their training fast, it will help our economy recover stronger and faster from the impacts of the pandemic.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Your first question comes from the member from St. Catharines.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: It's always a pleasure to be able to rise on a debate early in the morning; I guess it's almost—not as early as I thought. I'd like to thank the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook for her presentation today. I listened intently to what was said.

I just want to highlight on St. Catharines, the riding that I represent. St. Catharines had a local factory recently volunteer to shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic, which brings up the province's record for enforcement and investigations throughout COVID-19, which, in my opinion and some businesses' in St. Catharines, has been a complete failure.

This legislation does outline that compliance and enforcement will come back under the ministry. Given the recent failures to keep workers safe during COVID, the initial concern is, does the ministry have the resources to appropriately enforce regulations in this sector?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. The legislation that we're presenting today is legislation that is aimed at encouraging more and more people, obviously, to get into the skilled trades, and I think that it goes a long way. We had the Ontario College of Trades and, from the extensive work and consultation that we did across Ontario, it was clear that the people who were involved in the sectors, regardless of what sector and what part of the province, didn't like what existed. They

wanted something that would address all of the problems, including licensing, being able to encourage more people to enter, certification etc.

I think that the opportunities that this proposed act presents will address issues of governance. It will address issues of encouraging people to get into the trades and, of course, ensuring that people are actually playing by the rules while implementing all of these changes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Your next question comes from the member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: It was really great to hear the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook—Glanbrook; it's a tough Tuesday morning here in the Ontario Legislature—talk quite a bit about digitization. I know the Minister of Government and Consumer Services is here as well, and I know she's a big advocate for seeing modernized services here in the province of Ontario.

I know this is one thing that, when we look at how the private sector and different people or organizations interact with the provincial government, they always tell me, "We're 10 years behind. We're 10 years behind." How is this bill going to change that? How is this going to move us truly into the 21st century and really get things back on track here in the province of Ontario?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Of course, our government has been focused on getting rid of the outdated, cumbersome, paper-based way of governing and doing business. This piece of legislation, along with so many that we have introduced in the House since we formed government, will target that.

As I said, as a mom of a young man who entered the trades, it was unbelievable that you couldn't go online and go through the process digitally. Our kids, who we're trying to recruit into these jobs, are comfortable navigating in an online, digital setting. They grew up with a mouse in their hand. They feel very comfortable. In fact, they want the convenience of a digital process. That's what this will do.

I really do believe that many ministries within our government today are focused on bringing our government into the 21st century.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Joining a union has a lot of benefits for workers in the province of Ontario. Unionized construction workers make more than \$5 an hour more than non-unionized; unionized women in any sector make more than \$7 an hour more. You also get access to some of the best, most world-class training built into those union halls. They have devised incredible training centres that I have had the pleasure of visiting all across the province of Ontario.

The way to join a union in the construction trades is through card-based certification. That's a process that the government and the PC Party has attacked many times over the years. I'm just wondering if the member still believes that card certification should be attacked and eliminated in the province of Ontario, as many of her colleagues have proposed bills to state just that.

Ms. Donna Skelly: What our government doesn't believe in is that Social Contract under the Bob Rae days. I know that it hasn't helped you with trying to form government. It's still a hangover and it actually alienated the relationship between the New Democratic Party and unions.

As you see in the number of stakeholders that have supported this, they believe in what our government is bringing forward. They don't believe in the policies of the parties opposite. They believe that what we have presented in this proposal will help them attract more and more people into the trades. We have heard from LiUNA. From my hometown, Joe Mancinelli, as I read in my comments earlier, is very supportive. He was one of the stakeholders that we consulted and worked with.

We have the support of unions across Ontario; I hope we soon get the support of the NDP.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Burlington.

Ms. Jane McKenna: I want to actually talk to the member, because we have had numerous conversations about our sons, with the stigma that was attached that was obviously our issue, not theirs. But I want to just do a shout-out to her son Dane. He's done a phenomenal job at Maddison Avenue and I'm very, very proud of him as well. He's obviously a chip off the old block.

I just had a quick call from somebody, so I wanted to state this and give you a quick question. Somebody just asked me, with the Skilled Trades Ontario, will there be any disruption to the services for apprenticeship and business? I just want to be clear there will be no disruptions at all with the transition.

Can the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook explain why our government is introducing this legislation now and why it's so important?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Flamborough–Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's Maddison Avenue, and he's a great barber. So if anybody is in Hamilton and you're looking for a haircut, please head off to Locke Street South. He would be great with your hair too, by the way. He'd probably have a field day with that.

Yes, I think the reason that we're introducing it now is because it's time. The Ontario College of Trades is outdated. As the member from Burlington mentioned, one of the biggest problems with encouraging people into the trades was this complex system of trying to navigate and understand how you become a tradesperson, how you become an electrician, a millwright, a hairstylist. It was very, very confusing.

If we want more people to enter them and address the shortage that we have heard and we know exists in Ontario, we have to make it much more interesting. We have to educate people, and we certainly have to make the system much easier to navigate.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the member for her presentation. My question is very simple, because I really

appreciate the member speaking so highly about the skilled trades of all the workers in our province.

One of the things I noticed throughout this pandemic, however, is that workers have been left behind by this government. More specifically, when we're talking about women and racialized workers who are skilled workers, who are in the skilled trades, sometimes whether it's automation that caused them to lose their jobs—and I have talked about this in the House, Speaker, quite a few times, when I talked about a factory in Scarborough.

My question is, when we talk about construction workers or whatever the work may be, can these workers count on this government? Because we have seen this government vote against mental health support, paid sick leave and any sort of supports that workers need during this pandemic, really.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I want to share a story about when the Premier came to Hamilton and we visited one of the training centres. We met a number of women who were in the trades, and I had an opportunity to spend a couple of hours with them. It was amazing how talented they were and how excited and proud they were to be in the trades.

These women were of all ages. There were women in their twenties, and women in their forties and fifties. I asked them, "Why would you get into the trades?" It was such an unusual career, as we know by the statistics, for a woman. The answer was very clear: It gave them independence, financial security. If they went through a divorce, if they wanted to remain single all their life, it empowered them. We are doing everything to reach out to more women to get into the trades so that they are empowered.

0950

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

Mr. Faisal Hassan: It is an honour to rise on behalf of the decent, hard-working people of York South–Weston to speak to the bill that was introduced by the labour minister, entitled An Act to enact the Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill appears to build on and help fill the void left when this government effectively dissolved the College of Trades that had been in place since 2009. The government announced it was winding down the Ontario College of Trades in the fall of 2018. Last year, the Skilled Trades Panel was appointed to recommend what the replacement of the college will look like.

As the official opposition critic for youth opportunities, I can strongly state that employment, and employment in meaningful jobs with decent pay, is what young people need. The skilled trades are clearly a fantastic avenue for those young people. The problem I see is how we best encourage folks to look into the skilled trades for employment. How do we let young people know that it is an option, just as a university diploma is an option?

This government and this labour minister have publicly stated that the current skilled trades and apprenticeship system is confusing and difficult to navigate. They claim the new Skilled Trades Ontario will be a simplified system

that makes it easier and faster for people to get trained. I hope that is the case. I would suggest that having the paper trail be easier and faster is great, but actually training young people in apprenticeships requires not fast and easy, but careful, safe and deliberate, so that someone gets the full training they need to best learn their trade and, as importantly, that they learn by observing and by doing the safe practices needed to prevent workplace injuries. Safety and learning must be paramount.

This minister also talks of young people not even being aware of what trades are all about. What is a welder? What is a millwright? And what do they do? Well, part of the problem the labour minister speaks about is a direct result of the fact that we do not have woodworking, auto, machine and drafting shops, which used to exist for years in our schools. This government's former leader, Mike Harris, removed shop from the school curriculum back in the 1990s. It is no wonder young people are not familiar with the trades or consider skilled trades as a career path.

As this government appears to be wanting to push students to online learning and away from physical schools and the in-person learning that takes place there, I suggest that is a wrong approach. I believe we need to put shops back in schools and even, perhaps, create stand-alone trade schools.

The government talks of a skilled trade shortage. That is true. But what are they actually doing to address that? What is this bill really doing to address that skilled trade shortage? We need women in skilled trades. We need racialized and First Nations people in the trades. We need to put in place actual measures that ensure we attract and recruit specifically from these communities. I see nothing in this Bill 228 that addresses that.

We need investment in infrastructure by this government. My riding of York South–Weston has been subjected to flooding time and again. Infrastructure investment is needed in flooding mitigation. Our riding, like much of the GTA, could benefit from infrastructure investment by this government in the way of affordable housing, good transit hubs and good green environmental improvements. Mr. Speaker, those investments would create jobs, and those jobs should be filled with local workers and local young people given an opportunity to learn a trade. Every penny the province spends on infrastructure improvements should have an eye to how we can employ local workers and how we can create opportunities for young people to learn some skills in the trades.

Mr. Speaker, I did mention I am the critic for youth opportunities for the official opposition, and as such, I look at things in the province through the lens of how we can improve the lives of young people and how we can make their lives easier by opening some doors for them. I did have a motion in this Legislature passed in 2019—to be exact, February 28—that spoke to work-integrated learning. I believe that this government should be interested in finally putting the money towards implementing this motion that they did support.

Work-integrated learning called for the creation of 27,000 new paid work opportunities for students, recent

graduates and unemployed youth in the public and private sector and the skilled trades, so that they can have the ability to move into the workforce with real-world experience and a path to full employment. Mr. Speaker, the labour minister should know, when he did his research for Bill 288, that Ontario's youth unemployment rate is persistently higher than the national average, and in fact, the pandemic has made that number rise even higher, to unacceptable levels.

In my riding of York South–Weston, we are home to many essential workers, and we are a COVID hot spot and one designated as high-risk. I have mentioned frequently in this House that our decent, hard-working residents have been treated as an afterthought by this government. Essential front-line workers and their families have been left with no permanent vaccine facility and a real lack of mobile pop-ups for vaccines.

Our community is neglected as well when we see high rates of youth unemployment in York South–Weston, and no real plans or strategies by this government to address that.

We can help break the cycle of poverty with a plan like work-integrated learning. It is vital that young people see a clear path forward from school to employment and that we provide support during those critical periods of transition. A young person's destiny in York South–Weston or indeed anywhere in Ontario should not be predetermined by their financial means or by the connections their families may have.

Young people need opportunities, Mr. Speaker. My motion called for equal-opportunity paid placements as a signal to young people that their hard work would not be overlooked and a promise to the rest of the province that we are identifying and nurturing our talent, and not letting that talent fall through the cracks. Bill 288 could have gone in that direction.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk of skilled trades and internships, including placements and co-ops, that sometimes means students are working for free or for a very much reduced wage. That leaves many people behind who simply can't afford the financial sacrifices needed. We need to find ways to include those who may be left behind through no fault of their own. Ontario has thousands of young people who are not in education, employment or training. It is more important than ever that we as a society help those young people to have a future for themselves. For many of those young people, it is simply about being given an opportunity, a chance to learn a trade or a new skill, to be more job-ready.

We all have a vested interest in ensuring that young people are able to support themselves and participate fully in our society. The government's role is to step in and help bridge the gap between our education system and our workplaces in ways that will help young people gain employment. I'm hoping that Bill 288 would address our skilled trades shortage and also take into account our aging population and demographics that point to the need for people to be ready to step in as retirement rates increase to support our economy, to support our public services and

to ensure our aging population is cared for. The pandemic has recently shown us how vulnerable our elders can be, and we need a society where seniors can live in dignity and in affordable conditions. The burden placed on coming generations is large, and we need to be innovative and aggressive in job creation and training.

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Back in June 2016, the Ontario government at the time had what was termed a highly skilled workforce panel. This panel released a report entitled *Building the Workforce of Tomorrow: A Shared Responsibility*. The panel recommended that Ontario should commit to ensuring that every student has at least one experiential learning opportunity by the end of their secondary schooling and, further, that every student has at least one experiential learning opportunity by the time they graduate from post-secondary education.

We commissioned many reports and studies in this Legislature, and I only wish we would take their findings to heart and actually implement them. This panel's report and suggestions regarding young people and training were excellent, but I have seen no evidence of follow-up. As young people in this province struggle with the pandemic and the previous government cuts to OSAP and financial support, they're looking for any opportunity. This government should restore the cuts made and make every effort towards young people learning a trade, getting a good education and being able to better themselves.

The Minister of Labour may be better informed with Bill 288 by looking towards research done in America by the National Association of Colleges and Employers. This research is particularly relevant to my past motion regarding work-integrated learning that we are still waiting to be implemented to this day. That was February 28, 2019. An interesting comparison was made towards students who have participated in unpaid work-integrated learning versus paid work-integrated learning. It seems that paid work opportunities give students a definite advantage going into the labour market. Students who participate in paid programs are much more likely to get job offers when they graduate and have higher salaries. My motion suggested just such a plan, like Bill 288 hopes to do. It will build opportunities.

I'm hopeful the government consulted with unions, educators and tradespeople when they developed this bill. I certainly speak to unions on a regular basis in my community. This bill was once again tabled at the last minute by this government, leaving the opposition little time to reach out to stakeholders who would be affected by this bill. The minister has spoken about wanting to get this bill right, but he didn't feel affording the opposition time to really look into this bill was important. This is a strategy this government uses time and again, and it is very disappointing in that the approach does not best serve the interests of Ontarians.

This government previously brought forward the *Modernizing the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Act* in 2019 that was met with outrage by the labour community. Fortunately, this government was made to feel the errors

of its way and they reversed course with the appointment of the Skilled Trades Panel.

The government's record towards workers in Ontario is not one to be proud of, and here we are in National Nurses Week with the government capping wage increases and taking away bargaining rights through their Bill 124. When I see a bill such as this one from the labour minister, I must admit I approach it with caution and I look to read the fine print.

It is not only this government before us that has attacked labour and the skilled trades. The previous Liberal government acted in very much the same way. Back in 2015, the former Liberal leader made big changes to the Apprenticeship Training Tax Credit, with the result being that employers found it much more difficult to be able to take on apprentices. There was also once a youth jobs strategy that helped young folks find jobs. The Liberals cut that before the Conservatives had a chance to do the same.

The regard shown to workers and the safety of those workers is shown in their approach to apprenticeship ratios. When business owners are excited about a ratio of 1 to 1, it needs to be looked into further about what it will mean to health and safety and not what it means to the business's bottom line: profit maximization.

J.G. Burtch, owner of Construction Enterprises Ltd., was recently quoted bragging to the Ontario Home Builders' Association, "I can hire three journeymen and three apprentices." The CD Howe Institute is also on board with these changes. The reasoning for business is that apprentices are paid much less than journeymen, and they are easier to replace.

Apprentices, just like interns in the business world, have been used as cheap and disposable labour for years and years. I have heard disturbing stories from young people of employers hiring them on as apprentices, since they were affordable, and letting them go just before their time was up to qualify and thus get paid a good rate. The employer would replace them with new apprentices and start the vicious cycle again and again. This is unacceptable, and Bill 288 does nothing to address that reality.

I worry about an increase in workforce injuries and the lack of training and supervision that can take place with those ratios. A 1-to-1 ratio means a workplace could be balanced exactly between experienced and brand-new workers. This comes with the risk that the experienced worker will be too busy to adequately train the new person.

James Barry with the IBEW Construction Council of Ontario was recently quoted in the media. He stated:

"On large construction sites you would not want half the employees to be apprentices...."

"Ratios are important as it ensures a proper balance of trained journeypersons to apprentices. We want an apprentice to get a range of experiences but also have the oversight and guidance to learn and be safe on the job and successfully complete an apprenticeship"—wise words that the government should listen to, but this government doesn't listen to their own health table about the pandemic, so I'm not hopeful they will take the advice of labour.

The ratio is all about money, and the question is, at what cost? Will the apprentices get the real quality training and on-the-job learning required, and will they be able to do so safely?

As I said, this bill, Bill 288, was thrown at us rather quickly, and I continue to look closely at it. The devil is always in the details, and reading the fine print can never be truer than when dealing with this government.

I see in section 3(2), "A committee established under subsection (1) shall consist of one or more individuals including individuals who shall have experience in the trades and apprenticeship system." I would like to see a clarification of who can join the committee. Will there be a neutral third-party view or is the committee in danger of being skewed to a particular bias? Very much like many of this government's bills, it is vague on actual specific details and, conveniently, future regulations will guide the true direction of the bill.

Some outstanding questions for me surround the concentration of setting training standards; the timelines of implementation of provisions of the act regarding the transition period, as we go from the College of Trades dissolving to the enabling of Skilled Trades Ontario; who will actually determine the scope of practice and what constitutes a compulsory trade; who will make up the board at Skilled Trades Ontario; and, of course, my previously mentioned concern regarding safety on building and construction sites with the current apprentice-to-journeyman ratio.

1010

Mr. Speaker, it is my hope that the government allows for time for a proper debate at the committee that it did not give here in this Legislature as it rushed this bill through at the last minute. Getting young people into skilled trades is such an important initiative. Giving those young people the proper training needed to successfully learn their trade so they can go on to teach others is vital. Ensuring those young people learn and work in a safe environment is of the utmost importance.

I urge this government to take the time to get this bill right, to listen to unions and tradespeople, to seriously take into account the suggestions made by the opposition. Young people and workers in this province—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. We likely have time for two, possibly three, questions. The first one goes to the member from Burlington.

Ms. Jane McKenna: We are all in agreement that skilled trade workers are a crucial part of our economy. Why does the member from York South–Weston resist legislation explicitly intended to retain and attract people to an industry we unanimously understand is crucial?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Thank you for the question from the member, on the part of the government. I think the idea is, we want young people to have opportunities. As you know, in the province, youth unemployment is above the national, and giving young people that opportunity is very important. It's also very important for young people to have safety, but when you simply take advantage of young

people by not providing them an experienced tradesperson, not consulting with unions and tradespeople, the community will not really put this as the right approach. What I am saying is, we need to not rush bills like this. We need to work with everybody to make it better.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the member from York South–Weston for his presentation. I know he's been a very strong advocate for young people in his riding as well as for his community. He's doing a fantastic job throughout, especially during this pandemic.

My question is—obviously, you just ran out of time at the end there. You were ending off about the importance of involving young people and how we could have done better with this legislation, in terms of the proper skills they needed. Do you want to expand a little bit on that?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Thank you to my colleague from Scarborough Southwest. It's very important: Yes, we need to ensure that those young people learn and work in a safe environment. It's very important. It's also of the utmost importance because their safety is very important. Also, this government needs to take time to get this bill right, to listen to unions, to tradespeople, and to seriously take into account the suggestions made by the official opposition. Young people and workers in this province deserve no less.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: Just off the top, Speaker, I want to make it very clear that it was the Wynne government that started to pull trades and shop class and different things from high school. When I was in high school, Mike Harris was Premier and we had a shop class in my publicly funded school in North Bay.

But I will ask this question, Speaker, because I didn't fully understand the answer—

Interjection.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: —to the member for Burlington. She's asking why won't that member stand up here and support, and he says because there haven't been enough consultations with unions and there haven't been enough consultations with tradespeople.

There was a panel, Mr. Speaker, that went through all of these consultations. I know, as members, at least on this side of the House—I don't presume to speak for anybody on that side—we hear time and time again that people in the skilled trades are sick and tired of the College of Trades. They can't get in, they can't find a journey person to apprentice with, and they want it gone. Why won't this member support this bill?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I would like to remind the member of the government that his father, Mike Harris, was the one who removed the skilled trades in the schools—

Mr. Mike Harris: But he didn't.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Kitchener–Conestoga will come to order.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: That's a fact.

Interjection.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Yes, you're right. Also, the Liberals—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The House will come to order now. The member for Burlington, come to order. The member for York South–Weston will take his seat.

The member for Burlington, come to order. The member for Kitchener–Conestoga, come to order.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): It is now time for members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

Ms. Catherine Fife: As elected officials, we need to speak up when we see hate and racism in our communities. And if we are courageous, we need to acknowledge that racism is violence.

For the fourth consecutive week, anti-lockdown protesters gathered this past Sunday in KW. These gatherings are irresponsible and fuelled by a total lack of consideration for members of our community. The organizer, the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston, is not welcome in our community.

Another rally, where people gathered safely and virtually in Wilmot, focused on challenging racism and a growing and concerning white lives matter movement. My colleague for Kitchener Centre said of this rally, "It's about white allies joining in the fight in very real, very concrete ways. It is about not being silent. It is about standing up and speaking out in a place where your power and your privilege will allow your voice to be heard." That gives me some hope in the midst of a pretty trying time.

Racism is real in Waterloo region, and it compromises health. In our community, if you identify as a visible minority, you are three times more likely to contract COVID-19. If you identify as Black, you are five times more likely. Across the province, over 70% of COVID-related workplace deaths are racialized people.

Racism is impacting the health and well-being of Ontarians. We all have a role to play in addressing racism in our communities. Staying silent is not an option.

BERNIE DAYNES

Mr. Dave Smith: One of the passions I've had long before I was ever in politics has been inclusion in sport. I want to talk about one individual in my community who is working very hard to make sure that every athlete of every ability has an equal opportunity to play.

Bernie Daynes has spent the better part of the last decade volunteering his time to enhance an already successful Challenger Baseball organization in Peterborough. That success culminated with the first team of

special-needs athletes to represent Canada at the Little League World Series back in 2019.

Bernie's latest project is to build a field of dreams. Imagine a baseball diamond designed and built as a fully inclusive and fully accessible sporting field. Imagine a sports field designed in a way that an athlete with a mobility challenge can play. Imagine a sporting field designed in a way that an athlete who may experience sensory overload can still play. If you design it in a way that anyone who has an exceptional ability can play, it's also designed in a way that anyone who doesn't have an exceptional ability can play.

I want to say thank you to Bernie for his efforts. He has a vision that he's working towards, and that vision will make our community not only more inclusive, but demonstrate that if you build it, they will come.

NURSES

Mr. Faisal Hassan: It is my pleasure to rise today and acknowledge that this week is National Nursing Week. We all need to honour and thank nurses, who, particularly during this last year of the pandemic, have shown their commitment and dedication to patients and residents.

Nurses are the true front-line heroes, doing the most important of tasks imaginable. This government has not treated these valuable health care providers as heroes and, through Bill 124, has actually taken away their rights to bargain for their wages and working conditions.

This government has not met with the Ontario Nurses' Association, so I will tell the House a few items that ONA is seeking. They want registered nurses and other health care professionals exempted from Bill 124. They ask for financial compensation for nurses who continue to care and fight for patient safety and quality care during COVID-19. The nurses ask that the government begin discussions on the diversity and specializations within nursing to support continued education and retention in the nursing profession.

In the midst of this pandemic and government inaction that has led us down a dangerous path, I ask that it is not too late to begin listening to and respecting health care voices, such as nurses'. I thank them for their work, their patience and their dedication.

RAMADAN

Mr. Rod Phillips: Yesterday, I joined the Islamic Society of Ajax in Masjid Quba to celebrate the Ramadan food drive. As we all know, Muslims across Ontario and around the world are currently observing the month of Ramadan and, in just a day or so, will be celebrating the festival of Eid-ul-Fitr.

1020

Ajax has a vibrant and active Muslim population, with three mosques that play a vital role in the spiritual and social lives of many thousands of Muslims and, indeed, the rest of our community. Throughout the month of Ramadan, Muslims in Ajax have prayed, fasted and

reflected upon the spiritual and physical well-being of our community. Our Muslim community has been a model of charity and good citizenship throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, through their adherence to public health guidelines, food drives and other charitable efforts.

This week, I joined my friends Waqqas Syed of the Islamic Society of Ajax and Zahid Rafique of the Sayyidah Zainab Muslim Community Centre as they celebrated Eid-ul-Fitr safely and in accordance with all public health guidelines. I am proud to support our Muslim community in Ajax and across Ontario, and wish them a blessed and prosperous Eid Mubarak.

NURSES

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It's a pleasure to rise today, and members of the House would know that this is Nursing Week in the province of Ontario, where we celebrate and honour those who are on the front lines. We call them "front-line heroes," but they're really the last line of defence in absence of good, critical leadership and public health leadership through the province of Ontario. They are decrying the actions of this government throughout the pandemic.

First and foremost, if we indeed believe that they are heroes, as they are, let's pay them like heroes. Let's not freeze their wages through this really egregious Bill 124, which has not only frozen their wage at a 1% increase—lower than inflation—but also removed their collective bargaining rights.

Look, they are going through some of the most traumatic, challenging times in the history of the profession. We're seeing stress, anxiety, depression and mental health needs in our nursing capacity. We need to be there for them like they are there for us, and this government has abandoned the nurses in the province of Ontario.

Today, New Democrats stand in solidarity with nurses across the province to let them know that we understand them, we see them and we honour them. We are fighting for them and with them in this House to ensure that they are compensated, treated fairly and treated safely so that they can care for all of the residents across the province of Ontario.

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

Mr. Michael Coteau: Every day, we're hearing more about incidents of anti-Asian racism that are seriously traumatizing the community. I have spoken to organizations and community leaders, and their fear is growing. This pandemic has led to a sharp increase in anti-Asian hate and has exposed, once again, this government's inaction when it comes to addressing racism. This government has failed on numerous fronts:

—a lack of leadership, with no minister clearly in charge and responsible for the file;

—disbanding community committees and subcommittees;

—the government's resounding silence in the midst of clear and increasing anti-Asian racism in Ontario, despite the fact that we're one of the only jurisdictions in North America with a directorate; and

—the stagnant data collection and lack of policy innovation and direction based on that data collection.

I've heard the Premier and the minister get up to say plenty of nice things, but there is no tolerance for racism in Ontario. Fighting systemic racism is about action, not platitudes, and this government has shown virtually no action on this file.

FERGUSON ARTHUR JENKINS

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Major League Baseball is now just a few weeks into the 2021 season. This morning, I just want to briefly talk about history. I want to start off by talking about a local hero from Chatham that some may already recognize, Ferguson Arthur Jenkins. Now, Fergie originally signed with the Philadelphia Phillies in 1962, but it wasn't until he was later traded to the Chicago Cubs that he became a starting pitcher. Fergie won 284 games, with a total of 3,192 strikeouts, and set a major league record for having six consecutive winning seasons of 20-plus games. I believe that feat will never be broken.

For this reason and for many more, he was inducted into the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame in 1987 and later into the Cooperstown Baseball Hall of Fame in 1991. He was the very first Canadian to be inducted into Cooperstown, only to be later joined by Larry Walker from BC.

For the love of the game, Fergie's family was also involved in baseball. His father, Ferguson Jenkins Sr., was a Canadian baseball player, starting his career for baseball playing for teams in Detroit. He later joined the Chatham Coloured All-Stars in my hometown of Chatham. Chatham Coloured All-Stars, as they were known back then, were trailblazers.

In St. Marys, Ontario, you will find the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame. I strongly support the initiative to induct the 1934 Chatham Coloured All-Stars into the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame for the year 2022. They've been a key part in laying the foundation for the future of youth of colour to compete as equals, and I believe in celebrating their success. I can only hope that the committee will take their successes into consideration.

NURSES

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I stand today in honour of nurses week. Decision-makers in this chamber and across Ontario have expressed genuine gratitude for the experience of our front-line health care workers over the past year, especially our nurses. That expression of gratitude is deep and genuine. So, thank you to the nurses and to all front-line workers.

As a former front-line health care worker, I know that it is not enough if the words taper off on Sunday and result

in no meaningful actions. Nurses in their break rooms across the province are looking for more than small token gifts. They are looking for more than being labelled heroes.

So my commitment to all nurses in St. Catharines and across the Niagara region and Ontario is this: to push for more meaningful action in this Legislature, and to hold those to account when their actions do not match their words. That means resources when nurses need them to feel safe. That means isolation pay that does not have an end date. It means not calling nurses heroes from one side of your mouth while overriding collective bargaining agreements with the other. It means challenging the public sector wage cap by this government every step of the way.

My gift to nurses and all front-line health care workers is that after nurses week ends, I will not stop. My colleagues will not stop. I will continue to push for the actions that matter to nurses, not only kind words that taper off after nurses week.

VOLUNTEERS IN NORTHUMBERLAND— PETERBOROUGH SOUTH

Mr. David Piccini: Kindness and generosity abound in Northumberland-Peterborough South, and I rise today to highlight a few of the many great community initiatives in my community.

Cobourg Collegiate Institute is hosting a rain barrel fundraiser in support of the environmental initiatives at the school—and I'm pleased to be picking up my own soon.

The Lofty Kitchen in Colborne is fundraising for the Canadian Cancer Society with a daffodil campaign shortbread cookie fundraiser. You can purchase a daffodil-decorated shortbread cookie made by Roda's Kitchen, with \$5 going towards the campaign.

Roda's Kitchen has also been a part of a fundraiser with Community Care Northumberland to benefit Meals on Wheels.

Rotary Club of Campbellford is raising funds for their community initiatives through an Oktoberfest Fling, with meals prepared by Caper's Tap House, a favourite of mine in Campbellford.

The Old Newcastle House is a proud community supporter, donating whatever possible to local fundraising initiatives. Most recently, they've been working with the new Durham Region Hospice.

Ignite Cobourg has done a one-hour fitness class, Strong as a Mother, and raised over \$1,500 on Mother's Day for the Cornerstone Family Violence Prevention Centre.

Northumberland Players continues to fundraise scholarships for six post-secondary students. Earlier this month, Best Western Plus Cobourg Inn and Convention Centre partnered with Northumberland Players for a takeout dinner, and they raised over \$3,500.

Mr. Speaker, wherever you look in Northumberland—Peterborough South, kindness, generosity and our community spirit are alive and well.

I would like to thank all of the businesses and many remarkable organizations for stepping up and supporting our community.

GO TRANSIT

Mr. Mike Harris: Mr. Speaker, as you and all my colleagues who have visited Waterloo region know, we love the words “two-way, all-day GO.”

One of my top priorities is delivering faster, frequent, reliable GO train service on the entire Kitchener line. So I was absolutely thrilled to join the Minister of Transportation and the Associate Minister of Transportation to announce the approval of the preliminary design business case for the Kitchener GO rail expansion project. This is a huge win for Waterloo region.

In less than three years, our government has doubled the number of trains coming all the way to Kitchener. We’ve added a mid-morning train from Union and increased evening service, which now includes a second express train.

Excavation work on two tunnels under Highways 401 and 409 have been completed, and with the release of RFQs for further infrastructure, more shovels will be getting into the ground very soon.

1030

I would be remiss if I didn’t acknowledge the work of our tireless local advocates, including the Connect the Corridor Coalition, headed by Ian McLean, Regional Chair Karen Redman and, of course, all of our local mayors.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And Catherine Fife.

Mr. Mike Harris: Well, yes—do you know what, actually? Definitely, thank you to the MPP for Waterloo as well, because she has also been a strong advocate for this for many years. And, of course, thank you to the minister, the associate minister and all of my government colleagues who have advanced this forward. Like I said, this is a top priority here locally in the region, and I’m pleased to deliver tangible improvements and progress to my community, who have waited for this project for years.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question this morning is for the Premier. We know the long-term care commission obtained notes from the Minister of Long-Term Care regarding what was happening in long-term care with COVID-19. On April 17, 2020, last year, when we were in the first wave, this is what the minister had jotted down in her notebook: “Military plan needed, get them within 24 to 48 hours ... homes spiral down quickly.”

The Premier didn’t ask for the Canadian Armed Forces to help Ontario until five days after that note was jotted down, and they didn’t arrive until 12 days later; in fact, they didn’t arrive to Downsview until early June. So the

question is, why did the Premier wait five days after this note was written by the minister to actually call the CAF to get some help to those homes?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: The Leader of the Opposition is correct in how important the Armed Forces were to helping us stabilize some of the homes through the first wave. Mr. Speaker, as you know, there was a whole-of-government effort, especially during the first wave, to improve capacity in our acute-care system, as well as assist in the long-term-care system.

As I mentioned yesterday, we were on the defence for a better part of a year when it came to fighting the first wave of COVID, ostensibly because of the situation that we had been left in by the previous government. We are making significant progress in ensuring that our long-term-care system is better equipped not only to handle future pandemics—God forbid that that should happen again—but to provide the best quality of care for the people of Ontario, who have been so important to helping to build this province.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the military debriefing notes tell quite the horrifying story of what they found in long-term care when they did arrive. Two homes, Downsview and Hawthorne, were infested with cockroaches. They also found 26 seniors who died when all they needed was water.

The Minister of Long-Term Care knew that the Canadian Armed Forces were needed on April 17, and yet they didn’t arrive for over 12 days. The Premier didn’t even ask for them until five days after she was aware that they were necessary. Did the Minister of Long-Term Care not bring this necessary request to the Premier’s attention, or did the Premier simply not act on it quickly enough?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, as I’ve said—I’ll say it again, and I’ll say it throughout question period, I suspect—the Armed Forces were a very important part in helping us stabilize a number of long-term-care homes in the province of Ontario through the first wave. We saw across Canada, in fact, that our long-term-care homes in many provinces needed the assistance of the Armed Forces, in particular in both Ontario and in Quebec.

We were moving very, very quickly throughout the first wave, as I said. I’ll repeat again, Mr. Speaker, that we were left on the defensive posture for much of the first wave as we attempted to catch up to the lack of investment that we had inherited, whether it was infection prevention and control measures, whether it was renovating old homes that needed to be fixed, quite frankly, or the addition of greater capacity in the system, or dealing with the health and human resources. There was a lot of work that needed to be done that we inherited. We’re getting it done—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Premier: The military are people who are trained for combat. They are

actually trained to expect the worst. The military staff, in the notes we saw, indicated that they were horrified at the very idea of having to return to any of these homes. In fact, the very thought of it, in one person's words, is that it "sucked the life right out of you," the idea of having to return. One medic said that they saw more death in one week in their long-term-care stint than they had in all of their other tours of duty combined.

On April 17, the Minister of Long-Term Care indicated that she needed to get the CAF, the Canadian Armed Forces, into long-term care immediately, but there was a delay. So the question is, who was responsible for the delay? Was it the Premier who delayed or was it the Minister of Long-Term Care who didn't identify to the Premier quickly enough to get the—

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: As I said, the Canadian Armed Forces played a vital role, especially in the first wave, in helping us address some of the shortcomings that became evident in long-term-care homes when the request was made. We were very appreciative of the Armed Forces coming in. They did it as quickly as they possibly could in both Ontario and Quebec, Mr. Speaker.

But the whole system highlights, and the commission report highlights, the problems that we inherited in the system, whether it was underfunding, whether it was homes that were old and in desperate need of renovations or whether it was the health and human resources—these PSWs who had been working so hard for so long but were underfunded.

We moved quickly before the pandemic, during the pandemic and since the pandemic to address some of the problems that we knew were happening in long-term care, whether it's four hours of care or hiring 27,000 additional PSWs. The Armed Forces were an important part of the first wave, Mr. Speaker, and we appreciate all of the work that they did for us.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also to the Premier. This one is going to be about vaccinations, and particularly the second doses.

People are very anxious to know when it is that they're going to be able to get their second shot. They want to know so they don't have to scramble at the last minute like they've had to do for the first shot. A full four months is what was expected, but now, apparently, that may change because vaccines are coming more quickly.

So my question is, what is actually the government's plan to get the second shot into people's arms?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: We are in phase 2 of our rollout of the vaccines, and we are now receiving sufficient quantities, particularly of the Pfizer vaccine, that we will be able to provide people with their second shots at the appropriate time.

We have booked—actually, yesterday we did 112,000 vaccines, and we are at a total of 6,350,000 right now. We

are on track to deliver vaccines to 65% of adults over age 18 by the end of May, and of course we can now provide the Pfizer vaccines to young people aged 12 to 16 as well. So that is rolling out.

People will be able to receive their vaccines at the appropriate time. Because we have additional supplies, if we are able to reach that target and people are coming forward, we may be able to shorten the time frame, but people already have their appointments for their four-month shots and so they will receive them, maybe sooner than that, but they definitely will receive them within that time frame.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: People don't know when they're getting their second shot. Those shots are not booked. I haven't got—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. Member, please take your seat.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government side will come to order. The Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry will come to order. The member for Niagara Falls will come to order.

I'm going to ask the Leader of the Opposition to withdraw—

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Withdraw, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): —and finish her question.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the government's rollout of the vaccinations has been a mess. It has been chaotic. In fact, it was—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. The Solicitor General will come to order. We're not going to have this.

1040

I apologize to the Leader of the Opposition. Please start the clock.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It has been saved by the public health units—thank goodness for them. They have to fix the rollout problems, Speaker. Instead, they're busy with a blame game, always pointing at somebody else.

Look, the sign-up system was convoluted. It excluded family doctors. The rollout meant that people who needed the vaccines the most got them at the end instead of at the beginning. So the question is, what is the plan to fix this chaotic system for the second dose? Can the government show us one?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. The Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry is warned. You know what that means: If I have to speak to you again, you'll be named.

Please start the clock. To reply, the Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Contrary to what the leader of the official opposition says, Speaker, we have a very organized rollout. Our vaccination campaign is rolling out well, by virtue of the fact that 6.3 million doses have

already been administered—that’s almost half of the population of Ontario—and we are on track to book and vaccinate over 65% of the adults over age 18 by the end of May. I don’t know anyone who would call that a failure. It’s moving forward.

We have our booking system where people can book online, or they can call to book an appointment. They can receive their vaccines through a mass vaccination clinic, through pop-up clinics, through pharmacies—more and more pharmacies are being added every day—or through primary care offices. We’re making it as easy as possible for people to be vaccinated, and we already have another four million people booked to receive their vaccines. So I would call that a coordinated system.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, public health units and communities have come together to try to fill the holes in this government’s vaccine rollout. In fact, people are calling it a scavenger hunt to try to get a vaccine. They’re relying on things like Vaccine Hunters Canada to get a vaccine here in Ontario. It has been a mess.

The question I have for the government—which is very, very focused on partisan ad campaigns, but not so focused on cleaning up the vaccine rollout. There is an increased supply, and I think we’re all pleased about that, but the question still remains: Who is going to get their shots? When are they going to get their shots? How are they going to get their shots for the second vaccine? That’s what people need to know, and that’s what this government should be able to provide in terms of information.

No more excuses. The vaccines are here. What’s the plan to get the second shot into people’s arms?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Well, the facts speak for themselves: over six million doses already administered; four million doses already organized and booked. We are rolling this vaccine plan out. We’re making it very easy for people. We’re offering more and more pharmacies to be able to offer vaccines. Some of these pharmacies are open 24/7, or you can walk in. We have the mass vaccination clinics. We have clinics that are going to people’s workplaces. We have a plan, the plan is being delivered and the plan is working.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Two weeks ago, all of Canada was talking about Brampton’s COVID-19 crisis. We had one of the highest positivity rates in the entire country. Countless people were getting sick and many were dying. Tragic stories from Brampton were being heard across our nation, from the utterly devastating accounts of loss of life to essential workers who had to choose between going to work sick and paying their bills.

But despite all this national attention, two weeks later, the Conservative government continues to fail Brampton. We still have one of the highest positivity rates in the entire country, and essential workers are still getting sick. Workers are risking their lives every single day, moving

this economy so others can work from home. They deserve more than three paid sick days. Will the Conservative government commit today to treating workers with the dignity that they deserve by bringing in two weeks of paid sick days?

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

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I want to begin by thanking the member opposite for supporting our government’s legislation to pass a comprehensive package that includes 23 days of paid sick leave in record time here in the Legislature. Thank you to the NDP, thank you to the independent Liberals for joining with our government to ensure that workers do not have to choose between their jobs and their health. I can assure the member opposite: We’re going to continue working every single day to protect the health and safety of every single worker until we defeat COVID-19 once and for all.

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

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Back to the Premier: When you’re in a crisis, you don’t do the bare minimum. You pull out all the stops. You do everything possible to save lives. But from the beginning of the pandemic, we have seen a clear track record from the Conservative government. They are continually doing the least possible to help Ontarians. Half-measures are continually being brought forward, and not enough help is being given to communities that need it the most.

Now, the Conservative government is warning that Ontarians should be prepared for at least two weeks of a stay-at-home order and closure. But while they’ve warned of longer lockdowns, the truth is that the Conservative government had every opportunity to stop the third wave, just like they had every opportunity get this crisis under control sooner, both times. Instead, they chose to stand by and do nothing.

We need more paid sick days, we need more vaccines and we need more support for hot-spot communities. We’re in a crisis, and people are dying. When will the Conservative government start acting like it?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: We have been taking action throughout this pandemic, especially as far as Peel and Brampton are concerned. They are receiving their fair share of vaccines. In fact, in the month of May alone, we will be allocating 432,960 doses to Peel region, which will make Peel the public health unit with the second highest doses rate per capita in the province. So we are sending sufficient quantities to Peel—and to Brampton, of course, specifically.

In terms of places where they can be received, there are over 150 pharmacies, seven of which will be running 24/7, four hospitals and hot spot pop-ups. We have 40 primary care sites in Peel region, and we also have workplace clinics at Maple Leaf Foods, Maple Lodge Farms and Amazon. We know that there are 25 postal codes that have been designated as hot spots in Peel region, and the entire region is receiving sufficient quantities to make sure that

anyone who wants to receive a vaccine in Peel will be able to receive them.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Stan Cho: This week, I've been having many encouraging conversations with my constituents in Willowdale. It has to do with Ontario's COVID vaccine campaign, which has clearly moved into the next gear, as doses enter the province at almost double the previous rate. Over the last few weeks, Ontario has had an army of health care workers who have set records when it comes to needles in arms, and we've soared past the goal of 40% of Ontario's adult population getting at least their first dose by the end of April. It's very encouraging to hear, in fact, from the health minister that over 6.3 million doses have been administered, with—perhaps best of all—the last million doses being administered in nine days, and the million doses before that in just eight days. That's really good news, Speaker, and very encouraging for my constituents in Willowdale.

Speaker, my question is for the Solicitor General. With so much forward momentum on the vaccine front, what can members expect moving forward with Ontario's vaccine campaign?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you very much to the member from Willowdale. These are exciting times, as we see the increase in doses coming from the federal government. We know that Ontarians are very excited about the rollout of Ontario's vaccine campaign, and there is a lot to celebrate. As you said, after smashing through our goal of 40% of adults receiving at least their first dose by the end of April, we've set an ambitious goal for the end of May: 65% of adults receiving at least their first dose. And we are well on our way. Ontario is expected to surpass 50% of adults in the next 48 hours who will have received their first dose. It's incredible.

With a daily average of 120,000 vaccines being delivered every single day, we can all be proud of the tireless work of thousands of health care workers and many, many volunteers who are assisting in this rollout campaign. It's exciting news, it's great news, and we are well on our way to seeing the end of COVID-19 in Ontario.

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

Mr. Stan Cho: I share that sentiment of excitement, and so do the people of Willowdale and Toronto. After such a difficult year, this is the good news I think we've all been waiting for. In the city of Toronto, Speaker, where I represent, nearly 1.3 million vaccine doses have been administered, and this represents approximately half of the population in our great city. It's clear that with the vaccine supply ramping up in the province, the goals that we've set for the month of May are well within reach.

Speaker, given these developments in the vaccine rollout, I'm hoping the Solicitor General can update the House on what expansions to vaccine eligibility have been

introduced this month and what will be introduced in the weeks ahead.

1050

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you for your enthusiasm on this very critically important stage.

With stability in vaccine supply comes stability in our ability to expand the eligibility range. That's why we started off the month by expanding eligibility to all of those 18 and above in the 114 hot-spot neighbourhoods across 13 different public health units, as well as a series of planned expansions based on age and risk. Starting today, for example, individuals with at-risk conditions, such as dementia, diabetes and sickle cell disease, as well as the second phase of people who cannot work from home, including grocery store, restaurant and transportation workers, are eligible to book an appointment to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

In addition, due to the increased vaccine supply, we are adding at-risk health care workers and dialysis patients to the list of those eligible to book. It's exciting news, and I hope that people take advantage of, when you book, booking quickly, because we have a vaccine for you.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Catherine Fife: My next question is to the Premier.

"A nightmare." "Ridiculous." "Just an awful experience." "It just looks like rank amateurs, top to bottom." "The government simply doesn't seem to know what it is doing." These are quotes from business owners describing the Ontario Small Business Support Grant program.

Countless MPPs in this House have now shared stories of the significant problems their constituents have experienced with this program. The government needs to correct these issues. You need to expand eligibility—you should not be stalling on this any further—and you need to ensure that businesses that are closed through this third wave can receive additional support. Will the government commit to doing that today?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply on behalf of the government, the member for Willowdale and parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Stan Cho: I appreciate the member from Waterloo bringing up the small business support grant program, a grant program that has helped over 109,000 small businesses receive \$1.5 billion. In fact, over 75,000 businesses have received a second iteration of that grant program. That's \$1.1 billion. It's a total of \$2.6 billion paid out to these small businesses, with an average wait time of 12 days to get cash in hand.

Of course, there is a large volume of businesses that have applied to this good program, and that's why we have doubled up on the resources available to get through that backlog. But what's very curious is that the member stands in her place today and calls for further supports when she has voted against every single one of those support measures, including the doubling of the small business

grant, which has helped about a thousand businesses in Waterloo region weather the storm that is COVID-19.

My question to the member is, hopefully, if the government does introduce new measures, will she support these small businesses with—

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Are you going to do that? That's what we've been calling for since last April. Come to the table.

Another quote, Speaker: "I've never seen a program that just didn't have anyone there.... There's no one you can write to, no one you can call, there's no other number to ask to be elevated to speak with someone else. Ever." This lack of meaningful support or information is an issue not only with the grant program, but with the highly affected sectors, like tourism and event venues—in Waterloo region, Bingemans and the Princess Cinemas. All of us have examples. They have not been able to generate revenue for a year.

Businesses are about to be closed for another two weeks. That's another two weeks that business owners will be on their own, without help from this government. They are at the breaking point. You need to do something to support businesses for our economic recovery.

When are you going to fix the small business program? When are you going to put some additional funding on the table? When are you going to expand the eligibility—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. The member for Willowdale.

Mr. Stan Cho: To answer the question of when, well, from the very beginning of this pandemic, this government has been there with—

Interjections.

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

Mr. Stan Cho: —working with all levels of government. What the NDP has in common with all those support measures that they now call for is that they have voted against every single one, whether that was a PPE grant for the smallest of small businesses; a permanent reduction to small business property taxes of up to 30%; broadband infrastructure investment; the elimination of the EHT, a tax on jobs, for the smallest of small businesses; or the Digital Main Street program to help businesses retool and sell their products online.

Of course, this is a tough time for small businesses. That's why this government has been there for them. The question is, why hasn't the NDP?

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

Mr. Michael Coteau: Mr. Speaker, my question, through you, to the minister responsible for anti-racism: Can the minister update and inform this House about the alarming and unacceptable increase in anti-Asian racism and how these extreme forms of hate have impacted Asian Canadians in our province over the last year?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: The member opposite is absolutely right: There has been a disturbing increase. We all appreciate and understand that it is coming from misinformation and misinformed individuals who are targeting a particular group, suggesting that that is the cause of the COVID-19 outbreaks. It's terribly unfortunate. We have been working within the Anti-Racism Directorate—and, frankly, across government—to educate, inform and ultimately go after and shut down these individuals who are misinformed and are hurting our communities in a way that is truly, truly indefensible at this time.

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

Mr. Michael Coteau: I want to thank the minister for the answer, but the government has, frankly, done little over the last year to combat systemic racism and stop hate.

Last week, I asked the minister why the new anti-racism strategy, the updated strategy, did not mention the word "Asian" even once in the entire document. Instead of pledging action, the minister made reference to a grant, of which a small portion of that grant actually benefited one organization that's combatting anti-Asian racism.

Speaker, we need this government to stand up to hate and to protect the rights of all Ontarians, including Asian Canadians, and it starts with this government taking initiatives and creating a strategy to tackle anti-Asian racism. But because of the minister's continued lack of focus on one of the fastest-growing forms of hate in Canada, I plan to bring forward a change to the legislation, the Anti-Racism Act, today. I want to know if the minister will support those changes to include anti-Asian racism within the act.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I look forward to reviewing the private member's bill. Obviously, I have not had any insight into what he is bringing forward, but I'm happy to review it.

I think it's important that we talk about the actions that our government has taken. You mention grant programs like they're inconsequential. I think that is very unfortunate, because of the enthusiasm and the encouragement that we have received in talking to organizations saying, "This will help us. This will help us educate. This will help protect us, and ultimately, it will help inform all Ontario citizens."

Again, I will remind the member, the Anti-Racism and Anti-Hate Grant will provide \$1.6 million in total funding, will be accessible to communities throughout Ontario and provide investments to community-based projects. The organizations and the communities asked us for these investments. We have done that. They are very pleased, and I'm happy to be working with them on this.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. Stan Cho: I continue to have some frustrating conversations with my constituents regarding our border control measures from the federal government. We know that the majority of cases today are variants of concern. These are dangerous. It's a pretty clear message from the

Prime Minister that this just isn't a priority for him, tightening up our border controls. This is problematic for the people of Willowdale and our province, because we know that these variants originate from outside of Ontario. While our government continues to urge our federal partners, to request real action to secure our borders—we're going to continue calling on them in a vocal way.

It's not just international travellers that are the concern. Of course, there are people carrying the variants coming in from other provinces. My question is for the Solicitor General. I'm hoping that she can share with the House what our request is to the federal government when it comes to these domestic travellers, to make sure that Ontarians can remain safe from these dangerous variants of concern.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Our request to the federal government was really very simple. It was three: to actually shut down the land and water international travel that is happening between our southern partners; it was to make sure that when domestic visitors come in, they get tested immediately at the border.

1100

What we are finding, as we've highlighted previously, is that when a domestic traveller comes into Ontario and goes back to their place of residence or where they're visiting, then books an appointment, then gets the test, then waits for the results of the test, how many people did they interact with? How many people did they put at risk? We're seeing the variants increase. There's a very simple fix that the federal government could do, and that is test people when they arrive at the border.

The third and final thing, of course, is make sure that when individuals self-isolate, they do the proper follow-up and make sure that they're doing the right—

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

Mr. Stan Cho: I hope I don't sound too frustrated in the Legislature today. It's just that the frustration of my constituents is at a boiling point, because it has been a tough year and that has been the case for people all over the province. After making those sacrifices over a very difficult year, it's fair of Willowdalers to expect some sort of action from our federal cousins on getting these borders under control and protecting us from these dangerous variants of concern—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Mr. Stan Cho: I know the Liberals are heckling me and calling this about xenophobia. It's absolutely not about race. This is about protecting Ontarians against these dangerous variants of concern and putting in safeguards at the federal level to make sure that we protect all Ontarians.

Back to the minister: Can she provide examples of the concerning trends from incoming travellers at Toronto Pearson, Pearson being, of course, Canada's largest airport right here in the region of Peel?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Yes, unfortunately, it is a disturbing one and a very direct one. We know that the P1 variant of COVID-19 has been connected to a massive

outbreak in Brazil, and we know that travel remains a major vector for transmission. Just across the border from Hamilton, the Buffalo airport has a full web page dedicated to transportation for Canadians. I don't need to remind members of how some travellers move across the border to avoid airport quarantine.

Even though our government is taking extra precautions by closing our interprovincial land borders to help keep out the variants, we do not control our international borders. All levels of government must work together to keep our citizens safe, including those carrying variants of COVID-19 travelling into Ontario, which is why we will continue to call on the federal government to help secure international entry points and further strengthen screening at our borders.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: My question is for the Premier. Beaches—East York is home to communities of essential workers who have no choice but to work precarious jobs with no benefits. They've watched neighbours evicted—no work, no home. They can't take that risk, so they go to work, sick or not. The Premier stayed home for 14 days to ensure he wouldn't get his family sick, but he's only willing to give three days to essential workers. As a result, they and their families are ending up in the ICU.

As much as the government would like everyone to believe that the COVID fire raging in Ontario is entirely due to planeloads of foreigners, the science table and critical care doctors have been clear: It is driven by workplaces.

When is the government going to put in place a program of paid sick days that will allow workers to stay home when they are sick, and Ontario to heal?

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

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Again, I would thank the member opposite for her support in our province's paid sick leave plan. In fact, we were the first province in the country to bring forward paid sick leave for workers. It's a comprehensive plan of 23 days so workers don't have to choose between their jobs and their health.

The health and safety of every single worker in this province, their families and their communities is our government's top priority. We will continue to stand with workers every day until COVID-19 is defeated.

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

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: What we have in Ontario is a perfect storm of bad policies. Last March, the Premier promised that nobody would lose their housing due to COVID, but that turned out to be a fairy tale. Thousands upon thousands of people who lost income due to COVID have been or are being evicted to couch-surf or into homelessness because there's no moratorium on evictions for arrears and no rent relief.

Essential workers in Beaches—East York are terrified of losing their housing. Three days of paid sick days is simply

not enough to allow people to stay home or to stem the tide of workplace infections, and ultimately, all of Ontario is suffering as a result.

When is the Premier going to do the math and give people the paid sick days they need to stay home when they are sick, so that we can end the devastating cycle of lockdowns and begin to rebuild our lives?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Before I ask the minister to respond, I'm going to caution the member on her use of language.

I now ask for the reply from the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Again, I thank the member opposite and her NDP for supporting our comprehensive package to support workers. Twenty-three paid sick days are available to workers in this province.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue to ensure that every worker is protected so they don't have to choose between their job and their health. We'll be with workers every single day until we defeat COVID-19.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Mike Schreiner: My question is for the Premier. Small businesses are hurting, barely hanging on if they haven't gone out of business already. The third wave has forced small businesses to close for a third time, and there is speculation that they will remain closed well into next month.

Small businesses are doing their part to save lives, but they need the government to have their backs. So, I have a simple yes or no question: Will the Premier triple the Ontario Small Business Support Grant to help small businesses survive the third wave?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the member for Willowdale.

Mr. Stan Cho: I think I've mentioned this outside. I have a great deal of respect for the member from Guelph. We've had many conversations about the small businesses not just in his riding, but throughout this province, through our work with the finance committee, listening to the very difficult times they're going through, from the beginning of this pandemic.

That's why this government has responded, in step with our partners at other levels of government, to provide a blanket measure of support. We've introduced a series of supports, not just the small business support grant program, but help with hydro; with fixed costs, like property taxes; reducing or eliminating in many cases a tax on jobs, the EHT, for the smallest of small businesses, in fact.

It's curious to hear that the member from Guelph is calling for a third round of the small business support grant program when he voted against the second round. So the question—yes or no—is, if we introduce more support measures, will the member finally support and vote in favour of the supports?

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I think small businesses wanted a "yes" response to my previous question. The bottom line

is that wave 1 and 2 supports, and citing those, will not get small businesses through wave 3, especially when the current program is broken.

I just want to quote one of the many small businesses that have reached out to me: "I just got off the phone with the call centre and I got a hurry up and wait, that they don't have any timelines on payments."

Speaker, businesses simply cannot hurry up and wait. I can tell you as a long-time small business owner that cash flow is critically important. I will support a third round of funding in a system that is fixed.

Speaker, through you, I ask the government: Will you expand the eligibility criteria of the small business support grant, bring in a third round of funding and fix the existing broken system?

Mr. Stan Cho: I appreciate the passion from the member from Guelph, and it's encouraging to hear that he will consider changing the voting record and supporting small businesses for supports moving forward.

It's important to talk about the supports that businesses in Guelph have received. In the first iteration of the grant program, they received over \$11 million. This helped well over 700 businesses in the area of Guelph. The member voted against that. But in the second round, these businesses will be given more support.

Of course, we are not through this storm that is COVID-19. I will work with that member and his constituents and small businesses to make sure that we are listening to them. But where these targeted measures can best help these small business—because what I have in common with that member is I, too, am from a background in small business. My family made a new life for themselves in this, the best country in the world, based on small business.

We need to help them, so I encourage that member to reach out to my office. Let's get the job done. Let's put COVID-19 in the rear-view mirror and make sure these small businesses are not just prosperous again, but are the most successful that we have in the entire world.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. Stan Cho: My question is for the Solicitor General. Since first learning of COVID-19 last year, I know that our government has been committed to taking all the necessary steps to ensure that our communities remain safe and healthy during these unprecedented times. Protecting Ontario includes taking swift action to make sure that our borders are secure from all travellers entering our province who are carrying these dangerous variants of concern.

1110

Now, Speaker, we heard extremely concerning news recently that cases of the P1 variant have quadrupled from Thursday to Sunday in the Hamilton region. As we continue to manage this third wave of the virus in this province, I'm hoping the Solicitor General can address the continued need for strict measures at our border now, so that the P1 variant doesn't grow from what it has already become.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Solicitor General.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: The member from Willowdale is absolutely right. In the case you mentioned in Hamilton, they've seen a number of cases tied to the worrisome COVID-19 variant first identified in Brazil more than quadruple in the past week. As of Sunday, the P1 variant, considered more spreadable and possibly more dangerous to young people, has been confirmed in 14 Hamilton residents, up from just three cases reported Thursday. This is how quickly variants can move through our communities.

We've been testing for the P1 variant, and it wasn't there last month. Although we have identified P1 in Ontario, there are many more variants and mutations that have not yet been detected in Ontario. Our current cases are dominated by variants that come from other jurisdictions and all of which were introduced into Ontario through travel. Once again, we ask the government to take action to keep these variants out of Ontario and our community.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And the supplementary?

Mr. Stan Cho: We continue to hear, I think in all of our ridings, these concerning stories from constituents about what they feel are very weak border measures to protect against these variants of concern. I know I certainly heard my share from the great people of Willowdale.

We need to make sure we work together here to tell our federal partners, to say that this is a concern for all of us here in this province: Protect us against these dangerous variants. It's a simple request.

My question back to the Solicitor General: Can she explain why we still need to have concerns about keeping travellers carrying COVID-19 out of Ontario, given that the variants are already here in our province?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: We know that these new variants did not originate in Ontario. They're coming here from other parts of the world, and indeed other parts of Canada. We asked Ontarians to do their part, and they're following public health advice. Meanwhile, the federal government refuses to even test incoming passengers. The Premier of this province has repeatedly asked the federal government to step up and do their job. We need to ensure that our borders are secure.

Did you know that a population larger than the entire city of Mississauga passed through Pearson airport just since January? The majority were not even required to take a PCR test. Ontarians expect that most travellers should and will be tested. Will the members opposite join us in calling on the federal government to implement PCR testing for all travellers? It's time for the federal government to take this seriously.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is for the Premier. Tenants at Rebecca Towers in Hamilton are asking for help. The high-rise building is home to seniors, essential

workers, newcomers and working-class families, and it now has over a hundred confirmed cases of COVID-19. The outbreak in the building has been growing since March. It is located in a community that has a test positivity rate of 22%, yet this area is still not a provincial hot spot.

My question to the Premier is, why were the tenants at Rebecca Towers left to get sick or die without the province acting to get this community more resources, more vaccines and urgent help?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I thank the honourable member for the question. She knows that much of the plan for this month, especially with the increase in the vaccines that we received from the federal government, has been to attack some of the hot spots across the province, hot spots that have been identified by both the science table and by the local public health units. What she raises is obviously very concerning, and I'm sure it's something that we will work with public health in Hamilton to address shortly.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: Not only are the tenants of Rebecca Towers facing a horrible COVID-19 outbreak, but they are also facing the consequences of this government's terrible housing policies. In the middle of this pandemic, the tenants are fighting an above-guideline rent increase, and the building has fallen into complete disrepair. With only one elevator in service and no regular cleaning of the common areas, it is no wonder COVID-19 is spreading so quickly. Rebecca Towers tenants need a safe building, and the whole community needs their vaccines now.

Why has the province allowed landlords to raise the rents and let buildings like Rebecca Towers fall into such a level of disrepair that it is making people sick and die during this pandemic?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, as you know, throughout the pandemic, when there have been shut-downs and when previously we entered grey zones, of course evictions were stopped across the province. We brought in rent freezes.

Obviously, it is very important when it comes to vaccine distribution that we hit hot spots, Mr. Speaker. As you know and as the member opposite will know, the hot spots are the focus of our vaccine distribution plan for this month. It is very important, as the Minister of Health has highlighted, that we get to these hot spots. We're identifying hot spots by working with local public health but also working with the science table.

I can assure the member opposite that we'll certainly follow up with local public health officials in her area. Her constituents deserve access to the same great vaccination distribution program that all Ontarians get.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Roman Baber: My question is to the Minister of Health. On May 3, Citytv ran an article about a Toronto

woman who died from kidney cancer because her surgery was delayed three times. Cancer, heart procedures, hip replacements, knee surgeries and cataract operations are cancelled daily by government directive.

Yesterday, the FAO revealed that Ontario's backlog of surgeries will take more than three and a half years to clear. So many Ontarians will lose their lives.

But the most astounding fact is that almost all beds saved by cancelling surgeries are sitting empty. Surgeries of real patients are being cancelled to save beds for computer-modelled COVID patients, and the field hospitals are barely being used.

There are more than 6,000 employees at the Ministry of Health. Has anyone done the math on how many people will lose their lives because surgery was cancelled versus how many lives will be saved as a result of the cancellations? And if they haven't done such a comparison, will the minister commit to the House to undertake a study and report to the House? The question is simple: What is the estimate of the number of people whose lives are saved from COVID by cancelling surgeries versus what is the estimate of the number of people who will lose their lives as a result of their surgeries being cancelled?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Where to start? First, let me assure the member opposite that the beds in Ontario hospitals are unfortunately filled right now. They are filled with people with COVID and they're filled with people who are there for other reasons, people who have had surgeries, but they are filled.

We are very concerned about the levels. They are starting to go down, the numbers in intensive care units are starting to go down, but we're not in the clear yet. We still have a lot of work to do, and that is why we've had to postpone some of the surgeries and diagnostic procedures during this third wave, as we had to between the first and second waves.

But it is something that we are making sure—we're looking at the situation on a daily basis. As it stands now, most of our hospitals have completed 88% of their surgeries for the year, and we are looking at ways that we can catch up on those surgeries when we come back out of it.

I can assure the member opposite that the beds in our hospitals are full right now. That's not computer modelling; they're full.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Roman Baber: Like I said, I invite the minister to make the CCSO public so the public can see how many beds are actually full. ICU capacity has never gone above the 83% or 84% mark.

Speaker, my question was reasonable. The minister always says that the goal is to save lives. So, why doesn't she have the courage to study if she's actually costing more lives than she is saving? Clearly, she doesn't have the confidence to own her decision.

But it gets worse, because apparently the province is cancelling all elective surgeries, and that includes surgeries of ambulatory patients who don't need a bed.

Yesterday, the Globe and Mail ran an opinion piece by Dr. Nam, a professor of surgery at U of T specializing in urological cancers. Nam is turning away patients due to the directive to cancel surgeries. He says that for cancer patients waiting for treatment, the hopes of being able to beat cancer were severely harmed by the stroke of a pen. He doesn't understand why the order applies to ambulatory patients who do not require a bed after a surgery. And this is true not just for cancer; many arthritis, gall bladder, hernia procedures don't require a bed.

1120

Speaker, what's the minister's excuse for cancelling outpatient surgeries? Will she please just own her mistake and rescind the order and restore cancellation—

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Well, there's a lot there, but I'll try to answer part of your question. One is that if people—we've already conducted over 420,000 procedures and surgeries since this pandemic began last year. If someone has cancer or they have a cardiac issue that is threatening their life, they will receive surgery, and I want the people of Ontario to know that. If you need to be in hospital, please go to the hospital. The hospitals are safe, and if you need surgery for cardiac or cancer care, you will receive that surgery to save your life.

This is something that is not done by politics. This is done by medical professionals who assess every case to determine whether that person needs to have surgery right away or whether it can be delayed for a point in time. I am confident that our medical experts are making the right decisions. I am confident that we have a plan. It is very unfortunate that we have to delay some of these surgeries and procedures, but I can assure the member and I can assure the people of Ontario that we are looking at the numbers on a daily basis, and as soon as we can restart that procedure and start to work on that surgical backlog, we will. Because we know—

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

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is to the Premier. There's a housing crisis in Niagara. People from my community can't afford to buy a house. Families are torn apart, kids forced to leave the community they were raised in to find a home of their own. A recent report showed that Niagara experienced a 14% drop in housing affordability, the largest drop in Canada. Residents of Niagara are getting priced out of the market. People are evicted from their properties purchased by investors, and they can't find an affordable rental unit. They end up on the streets. This is driven by greed and it has to end. The average home price in Niagara is nearly \$750,000. Families in Niagara have not seen wage increases at the same level as housing costs increase.

My question, Mr. Speaker: What is the Premier going to do today to address this crisis and make it so people can afford to own a home in Niagara?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Actually, I really appreciate the question from the honourable member, because it is something that this government has been focused on from day one. We have consistently talked about affordability on this side of the House. It is ironic to hear a question coming from the member opposite who has voted against every single measure to make this province more affordable for the people of the province of Ontario, including those first-time homebuyers who are doing exactly what he's saying: They're saving. They're trying to put money away so that they can buy their first home. It becomes increasingly difficult when, if you listen to the opposition, governments are digging in your pocket and taking away all of that extra money that you should be putting away for your first home.

Look, we are seized with this. We know how important it is for people to be able to buy their first home, and that is something that this government has been focused on from day one. I really invite the honourable gentleman opposite to work with us to bring down costs for people, to make it more affordable to buy homes so that more people can enjoy the first home that he is talking about.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Back to the Premier: I've spoken with young people in my community who are saving whatever they can to buy their first home. Right now, the dream of being a homeowner is becoming just that: a dream. It's sadly not a reality for many hard-working first-time homebuyers. Homes for sale are getting multiple offers and bidding wars, selling well over asking prices—sometimes \$100,000 over asking. What average working Ontarian can afford that? People renting are facing renovations in our community at an alarming rate. Our wait-list for affordable housing in Niagara is so long, the average wait is over a decade.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the question is: Will the Premier finally stand up to speculators, investors only interested in padding their own pockets, support the hard-working people of Niagara and end the practice of greedy speculators driving up housing costs? Will he take action to make homes in Niagara affordable again for our kids and our grandkids, their kids and their grandkids?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, I certainly would expect that the member opposite would expect that this is a whole-of-government approach to ensuring that there is availability. You have to ensure that there is availability and supply is there for people.

Just earlier today, the member for Kitchener talked about two-way, all-day GO train service that this government has brought to his region. That makes it more affordable and easier for people to work in different parts of the province. That's one important feature.

The Minister of Infrastructure has brought in a groundbreaking, over \$4.5-billion broadband project which will see all of the province of Ontario connected to broadband, making it essential, because more people will be able to work from home and live in diverse parts of the province.

We're hearing, from across the province, different members—I heard the member for Timiskaming talking about all the people who are moving to his community from the GTA.

This is what we need to do, Mr. Speaker: Open up more parts of the province so that people can have their first home. It's more affordable, and this government is taking a whole-of-government approach to make sure that it happens.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Premier. Mr. Speaker, it has been weeks since the federal government presented Canada's national child care plan. Ontario Liberals have committed to working with the federal government to implement \$10-a-day licensed child care, which will save Ontario families, on average, \$10,000 a year per child. This is money that families can use to save for post-secondary education, put away for retirement or pay down their personal debt. This is a lot of money, Mr. Speaker, especially in those early years of parenthood. One might think the Premier would react enthusiastically and get on board with their federal partners to deliver real relief for families, but that's hardly the case.

We all remember that it was Conservatives who killed the last national child care plan, and it seems like the Premier's government is about to do it again. Why won't the Premier do the right thing, partner with the federal government and provide \$10-a-day child care to all Ontario families?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to thank the member opposite for the question. I will remind him that when his party was afforded with the honour of serving for 15 years, the cost of child care rose to the most expensive—and the second-most expensive system in the nation. That is not a program or a metric which any member of this Legislature should be proud of.

What we are doing in this House: In our first budget, as a recognition that child care was inaccessible and unaffordable, we introduced the child care tax credit, a credit that is flexible, recognizing that most families will raise their children in keeping with their values and recognizing the inherent costs of raising every child, irrespective of if they use institutional daycare. What we have done is introduced a credit to provide up to 70% of eligible expenses, supporting 300,000 families, and in the most recent budget we topped it up.

To answer the question: Yes, we are going to work with the federal government. I've spoken to Minister Ahmed Hussen myself on this matter as we work together to make child care more accessible and—

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

The supplementary question.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Mr. Speaker, women are bearing the brunt of job losses during COVID-19. An analysis by

RBC shows that working-age Canadian women are leaving the workforce at a rate 10 times higher than men. The she-cession is real and the government doesn't seem to have a plan to do anything about it.

Increasing women's workforce participation has the potential to grow Ontario's economy by \$7 billion a year. Our economy won't recover from COVID-19, though, without full and equal workforce participation, and that won't happen without child care. And yet, Mr. Speaker, the government seems unwilling and uninterested to deliver affordable child care to Ontario families.

Ontario Liberals have committed to delivering \$10-a-day licensed child care and to ensuring the economic dignity of child care workers. There's an opportunity for transformation in child care and throughout the economy, Mr. Speaker, so through you: Will the Premier join us in working with the federal government to deliver Ontario families \$10-a-day licensed child care?

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

Hon. Todd Smith: As the Minister of Education just mentioned, he is working very closely with the federal government, as I am, and my colleague Minister Dunlop is as well. We know, and the government is certainly aware, that COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted the economic and social well-being of women across the province and that they've been affected both at home and in the workplace. That's why we're working hard to ensure that there is more child care space available for them to access, and we will be working with them, given the investments that we have made in child care, to ensure that we're working towards the goal that the federal government has set in their recent budget up on Parliament Hill.

But, Mr. Speaker, our government wants to build a province where every woman and every girl is empowered to succeed, because promoting women's full economic participation supports Ontario's continued growth and prosperity, and that is the goal of our government here in Ontario.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Earlier in question period, in response to the leader of the official opposition, the Deputy Premier stated, I believe, that everyone in the province, when they got their first vaccine, would have an appointment set for the second vaccine. I would like to ask the Deputy Premier to confirm that that is actually the case.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Christine Elliott: To clarify, I did not indicate—
Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for York Centre is warned.

Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: —the second dose, but I can advise that we have over four and a half million people booked for their first and second doses already, and over a

million of them were booked in the last week. This is something that depends, of course, on where you make your appointment, whether it's through the central booking number or through a pharmacy. But through the central booking system, we have over four and a half million already booked for first and second doses.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Mr. John Vanthof: I appreciate that clarification, because that did not come through in the first response. For an example, I got the vaccine through a pharmacy. My wife and I, we specifically asked for a date for the second vaccine, and we were told, "You will just have to keep looking." That is part of the issue with the vaccination program, that there are many streams, and people are confused.

I'm glad that the minister clarified that, but I would ask, could you please clarify more widely? Because people are clamouring for information, and each time it's partly explained just adds to their confusion and to their fear. Could you please do that, Minister?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Well, we are providing people with information as broadly as possible, and now people have choices about where they can receive the vaccines. They can be received through their primary care provider, and that's happening for a lot of people with pre-existing health conditions who want to understand whether it's safe for them, with their health conditions, to do that; mass vaccination clinics; pharmacies, of course. We're adding more pharmacies by the week. We expect to reach 2,400 pharmacies offering vaccines by the end of May. We also have the pop-up and mobile vaccination clinics.

We want to make it as easy as possible for people to receive a vaccine wherever they live in Ontario and whatever time of day, because we have many of our pharmacies also offering vaccinations 24/7. We're going to continue to work on that so that everyone who wants to receive a vaccine, first and second dose, will be able to do so.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our question period for this morning.

This House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1133 to 1500.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Just to inform the House, Speaker, that there will not be a night sitting this evening.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you for that information.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received a report on intended appointments, dated May 11, 2021, from 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

ANTI-RACISM AMENDMENT ACT (ANTI-ASIAN RACISM AND INCIDENTS OF HATE), 2021

LOI DE 2021 MODIFIANT LA LOI CONTRE LE RACISME (RACISME ENVERS LES ASIATIQUES ET INCIDENTS HAINEUX)

Mr. Coteau moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 291, An Act to amend the Anti-Racism Act, 2017 with respect to anti-Asian racism and hate crimes / Projet de loi 291, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2017 contre le racisme en ce qui a trait au racisme envers les Asiatiques et aux crimes haineux.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member for Don Valley East care to explain his bill briefly?

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Asian communities across the province have been experiencing a rise in hate crime and racism at a time when we know that—over the course of the year, during this pandemic, there has been a drastic increase of about 40% here in Ontario. That's why I'm introducing a private member's bill, co-sponsored by my colleague from Ottawa-Vanier, Lucille Collard, to amend the Anti-Racism Act.

If adopted, this bill would also introduce anti-Asian racism as a form of racism the government must report back to the public on, both in terms of the severity of the problem as well as specific, measurable strategies to combat it. It would also force the government to report back to the public on developments in its strategy to prevent and combat hate and hate crimes.

I hope MPPs from all parties can join me in supporting this proposed legislation, and that we can support the Asian community here in Ontario and stop all forms of hate.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE SKILLED TRADES ACT, 2021 LOI DE 2021 OUVRANT DES PERSPECTIVES DANS LES MÉTIERS SPÉCIALISÉS

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 11, 2021, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 288, An Act to enact the Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act, 2021 / Projet de loi 288, Loi édictant la Loi de 2021 ouvrant des perspectives dans les métiers spécialisés.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll invite questions and comments, and I'll recognize the member for Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I was able to be in the House this morning—as I seem to be all shifts every day, these days—and was able to listen to the member on his very eloquent speech on this important bill.

My question to him is regarding youth—because I know he does a lot with youth in his constituency, in his riding—and the importance of encouraging youth into the skilled trades, which we know, and which New Democrats have been saying for years, are fantastic jobs. We need to encourage more young people to get into these jobs. How would the member go about encouraging young people in his riding to join the skilled trades?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Thank you for the question, my colleague from Hamilton Mountain. That's a very good question.

Really, the national average for unemployment for young people is above the national average.

As you know, in my motion in 2019, I asked the government to provide paid internships for young people—and that is those who are in university and colleges, and those who are unemployed, and also recent graduates. This will be an opportunity for young people to benefit from the skilled trades, who are not in a school, who are unemployed, and especially in my riding of York South-Weston, where we have the largest—in the Toronto area—youth unemployment.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions to the member for York South-Weston?

Mr. Lorne Coe: We've heard many times now during the debate that a job in the trades is a job for life.

I'd like to hear from the member opposite why he thinks this government should not pursue a system that supports current and future tradespeople in the communities that we have the privilege of serving.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Thank you for the question from the member from Whitby.

Yes, the skilled trades, as it has been said, are well-paying jobs, good jobs. But the problem with this bill is that it hasn't been consulted with the community—it has just been rushed quickly. That's why we need to make sure that it is—consult the unions, the tradespeople and the community at large, and also bring the young people to the table. The young people have not been included into the discussions of consultations. Skilled trades are very important; they're good-paying jobs.

Also, we need to start it early, and we need to start it in the schools. As you know, member from Whitby, Mike Harris, who was the Premier in the 1990s, also removed early on in the schools—teaching young people those skills.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member from York South–Weston, and for being an advocate for youth, especially in your riding.

You said earlier that there's a high rate of unemployment for youth in your riding and also in other areas. If you could expand—because sometimes people feel like a job is a job. But what does it mean when you—as a young person, young woman, young man—have a good-paying job in the trades, and what does that mean for your future and for your family?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Thank you to my colleague from Sudbury. It's a very good question.

Young people are really looking for opportunities, and opportunities such as skilled trades—are an opportunity that they could really get a good skill, and they can also get independence to make money, to earn a good living, and also for opportunities. But this current government—their history hasn't been really putting young people into work and into investments.

As I'm the official opposition critic for opportunities, I asked this government in 2019 to put 27,000 internships, placements and co-ops for young people so they can gain the experience they need early on. And it is not doing—but this will improve them and give them skills to start up.

We need to invest in our young people. It's very important that we give them that heads-up so they can actually have a job.

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

Ms. Jane McKenna: I'm just curious, because stakeholders—you can see a plethora of them that are on here—youngsters and everyone have asked for a one-stop shop. We all know that the skilled trades not only have not been at the table, but no one has listened to any of them, and they're absolutely thrilled at what we're doing. My question to you—without politicizing this: What exactly would you suggest that we have done or continue to do up to this point?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Thank you for the question from the member from Burlington.

I say that you supported my motion on February 28, 2019, but then you haven't put the budget or resources to put to work the young people to gain the experience they needed—internships, placements and co-ops that are necessary for them to gain experiences. Young people ask, "Do you have experience with new graduates from universities?" This would have been an opportunity to start on 27,000 internships and co-ops and placements that you haven't done. You supported it, but you need to deliver.

1510

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and responses for this round.

Further debate?

Interjections.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you to my colleagues for the wonderful, rousing applause here today. I'm sure that I'll live up to their expectations, Mr. Speaker.

It's always a pleasure to rise and join my colleagues here in debate, and on this very important bill that, if passed, would be another step forward in our government's mission to transform and support the skilled trades. The trades have built our cities. They keep the lights on and maintain the infrastructure that we rely on every day. But, simply put, we need more people to consider careers in the trades.

By 2025, the trades will make up 40% of all occupations here in the province of Ontario. On top of that, we are about to face a retirement bubble, with nearly 250,000 construction workers expected to retire in the next 10 years.

Fortunately, at the helm is someone who really understands the importance of breaking down the barriers when it comes to entering the skilled trades, and that, of course, is our Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development. He is committed to changing the perception of the trades and supporting more young people on their journey to these exciting career paths.

For too long, talented young students have been told they need to leave the shop floor and head into university lecture halls to get a "real job," because blue-collar jobs—like plumbing, for example—had been considered messy or dirty or just aren't sexy. That is the kind of thinking that has been allowed into our children's classrooms for 15 years. How many times have kids been told to study hard so they don't end up in a job in construction? It is abysmal that the previous government promoted that kind of mentality to young people and allowed our education system to get so far out of tune with the realities of today's job market.

Before COVID-19, every time I met with an employer in Waterloo region, I could always count on two things. The first is that they would slip in a plug for two-way, all-day GO, which is something that our government is also committed to delivering on, and I'm very thankful to see that committed to in our 2021 budget. The second thing they would always mention was how tough it was to find qualified workers to fill vacancies in the trades.

Then I think back to the conversations I had on the doorsteps during our last election and stories I've heard through personal friends. I firmly believe that anyone who is prepared and ready to put in the work should have a shot at pursuing the job of their dreams. Sadly, before our government took office, it just wasn't that easy for those people looking to get into the trades to go forward and do that, all because of an organization we all know here: the Ontario College of Trades. It's a story I'm all too familiar with because, like I said, I have neighbours and friends who have had to deal with it.

Let's just say someone was born and raised in Kitchener—this is where their roots are, and they want to build a family here someday. Just like some kids dream about becoming teachers or doctors, this individual dreams about becoming, let's say, an electrician, but they can't find a journeyman who has the space to take them on. This is a challenge in a city like Kitchener. Think about it—and you'll know this all too well, Mr. Speaker—in our

rural communities, and especially places in northern Ontario, you're faced with the choice of switching career paths or moving hours away just to find the training you need.

I want to give a quick example of a very good friend of mine, Andrew. Andrew lives in Espanola, but he hasn't always lived in Espanola. Andrew is an HVAC apprentice. He left Espanola to go to North Bay; North Bay then to Sudbury; Sudbury then to Parry Sound; Parry Sound then to Stratford—and this was all just so he could accommodate his training as an apprentice. Because of the ratios that we had in the province, it was so hard for him to be able to actually find the training that he needed, but thankfully now he has been able to return home to Espanola, where he just bought a house and is living a very successful life. But why did he have to bounce around from community to community to actually be able to accomplish the goals that he wanted to accomplish? I will say that this is really a common thing that happens all over the province. We just, quite frankly, don't need to see that happen anymore. We've taken a lot of steps, I think, already through our government, to be able to move forward with this—back in 2018—by lowering apprenticeship ratios to a simple 1-to-1. That allowed him, finally, to return to northern Ontario, because there was now an ability for a journey-person to take him on—not having to have six journey-persons on your payroll to be able to take on one apprentice, in some cases. This was a huge win for the next generation of apprentices and young people looking to get their foot in the door to a good-paying job.

Of course, as members, we will all recall that this was not the only change we made back in the fall. It was also announced that we were dismantling the entire College of Trades—and I can't say how happy I am to actually see that happening with this bill. This was a key promise; one of those that I spoke to when we talked about what we were running on in our election platforms.

Our transformation of the skilled trades and apprenticeships began with Bill 47—this is going back to 2018—and it is coming full circle, like I said, with this bill here today, the Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act.

If passed, this bill would completely modernize the apprenticeship system, making it easier for apprentices to get on with an employer, while also optimizing career-building opportunities for trade workers. This is going to be a system that works, and we know that because it is built from what we've heard during the skilled trades panel hearings. The independent, five-member panel delivered its recommendations to the minister and shared feedback directly on how we can get more apprentices and more employers to participate in this system.

The panel put out an open call to get feedback on how we should move forward after dismantling the College of Trades. What was made absolutely clear by the 67 written submissions and the attendees of the 24 publicly held meetings was that the sector needs to be agile and responsive, that it be accountable to the minister but exist outside of government. There also needs to be a clear separation between certification and training, and compliance and

enforcement. So what the panel suggested is a crown corporation focused on training, while the ministry takes responsibility for enforcement and compliance. This makes sense as it fits into the ministry's existing role when it comes to health and safety, so that we don't duplicate the work that is already being done. And this is exactly what we are proposing here today with this bill.

Skilled Trades Ontario would be the front-facing agency to register and certify apprentices. It would also be responsible for developing industry-informed training standards that are responsive to changes in the economy and developments in the workplace. And I want to emphasize for a moment, because we need for this agency to be responsive, the need for it was something the panel heard time and time again. I've spoken with skilled tradesmen and tradeswomen in my riding, and a lot of these things that the panel is bringing forward are things that I've also heard in the past; like, rather than having multiple regulators and inspectors, there should be one coordinated inspection body.

When I started having these discussions almost three years ago, the first thing I would ask is, "Have you had these conversations with the previous government?" They would say to me, "Mike, we've been telling them this for years, but the College of Trades is overly bureaucratic and they just don't listen. It is impossible to get someone who is responsible for making a decision, and it takes forever just to get acknowledged. When you finally do get to provide input on how things should be changed, there is a study or review that just goes nowhere." It is that kind of job-killing bureaucracy that we are getting rid of today here with this bill—because it not only reviews the studies that Ontario's skilled trades sector needs, but, quite frankly, it really reinforces the things that we all heard over the last many years.

So because it not only reviews the study of Ontario's skilled trades sector—but it's going deeper than that, and there are some metrics here that I want to share with you. In our first year of government, apprenticeships rose by 5.5% across the province, compared to—are you ready for this—a decrease of 17,000 apprentices through the College of Trades structure over the last many years under the previous government.

That's the legacy of the College of Trades: fewer trained workers, and a system that leaves the journeymen and journeywomen and employers and apprentices frustrated and confused.

With the Skilled Trades Ontario portal, there will only be one digital window for registration, tracking processes, scheduling, training and getting more information about financial support. This is how it should have always been. It should have been simple. There should have been a one-window approach.

1520

A university student doesn't need to contact the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to register for class, then get their assignments through their school, but schedule exams and testing through their ministry, but then pay at their school. I know it sounds crazy, but that's what our

apprentices in this province had to do under the Ontario College of Trades. It's truly remarkable that anyone manages to successfully get through that system. And it is no wonder that high school students have no idea how to become a welder, a millwright or a machinist, yet they know how to apply for a bachelor of concurrent education or nursing sciences.

In construction alone, we are going to need 100,000 more skilled workers in the next 10 years, and we can't meet that demand if we don't make skilled trades training more accessible.

The backbone of our plan to get more people into the trades is our skilled trades strategy. It is also backed up by nearly \$1 billion in meaningful investments that are going to make a real difference to the next generation of tradespeople, like the \$21 million we are putting into the Pre-apprenticeship Training Program to promote the trades to under-represented groups.

For a long time, up until quite recently, the trades were not promoted to women. There's absolutely no reason why a woman can't put on a hard hat and steel-toed boots to go to work every day.

I have a five-year-old daughter, and I think she might actually be watching at home right now. Hi, Gemma, if you are tuning in. I would absolutely support her if she decides that being an arborist, a heavy machine operator or an HVAC technician, just like my friend Andrew has decided, is her career path. There's absolutely no reason why her brothers can pursue these jobs but she can't.

I had the opportunity to attend a virtual announcement with the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development and the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues, who deserves recognition for her dedication in promoting trades to young women across the province. I know she is extremely passionate about it. This particular announcement was to promote trucking to women in Waterloo region. It was really neat. A trucker named Hayley joined us for this announcement, actually coming to us all the way from Ohio, which is where she was working that day. Hayley spoke to us about how she never saw herself as a trucker growing up, but now that she has made it her career, she wants to show young girls that, in fact, it really is a viable option for them. We need more women like Hayley to get out there so that the next generation of girls can see themselves in the trades, just like her.

Only 7% of those employed in the trades are women, and with the need for more qualified personnel out there, I hope to see that number grow in the future.

It all comes back to the first principle that is guiding our government's skilled trades strategy, and that is breaking down the stigma around these jobs. We have to give those who put on a hard hat every day just as much respect as those who put on a tie and carry a briefcase. The trades cannot be seen as backup options for those who couldn't get into university. Kids shouldn't be ashamed to go to their parents or guidance counsellors and say they want to pursue a trade.

That leads me to our second guiding principle, which is simplifying the system. When a student goes to a guidance

counsellor and says, "After I graduate from high school, I want to be a millwright," that guidance counsellor should be able to put them on a straight path to accomplishing that, just like they would for a student who wants to become a doctor. They should be able to see the way forward. As the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development has said, we should be able to see a way forward that doesn't look like a subway map in Tokyo. If we need to attract 100,000 more people to the trades, they need to be able to clearly see what they have to do to get there and where they can go for support.

For example, they need to know how to purchase the proper tools for their trade and where they can get financial support for that. Any trades worker will tell you that tools are an investment, but making the investment upfront, without a full-time, permanent job, can be a challenge for those trying to get their foot in the door. That's where money like the non-repayable tools grant comes in. Between \$400 and \$1,000 is available to help get apprentices equipped to do their training.

There is also money out there to help cover basic living expenses when apprentices need to get time off the job site to attend classes or training.

All of that money is there, but it does no good if nobody knows about it. College students can visit their financial aid website and get information about all the grants that they might be eligible for. If we pass this bill, Skilled Trades Ontario will have the exact same information for apprentices. The government has allocated this money, and I know the Minister of Labour wants to see it all spent.

The final principle in the skilled trades strategy is supporting employers and encouraging them to take on more apprentices. We've set aside money for that too. Our \$23-million Achievement Incentive Program will provide 11,000 employers with up to \$4,000 per apprentice who reaches key training milestones. Not only will this encourage more employers to get involved, but it will also motivate them and help their apprentices succeed, which is very important. For small businesses and those who are self-employed, this funding can make a huge difference. The bottom line is that we can lower the ratio and simplify the process to make it easier to access apprenticeship, but without employers, the system, plain and simple, falls apart.

I'm going to wrap it up by touching on something that, as a father of young children, I'm very passionate about. I want to see more of a focus on our trades in elementary school. What better way to have our kids see themselves in the trades than to have them try out things when they are young? This is what we do all across Europe. It works very, very well. We've got three youth advisers who are helping our government do just that. By the time students get to high school, they probably have some kind of idea of what they want to do, of course. But before they get there, we need to plant a seed in their minds that the trades are a viable option.

I've had the opportunity to chat with my local school boards, particularly the Waterloo Catholic District School Board. I've visited St. Benedict Catholic Secondary

School and have seen first-hand their tech classroom and facilities. They have a remarkable program that includes construction and manufacturing. By working with local employers and Conestoga College, they pull on the community to give their students good hands-on experience, all before they even finish high school. Their students have successfully landed apprenticeships and set themselves up just based on their high school courses. It's those kinds of opportunities that, as a parent, I want to see my children have.

Again, in order to really promote careers to students, we have to start in the younger grades. By the time they get to grade 9, we've lost over half of them. They have already decided on a different career path. That is what these youth advisers are going to be working on, and I look forward to supporting them and, of course, the Minister of Labour and all our friends in education.

Our work to promote skilled trades and support our apprentices is far from over. We've got 15 years to make up for. But it is a challenge that the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development is up for. We've seen progress already. The numbers don't lie. There are more apprentices coming online every year. Under-represented groups are starting to join the trades in increased numbers. That is in just three short years. Filling the skilled labour gap is no small feat, but it is a job that we, on this side of the House—and I encourage members on that side of the House—do not to shy away from.

I hope the members opposite, who consistently go on about supporting the workers of this province, will see the merit in this legislation and support it.

These are exciting, viable careers. It is about time we stopped making people jump through hoops to get a good-paying job that they are passionate about. The next generation, employers and all of Ontario are counting on us to make important changes, like the one we have before us today.

Thank you to the minister and his entire team for developing this piece of legislation. I hope that we can all find some common ground to go ahead and support this in the very near future.

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

1530

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: As with my colleagues on this side of the House, I absolutely think it's so important to encourage young people to go into the trades, if that's what they want. They're fabulous jobs.

I have four incredible kids. One of them said, "There's no way I'm going to study anything academic. I want to learn how to make the trucks on the bottom of skateboards and longboards." He did that, and now he has a longboard shop. It's actually one of the small businesses that is thriving during COVID-19, as people look for alternative modes of transportation.

So I couldn't support the aims more.

It seems as though there are certain aspects of the bill that folks in the trades already feel could use a tweaking. Would you be open to that tweaking, as it goes through the committee process?

Mr. Mike Harris: Congratulations to her family and everybody who has been out there doing a fantastic job throughout the pandemic. There are some bright spots, luckily, that we can point to. It's really great to hear that news.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is going to have an opportunity to come to committee. Obviously, there will be an opportunity for the government or members in the official opposition or the independent parties to file amendments. We certainly welcome anything that they feel is important and that they want to try to add to this bill in a constructive manner.

I will say, though, that this bill hasn't just come out of left field. This has been something that we've been working on for quite some time. Quite a bit of consultation has already gone into it with labour leaders, with different community groups and, of course, with people who are already in the trades and people who are looking to get into the trades.

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that my father spoke about a lot, prior to my getting elected and then right after, was the College of Trades and how frustrated he was with it. My father is an electrician and has been working as a tradesperson his entire life, supporting his family. So when we decided to end the College of Trades and finally make those decisions, he was so pleased, as were many other electricians and tradespeople around the province.

My question to the member is—and I listened intently to his speech—can the member reassure the House and explain how this new agency that we are looking to build will not end up with the same problems the Ontario College of Trades had?

Mr. Mike Harris: To the member from Carleton: That's a really important question.

Obviously, there's no sense in developing a new program that's just going to replace an old one and then fall back into the same ways that that program was before.

One of the key things when we look at how this program and this bill have been developed is the way that this new agency is going to be structured. It will be structured as a crown corporation, but it will still be under the oversight—and this is what's really important and the big differentiator between the way the Ontario College of Trades was set up and what we're looking to do now, is that there will be ministerial oversight. Quite frankly, that really didn't exist before. I think that's the most important part of this bill, when we talk about not falling into the same trappings that we had—was that we're modernizing, and we're being accountable and moving forward.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the member for his presentation. Actually, I always enjoy listening to him because he's a great speaker and presents his ideas very well.

I was hoping he would be able to answer the question I have about some clarification regarding how this bill will

impact the certification and maintenance of the licences. Previously, trades and professionals had questions about the fees. You talked a little bit about it and talked a little bit about the college and the problems that people are facing. Who will be collecting the fees? And can you talk a little bit more about the cost of certification, as well as the maintenance of licences?

Mr. Mike Harris: I really appreciate the member from Scarborough Southwest's comments.

I'm certainly not an expert when it comes to how the rules and regulations of this are actually all going to be put forward, but I think, when we look at the way things were done previously, there are a few things that are going to be different this time around.

When we talk about training and fees and different things that are associated with the way the college had done things previously—the way that we're looking forward is being able to modernize a lot of those interactions. That was one of the biggest problems I heard from friends, constituents and folks around Waterloo region—that the interactions people had with the College of Trades were extremely frustrating. They didn't understand where their fees were going. They didn't understand how their training was supposed to be laid out. With this new, one-window approach, I think it's going to be much more streamlined. People are going to understand things much better, and it's going to be much clearer as to what they have to do moving forward to keep—

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

Ms. Jane McKenna: The name says it all: Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act.

We all know that the skilled trades have not been at the table for many, many years, unfortunately. We see now, as the member from Kitchener–Conestoga said, that we're going to have a quarter of people retiring—so you don't want to be in that situation at all. Everyone in this whole House does know that it was cumbersome to navigate and people were stressed trying to figure that out. So we didn't have the people getting into the skilled trades because of the stigma, but also because there was no one-stop shop; everything was all over the place.

I have a question for the member. Thank you for your speech. It was fabulous. Do you not agree that we need, finally, in the 20th century, a one-stop shop?

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you to the member from Burlington.

Really, the one-stop shop is the crux of this whole legislation. As I was just saying to the member opposite, being able to understand when your licence expires, being able to make sure that you can stay current, being able to make sure that you don't have to go to three or four places to find out when you have to go for your next training period—being able to coordinate that through a one-window approach, in my mind, is invaluable.

Quite frankly, the previous government had an opportunity to fix these problems, and they just ignored them. I would welcome them to stand up here today and refute that; I don't think they're going to, but I hope they do.

I think that we have a real opportunity to effect some change for the current system and, more importantly, for the next generation of tradespeople who are coming forth here in the province.

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

Mr. Gurratan Singh: We've seen the issues when it comes to having boards like Tarion and the impact that it has on consumer rights, and the fact that when the boards lack accountability and lack independence, it ultimately hurts the consumer.

Now we're seeing a bill being put forward that has, potentially, the same threat, with the board around Skilled Trades Ontario. What assurances can the government put forward that they're not going to allow for the same sort of lack of integrity that existed in Tarion, with this board?

Mr. Mike Harris: As the member opposite may or may not know, I sat on the committee that our proposed Tarion legislation went through, and we've had an opportunity to actually fix a lot of the problems with Tarion. We know that system wasn't working very well, and we went ahead and made those changes.

We also know that the Ontario College of Trades, quite frankly, isn't working well—so here we are making real, substantive changes to the way that the structure of the Ontario College of Trades is done.

The key part of this is the ministerial oversight. I was alluding to that earlier. Having the minister directly involved in the accountability process of an independent agency is very important, so that they don't stray too far from their mandate, as we saw with what was happening with Tarion. We won't let it happen again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Sarnia–Lambton, if he has a quick question, can pose it.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I just wanted to comment that I probably had more experience with the College of Trades than—well, I won't say any other member in here. In Sarnia–Lambton, the College of Trades shut down more work. They would come in—they were real bully boys; sorry for the gender—and they would demand to see your College of Trades card, and if you didn't have it, they shut the work down. They had no support in the general industry. I'll let you comment on that.

Mr. Mike Harris: As I said, we're going to make some great changes here, not only for employers and businesses, but obviously for the people who are looking to get involved in the trades here in the province of Ontario.

1540

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

Mr. Jamie West: It's always an honour to stand in the House and bring the voice from Sudbury and the north.

Thank you, as well, to the member opposite for talking about the north. It was a good perspective.

We're here to debate Bill 288, Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act. At a glance, it looks like all we're really doing is replacing the old College of Trades with the new Skilled Trades Ontario—and before I get

heckled, that's how it looks at a glance. I think the intent really is to improve the system. Through the debate that I've heard and through the briefing notes that I've read, it seems like there's a decent effort to try to make it better, because there were a lot of complaints about the old College of Trades system.

Will we get it right? I'd say, hopefully, because honestly, a lot of people are counting on us to get it right. The College of Trades wasn't working very well. People were having issues finding a trade school. Most people know how to apply for a college or university, but finding the door for a trade is pretty difficult. Hopefully, this will make it easier.

Bill 47 dissolved the College of Trades back in November 2018. That was almost two and a half years ago, which is a long time. They've been doing consultations all that time—hopefully, good consultations, solid consultations to give the bill.

We've had a shortage of tradespeople for a long time. I got elected in 2018; I know we were talking about it then, but I don't know if we were talking about it before. I worked at a smelter. I worked with a lot of tradespeople, and we knew a long time ago that we were running out of tradespeople. You would have tradesmen come in during a shutdown or we'd bring in people from across Canada to help with a shutdown so we could do a mountain of work in a really limited amount of time. You would have people come in there who were really old. They were solid workers, but you knew that, sooner or later, they—generally, guys—would want to retire, and so your back was against the wall.

One of the stats I heard earlier is that one in three are 55 or older. When you think about people who went to trade school, who got into the trades, a lot of them started out of high school. So if you started at 18, 19 or 20 and you put in 30 years, you might be thinking about retiring, and you might be 50 years old. Trades are good-paying jobs, so it's an option for a lot of people. My stepdad was eligible to retire when he was 51; he did a couple of victory laps, because none of his friends could. He just waited for his best friends so they could go golfing together. The reality is, a lot of tradespeople can leave. When you think that one in three—I think earlier I heard about a quarter—are ready for retirement, the government is looking to replace 100,000 people or bring 100,000 people in. When a third to a quarter of your workforce could just walk out the door and pull the pin, that's scary for any industry—and not just when they walk away. Those tradespeople with 30 years, some with 40 years—when they walk out the door, they bring 30 to 40 years of experience with them. That's 30 to 40 years of experience they can share with apprentices that really would benefit all of us long term.

I talked about the clock ticking. It has been two and a half years. I really hope it's solid consultation. From the notes, it looks like it has been decent consultation. I'm just concerned because sometimes there's consultation and it seems to be, "We consulted with all these people and here's what we're doing," and you can't always connect

the dots. I haven't really had the opportunity to follow up. I know that our critic for trades, the member from Niagara Falls, is connecting with the different unions to follow up and get feedback. So I hope it's very solid. It seems like in the debate, there's a real attempt to fix the trades system and make it a lot better. So I'm always optimistic.

How did we get here? We have to be honest. As a province, Ontario has scared people away from the trades. I remember in high school, just as an example, my best friend loved auto shop. I knew nothing about cars. I can you tell you if your tire is flat. I can tell you if you're out of gas. I can tell you if your door is open. That's it. So I wanted to take shop and I signed up for it, and for the first time, I got called to guidance. My guidance counsellor said, "Why are you taking this? You have good grades. You're going to university." That was a reality for a lot of people. There was a stigma that shop was for people who didn't have good grades; it was the default.

Ironically, I went to college and then I went to university, and I paid for college and university while working as a labourer. I couldn't find a job in my field because of the big recession that happened when I graduated, and I ended up taking on an apprenticeship as an electrician. My journeyman was about three years younger than me. He was driving the truck, and I was carrying about 20 grand in student loans. So I can really talk to how—it's a pretty decent roll, right?—and we could have avoided this.

And then—I don't know if it started with Mike Harris; I know it continued under the Liberals—we started losing shops. More and more, schools got rid of shops. Sudbury Secondary—in the old days, it was Sheridan Tech; I think it has had a couple of names since then—basically was just shops. When my parents were growing up, it was the school that you went to because it had the most shops and the best shops. But every high school had shops, growing up, and little by little—there's maybe a handful. I don't know how solid they are, even the ones that are there. I haven't been to every high school, but I know more and more of them have diminished and gone away, and I think that's the same story across the province. That's going to be difficult, as well.

We've gotten to this point now where trades aren't glamorous. There's still that stigma that we have to work on. I know on the opposite side of the House, we've talked about this very openly.

My son Sam, for example, was graduating from high school. He basically had good grades—not the best grades, but probably around an 80, decent grades. He was trying to figure out what he wanted to do, and he was looking through different courses in colleges and universities. I talked to him one night and I said, "The only classes you ever talk about are your shop classes. It's the only time I hear you talking about what you're working on. It's the only thing that seems to really, really interest you. The other stuff is—you're doing work and you're doing fine. But when you talk about"—he had to build a house for shop, frame out a house, and he wanted to make one with no corners; all rounded. I said, "That's what seems to pique your interest." So when he started to look at shops,

my wife—and one of the members talked about this as well, for her son—was worried that maybe he should go to university and then take on a trade afterwards as a fallback, as a cushion. It's weird, because my wife's dad is an electrician and is very, very successful. He had his own business for many, many years; they had a very comfortable life because of it. So she knows these are good jobs. But there's still a societal stigma. It didn't hang on for a long time—but it's just the instinct. We've got to break that instinct.

One of the problems we have is not just the stigma, but that because the stigma is there, a lot of people don't even know trades; most people, I don't think, could name more than five.

So how do you get young people to become interested in becoming millwrights if they don't know what a millwright is? Do you know what a millwright is, Speaker? The millwright is the one who owns a camp, a quad, a truck, and they're paying off their house.

That's what you've got to start telling kids. These are good jobs, solid jobs. They pay well. They're rewarding.

I tell you, I did my apprenticeship as an electrician, and I still drive around town and point out stuff that I built. Some of the stuff—there's no way it lasted this long, just wear and tear, but it's still mine; those are my lights.

So there's lots of work that you would have to do if you want to save the trades. You've got to bring shops back into school. You've got to educate parents and guidance counsellors.

I had a meeting with the carpenters' union. It was through the summer, when we were having these Zoom meetings with all the different work groups about COVID-19. One of the comments they said is that when they meet with guidance counsellors who don't know much about the trades—when they have students come, they take a photo of the student, and the student is holding his first paycheque. They said that's a good way to educate somebody. I think it works for parents, as well—because of that stigma that we have to break down.

We have to attract people to the trades. Earlier, I was mentioning attracting women to the trades. If you think it's bad for men and boys to be interested because of the stigma, just imagine as women—how we're just set up that these are men's jobs and these are women's jobs. I know that's dissolving, but it still exists. I know that the member from Nickel Belt has a family member who is an electrician. I used to work with her at the smelter. It was new. The smelter, for a long time, was mainly guys on the floor and mainly women in the offices. That broke down in probably the mid-1980s. You had more and more women in blue-collar jobs, to the point where, when I was a furnace operator, I would go for training and I would meet people from other places, and they would say, "What's it like working with women?" It's a 20-minute drive from my house to the smelter; it's not a fly-in, fly-out camp, where it's super unusual. I'd say that it's like everywhere else in town. But I have 17 years of seniority. It's not that long ago that we started introducing women, getting them interested in the trades. It's important,

because we have, like they said earlier—100,000 jobs was the number that I heard quoted. We have to attract people back to the trades.

1550

Nicole, who works in my office—Nicole, who, if I'm at the right place at the right time, it's Nicole who set it up. Like many of us, we rely on our staff like that. She has a toddler, and there are some days when she talks about going past a construction site and just spending, basically, from the time they leave their house to the time he needs a nap or gets hungry—just watching construction. You can't walk past a construction site with a toddler. The same thing happens when people are 10, 12, maybe 15, but somewhere in there they lose interest. So it's not that we have to convince people. We've got to stop training people that it's not interesting. Somewhere along the line—because in a lot of trades, you get to do some cool stuff. We have to train them that it's still interesting, and we have to do it fast.

Speaker, like I said earlier, there's a huge chunk of tradespeople ready to retire. That's a lot of people who can walk out the door with a lot of knowledge.

I was an apprentice. I didn't finish; I got interested in the Internet and high-speed, and I went to work for Bell. But the people I worked with—an electrician is not an electrician. The person who is a journeyman, the person who is a Red Seal, the person with 10 years, 20 years, 30 years, when you watch—I have this weird habit. Sometimes I stare at lights because I think about how to install them. Honestly, it would be a real pain—and I feel bad for whoever has to change the light bulbs here, because I can't imagine you can do it without scaffolding. Whenever I'm somewhere, I look at stuff, and probably everyone who is an electrician does—where you stare at conduit.

Mr. John Vanthof: They come down.

Mr. Jamie West: Oh, maybe I'll apply. I didn't know they lowered.

It popped in my head: When I worked for Bell, there was an expression we used, "banana feet." It's when you stood on a ladder for too long and your feet would slowly curl over. I had that image of getting up there.

When you see someone who is a master at their craft, if you see a welder who can really solidly weld—and you actually need a good welder to show you what a good weld is compared to a bad one, if you don't know. When you see that nice ripple effect, it's amazing what they can do. Or in my field, an electrician—when you see somebody who can bend pipe just by looking. I can bend pipe, but I'm going to cut it about 100 times and use little fittings to make it fit the way it's supposed to. But there are some people who are amazing at it.

I talked earlier about how when you lose that worker, you lose all the apprentices who are going to learn from that worker, all the tricks of the trade. Even that expression, "the tricks of the trade"—all those little things that are going to be learned walk out the door when that person retires. There's a real opportunity.

The quicker we do it, the better, but we've got to get it right. I understand; it feels slow, two and a half years. But

if you want to get it right, it's better to be slow and right than quick and wrong. I'm optimistic that we're going to get it right. I think most of this is sketch work. It's a sort of framework of how to go forward so there's opportunity. I think if we work together and listen really well, we can get it right.

I know in the past, the government got a reputation of ready-firing for some issues. Licence plates are a good example of that. It feels like this is a slower process, and it's going to come together very well.

This bill, basically, is a framework. I talked earlier how it's going to change the College of Trades to—I apologize; I forget the new name. I had memorized the College of Trades, because I was frustrated too—Skilled Trades Ontario.

Once this goes through—and it's going to go through. There's a majority government, and I think there's decent feedback coming through here. Once it gets through, the next step is to put everything in place by Christmastime. So you're going to have a board, and you're going to elect the CEO. Then, over the next three years, you're going to roll everything out. That worries me a little bit. I think the government wants to get this right. I've been to enough meetings with different tradespeople and lobby groups for the trades about trying to get this right, and the feedback I get is that they want to get it right. So I think that's good. But the thing I'm worried about is that there will be an election between now and the next three years, and sometimes when we change government—and we could change government; we're planning to change government.

I hear stories here about how one government is in place and they start a subway; and then another party becomes government and they fill the subway up with cement; and then another government comes in and they make plans for the subway—and it's interesting, because in Sudbury we don't have the public transit they have in Toronto. They have plans for the subway, and then another party gets elected as government and they change the plans for the subway. As a guy who has worked with all these different organizations and planning and safety and permits, I shake my head about how anything could get done or how fast it could get done.

I think about my mom, for example, when I was a kid. We took public transit. She would go to work, and I would go to daycare. I think of my mom waiting for the bus and hearing about one party or the next party scrapping previous plans and just having a hard time getting out there.

Hopefully, it goes through over the next three years. Hopefully, it's sketched out. Hopefully, we get some accountability on who the board is, who the representatives are. You need people who are doing the work to have faith in the board. If we end up with figureheads in place, then people will know that and they'll just roll their eyes. Life goes on.

I think that the College of Trades had flaws. It's maybe a little older than 10 years ago—and a lot of tradespeople I talked to saw it as inefficient and flawed; employers did, too. Employers were generally politer about it; tradespeople would generally speak their mind. It was a little bit

of what I would call industrial language. So I think there's room for opportunity. I don't know if it had to be scrapped and replaced. I don't know if it could have been fixed. Both of those, I think, are good analogies for the trades. Sometimes you just have to. Sometimes it just doesn't make sense.

I talked about getting into the trades. One of my favourite things, actually, was when you got to demolish and start from scratch. One of the places that I like to talk about when I'm thinking of places where we did work is Marymount. In Marymount, they moved a lot of the offices—sorry, Marymount is a high school. It used to be all girls, and now it's mixed. Due to low enrolment, they used one of the towers for offices for the school board, and we got to do a rebuild in there. It's very satisfying when you get to rip everything out and rebuild from scratch. I'm rarely inside that part of the building, but whenever I drive by, I see that and say, "I did that"—which is one of the things about trades that's so rewarding. Think about the work that we do as members, preparing our notes and filing. It kind of disappears. It's in our minds, and if you want, you can look through the book. You don't get to drive by and say, "That's what we did"; but with stuff like this, you do, when you're building stuff. Part of the legacy of this bill, really, is that if it comes out very well, you have that as your legacy—because we listened and we got the feedback and we moved forward.

I want to talk about how hard it is to find the door. If you're in high school and you want to go to college or you want to go to university, it's really easy; you just google it. It's complicated for a trade. So I was lucky; I didn't even know how hard it was. I was working at a bunch of odd jobs, like most kids do—in the mall and things like that—and a friend of mine's dad was looking for labourers, because the fire code had been updated. Like most things in life, people didn't upgrade their fire alarms—I'm talking about industrial settings and high schools and things like that. They didn't upgrade their fire alarms until it was due. So there was a whole bunch of work, and I was hired, basically, just to unpack things, just to open boxes and lay it out for people. I didn't get to touch anything, but I got to know what all the different tools were. I got to know what conduit was, and L16s and BX and all the different terms.

And then, when I graduated, there were no jobs. We were in a recession. We have these revolving recessions that happen all the time. And so my friend's dad said, "You should be an apprentice. You should come here." I was doing those little contracts that now have become the norm. But he invited me to become an apprentice, and if it wasn't for that, I wouldn't have found the door.

1600

I've got just a couple of seconds left. But think about the kids who are looking for the door and don't have a friend who says, "Come on. You should join me." It's really, really hard, and so I really hope this is successful, Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The first question goes to the member from Burlington.

Ms. Jane McKenna: I want to say a couple of things. I listened to you intently. You mentioned a couple of things. First of all, you said, “How do we educate people?” Well, we educate, obviously, by the numerous people—Joe Mancinelli, Patrick Dillon, James St. John, Mathew Wilson, Stephen Hamilton—all of these people who are educating the people who come to their place. I’ve been to LIUNA. What they do there is an absolutely phenomenal job. Thank you to those people, because they’re educating, plus myself.

I know I’m passionate—I’ve said this to the Speaker many times—not only as the PA but also because my son—watching him go through the system, getting out of high school. Unfortunately, he had lots of friends who just dropped out because they didn’t know they would be great with their hands.

Obviously, we’ve heard this from the member from Kitchener–Conestoga—

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

Ms. Jane McKenna: You say that they change quickly, but for 15 years, when the government across was in, everything fell by the wayside, including skilled trades. My question to you is—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Sorry, but you don’t have time to pose your question because you took too long in your preamble. But I will ask the member from Sudbury to respond to what the member from Burlington has said.

Mr. Jamie West: I can guess at what the question was. I was here yesterday, actually, when you had your debate, to the member for Burlington. It was a familiar thing for me. It actually reminded me of a conversation that my wife and I had about my son getting into the trades. The first response was, “Well, maybe that will be the back-up plan.” I don’t know if it was exactly like that for your son, but I know you said something about being a little bit surprised that he said, “I want to do this.” I think that it’s important to have the heads of unions talking to their members about joining trade schools, like he said, and different people from unions. But you also have to start at home, and you also have to start in schools, where we steer people into it.

I saw you pushing the button, so I’m going to sit down.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Oh, I was going to give you a 10-second warning.

The next question?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I also listened very intently to my colleague the member from Sudbury, for his presentation. I know that getting young people into the skilled trades is such an important initiative. I know that many young people don’t have access to this. And this now, setting up, again, this board of Skilled Trades Ontario—the question of who will sit on that board is not clear, and who will actually determine the scope of practice and what constitutes a compulsory trade. These are the challenges I see in this bill. But how do we get young people into the skilled trades right now, not three years from today?

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member from York South–Weston. I think it goes back to just educating and informing. I met with the Hammer Heads the summer before the pandemic. It’s an amazing organization, because, like I said during the debate, a lot of people can’t name more than five different skills. You go to a group like Hammer Heads—and I don’t know the timelines, but they go from one trade to the next, and you’re exposed to all the different trades. That piques your interest, and you have an idea of what you really like or what happens on a job site. I think that’s one of the things that works really well.

I think another thing, as well, when we talk about skilled trades—and we need to move on to that. There is more than just the trades work. There’s more than the blue collar work. There’s the office work, and there’s the planning and building and accounting. There are a lot of jobs that are associated with the—

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

Mr. Jamie West: I’m good there.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): When I give you 10 seconds, you have 10 seconds to conclude. You don’t have to do it right away.

The next question goes to the member from Essex, Kent and Leamington.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Chatham-Kent.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Chatham-Kent. I’m sorry.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: To the member from Sudbury: Back in the fall of 2020, I attended a grand opening of a program called OYAP—O-Y-A-P—which stands for the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program. What it does is it connects students with opportunities in skilled trades. Of course, these were high school students apprenticing at this particular point at the carpenters’ union local 494 in Windsor. It was put on by the Windsor-Essex district school board. It’s a great program, an absolutely great program. And again, it’s a great opportunity for high school students to learn about carpentry. By the way, there’s a good mix of both young men and women in this particular course.

My question to you: Does the member from Sudbury know of any such programs for students in his riding? And if not, would you be willing to talk with school boards and local unions to get something rolling?

Mr. Jamie West: Yes, I think it’s a great initiative. I’m not aware of any specific ones. I know the carpenter’s union, the brotherhood of carpenters, have an excellent training facility and they do training up just north of Sudbury, close to Azilda. They also have sessions where they do the work to train the people and the stuff they build goes to charity, so they’ll help build a shed or whatever for a certain charity, which I think is an excellent idea. I would absolutely—I think it’s important. There are many of us—I was going to say his name; the MPP for Mushkegowuk—James Bay is a tradesperson and the MPP for Timmins is a tradesperson. People who have worked in the trades or people who have family who work in the trades, like the

member from Burlington—I think it's important for us, as MPPs, as leaders in our community to talk about how important these jobs are and to really spread the word.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Beaches–East York.

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: I so enjoyed the presentation that my colleague from Sudbury made. I was hanging on every word; it was like storytime.

I think a lot about questions of stigma in all sorts of different ways and how you go about changing them, how we change them as a society. I'm just wondering, other than teaching at school and having the idea that it needs to be better at home, do you have any thoughts about how to go about taking away that stigma? What could we do, as a society? What policies could we put in place that would change that stigma?

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to my colleague. I think there are a couple of things. There's the main stigma about trade school and blue-collar work and what that means. You've got to get down to the roots of all labour has dignity and all labour is important. But also, when you're talking about a job that pays really well—where I come from, I think you're looking at about \$70,000 as your base wage if you're in a trade, and that's without overtime or any kind of bonus. So these are solid, solid jobs.

I think as well you have to look at expanding and getting rid of the stigma for—in my debate, I talked about women and girls, and also people you don't traditionally see in the trades, at least in Canada: people of colour in trades, people who identify as a different sexuality and gender in trades. I think having conversations about that and having a safe place for people, inviting people in, is essential.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Sarnia–Lambton has a question.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I liked the speech. I heard the whole 20 minutes; it was great. When you talked about student guidance counsellors, it takes me back to—I shouldn't tell you here, but over 50 years ago, a young guy I knew was in high school. The guidance counsellor was a great guy, but he was an English teacher. I think guidance back then was something you did to fill in. They were great, those guys. They talked about university, but as far as the real trades and giving people advice, they didn't have a lot of help.

So what I really enjoyed, and I'd like to know your comments—I heard the minister the other day say that this September, the Ministry of Labour is going to put a major marketing program forward and they're going to be in all of the schools, promoting the trades. I think that's such a great idea. I would just like to know, as a former tradesman yourself, what you think of that kind of format.

Mr. Jamie West: Yes, I think it's a good idea. We need to talk about it. We need to show people that these are good jobs. We need to show them what can happen.

There was a young lady in Sudbury—I can't remember if she was Miss Teen Sudbury or Miss Teen Greater Sudbury, but she was in love with welding. She had this crown that she had welded herself, her own personal style

on it. That opportunity of sharing with people the things you love, the same way that people share about hockey or literature or anything else that they love, I think those are important.

I also think that we have to figure out a way to get people who are tradespeople who are retiring and maybe don't want to be on the tools anymore into schools to talk about it or to provide advice, maybe to become shop teachers when we reopen shops, and what's the path forward. The path to get into trades school is tricky with the old system. It's probably as tricky for somebody who went to trades school to become a teacher. And so, what doors can we open to make it easier for them?

1610

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Well, we don't have enough time for a short question because we won't have enough time for a short answer, so it's further debate.

Mr. Dave Smith: I've heard pretty much all the speeches on this now. I was here in the chamber yesterday listening to it, and there's been a lot of statistics that have been given out, and when I first said that I would talk to this bill, I thought I'd talk a lot about the statistics, and I will touch on some of them, but I think the member from Sudbury made some really good points and I'm going to steal some of the inspiration from his speech, actually.

I went to university because, when I was in high school, that's what you were supposed to do. Now, I remember as a kid, my grandfather—he played a very big influence in my life when I was younger. He worked at Corby's just outside of Belleville in Corbyville, and he was a third-class engineer. I have his certificate hanging in my office at home. He was really proud of the fact that he had a grade 4 education, but had gone on and, working at Corby's, apprenticed to become a third-class engineer. He knew everything that there was to know about the boiler system they had there and how they would make alcohol. He would always point to it and talk about how that provided him with a life that could provide for his family. He said he knew that when he got that certificate, he'd made it, because he could provide for his family for the rest of his life without any concern. This was almost 40 years ago.

When I was in high school, though, there was a devaluing of doing anything that got your hands dirty. As I'd left school after I had gotten an education at university, I'd gone on and worked for a couple of software companies at that point. I had moved on to work in a couple of school boards and then had gone back into software.

In 2003, I wrote an application for the Ontario school boards for experiential learning, and I got immersed in co-operative education and, in particular, OYAP, the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program. I remember the College of Trades being brought out and how there were obstacles that were put in place for kids to get involved in experiential learning and for kids, students, to go on into the trades. There was still a focus, there was a push, that if you wanted to succeed, you needed to go to university.

I remember distinctly one of the changes that the College of Trades made, because it didn't make sense to

me and I had to modify the application. I had to modify my software to make this accommodation for it. If you wanted to be a bricklayer, or if you wanted to apprentice as a cinder-block layer, what the requirements were at the time—you needed a grade 8 education to apprentice, and when the College of Trades came in, they changed that. If you were under 25, you couldn't apprentice in it unless you had a minimum of a grade 11 education, but you had to go on to college and take certain college courses. One of them was the college communications course, and part of that curriculum was dealing with media. For the life of me—it's 18 years later and I still can't figure out why a cinder-block layer has to know how to deal with media, how to conduct an interview with a TV reporter, but that's the type of thing the College of Trades put in.

They changed the whole focus of apprenticeships. It wasn't about experiential learning. It wasn't about learning what to do, taking the experience of someone who has been doing it for 30 years and getting those best practices. It was how they could make it academic, how they could change it so that, at the high school level, the guidance teachers, the other teachers in the school, could send you down the path of going to college rather than going out and getting a career, rather than learning how to earn. Anyone who has a trade has a career for life. There is always going to be a demand for it. There will come a time, I'm sure—and with apologies to the member from Brampton East or West, I'm not sure which he's from, and my colleague from Carleton, as I look over here, the lawyers in the room—I don't need a lawyer, but I can't imagine a time in my lifetime when a plumber isn't going to come in handy once in a while for us. You have a career for life if you have a skilled trade.

I remember, in particular, one co-op conference that I had gone to. There were a number of different speakers and there was someone who stood up and talked about heading off to school and being part of this specific type of job, a career path that was based at a university. He talked about how he could start at \$70,000 a year and he could make \$120,000 a year in that type of a job, and I remember distinctly the crane operator who got up there and said, "You know what? That's really good. How long did it take you to go to school for that?" The guy said it was six years before he came out with the education he needed to do that, and the crane operator said, "Well, I took four years, I got paid the entire time and I make double that now. Why would you bother going into the program that you're talking about when you can do this and there's a demand for it?" And he's right; there is a demand for that type of thing.

When we were first elected, within a year, we made some changes to some of the ministries—the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. Apprenticeship was part of colleges and universities. It was embedded in that. Previously, a previous government had referred to it as the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development. We made a seismic shift. We moved training out into labour, because it's about having a career, and that seemingly insignificant change signalled where we were

going with it. We were going to move to career-based training. We were moving to where we were showing value in that apprenticeship.

One of the things that this bill does is it removes the Ontario College of Trades. It's now Skilled Trades Ontario. There's a key to that, because it is no longer about academia. It's no longer about academia. We're not signalling to these kids, these high school students, these young adults who have gone off and decided to come back and go into a skilled trade—we're not saying to them anymore that this is about academics. What we're saying is this is about skills. The focus is now on skill development. It's on creating a career for yourself. It's on bettering yourself.

I go back to that one change that the Ontario College of Trades made with cinder block layers. Why? Why do you need to know how to have an interview with a TV reporter, with a newspaper reporter when you are building homes, when you're building apartments, when you're building warehouses? I've yet to see Global show up with their TV crew and do a really great, sexy, sleek thing about laying cinder block, because they don't. Even our media looks at it and has devalued a lot of that.

This bill changes the entire narrative about it.

As my colleague from Kitchener-Conestoga said, when you're in high school and you want to go off to college or university, there's one place that you go to find out about OSAP, to find grants, to apply for bursaries, to get into school so that you can go on and improve your education that way. Everybody knows where to go. But if you wanted to be in a trade, it wasn't a straightforward path. It was really difficult. There was no place to go to get guidance on where you could get funding for it, how you could make it easier.

1620

We're changing that. It's a one-stop shop. You can go in and you can find out what kinds of grants are available for you.

Tool grants—imagine that. To be an apprentice, you need to have the appropriate tools. We've got a program in place that's going to help you with that.

When you leave that workplace and you have to go to the school-based side of it, we've got supports for you for that, and it's the same place that you go to get the information on it. So it makes it easy—it's not that barrier anymore. We're trying everything possible to make it easier.

Just last weekend, I was talking to a constituent of mine who owns a marina—a great guy. He bought the marina in 1984. He said to me that he was 23 years old and he was full of vinegar and something else. He came up with the \$84,000 at the time to buy it, and he has had it since then. He's a marine mechanic. He was talking to me about the challenges in his trade—because it's not a restricted trade. Anybody can hang up the shingle and say that they can fix boat motors, but there's a real skill to it. There are differences between a Mercury and an Evinrude or a Yamaha and a Suzuki engine. He's considered to be one of the experts in our area for Evinrude. Evinrude used to

be in Peterborough. OMC, for more than 70 years, had a plant in Peterborough, and he's one of the few guys in Ontario now who's considered to be an expert in this. He said to me, "Dave, I'm getting to the point now where I have to look at a succession plan. I've got a son, but all through school, I kept telling him, 'Go to university. Go to university. Go to university.' He doesn't have any interest in doing what I did. I make a really good living, but the problem is, I can't find another marine mechanic to come in and take over the business. What's going to happen?"

He said something to me that I thought was really interesting. He said, "Although GM is no longer in Oshawa"—and I kind of pointed out that they're coming back. He said that there was a time, when he was a kid, when GM would take apprentices and Ford would take apprentices and GE in Peterborough would take apprentices. And then, for whatever reason, there was a shift, and nobody wanted to take on apprentices. He said that there was no incentive for employers to do it. He said that he would welcome the idea of having an apprentice work there, but he said that the problem is, he invests all of that money in the individual, and then they go off to work for a large corporation. He said, "You need to find a way to put an incentive back in for employers to do it."

One of the things that we're talking about now is a \$4,000 incentive for employers—so we're incentivizing that employer to invest in that student.

There was some opposition yesterday, in one of the speeches, about the trade ratios that we had changed—at one point, it was 3 to 1 in some trades; it's now 1 to 1. There was pushback on that to say that what we're doing is, we're making an unsafe workplace. But what's lost on it—and coming from a rural riding—is that there are small companies like my marina operator, who is just the one mechanic. If it was 3 to 1, he'd never be able to take on an apprentice. We have shown that we're focusing on getting people into these career-based jobs, because it makes a big difference for them. When we changed the ratio to 1 to 1, the small plumbers in my area were able to take on an apprentice.

Carpenters are a great example of this. My son is 24, really just a—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Stop the clock, please.

Pursuant to standing order 50(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. The debate will therefore be deemed adjourned, unless the deputy House leader directs the debate to continue.

I recognize the member for Barrie–Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you, Speaker. Please continue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Debate continues. I return to the member from Peterborough–Kawartha.

Please restart the clock.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was talking about my son, who's 23; he'll be 24 this year. He's a great kid—not to pat myself on the back, but I think we've done a pretty good job with him. He has an honours degree from university, and he has gone back to teachers' college. He wants to be a kindergarten teacher.

What was interesting about it is, last summer, he was talking about one of his buddies, his friend—I won't name who he is, because I don't want to single him out and haven't asked his permission to name him. All through high school, guidance counsellors, teachers, even friends of his, all figured he'd amount to nothing because they said he wasn't book-smart. He apprenticed right out of high school as a carpenter. He's a framer, bought his own house, bought a new truck this past summer, just got engaged—a real success story.

My son said to me this past summer, "Maybe I did it wrong. Maybe I should have followed" this gentleman's "career path," because right out of high school he knew what he wanted to do, he got a job, he got paid while he was going to school. Now he owns a house, he owns a new truck. He's engaged—he's got a wife on the way. He's starting his family. He's six months older than my son, and my son still has another year left of university. He said, "I'm going to be paying 20,000 bucks this year to go to school, and my buddy got paid to go to school. So who was the one who was smart and who was the one who wasn't?"

I think when you look at what has happened in high school, we have had so much of a focus on sending kids to university, sending kids off to college, and not valuing what the skilled trades can do—what they can do for you and what you can do for them.

One in three journeypersons now is over the age of 55. How many people are going to be retiring? How many people are going to continue to work because they can? A lot of these skilled trades are things where you don't have to retire at the mandatory 65 or 67. You can continue doing it as long as you want. As long as you are able to do it, you have an opportunity to do it. So if it's something you love, why not do it?

I had some work done in my house four summers ago. Four summers ago, I had a drywaller come and do some stuff for me. What he was able to do in one day would have taken me probably a week. I think I'm fairly handy, but he knew exactly what he was doing and was really, really good at it—money well spent. When you find that skilled tradesperson who can do those things quickly and do them correctly—it's invaluable to have a few of those guys as your friends when you want to get something done.

There has been some comment that this has happened too quickly, that we haven't done enough consultation on it, but there has been consultation with LIUNA, with Merit, with chambers of commerce—all feeding back in, saying that this is something that's going to be good for Ontario, that this is something we needed to do, and, really, why wouldn't we? We've been in power now for just under three years. We have had these conversations with all these unions, with all of these different organizations that support skilled trades, and they've said to us

continuously, all throughout our time here, that it was difficult to get into a trade, it was difficult to navigate the system, it was a challenge for our youth to be able to do this.

The average age of an apprentice is in the mid-20s now—so we're not getting those kids coming out of high school; we're getting them, as the member from Sudbury talked about, as the fallback, because for so long, there has been an emphasis that skilled trades aren't valuable; that skilled trades aren't something you want to go into; that if you get your hands dirty, if you have to change your clothes when you get home, that's not a job that you want.

Well, I'm going to partially agree with it—because it's not a job; it's a career. It's something that's going to carry you for your entire life. It's something that's going to support your entire family for as long as you want to.

The more emphasis that we can put on skilled trades, the more opportunities that we give our youth to go into that, the better our province is going to be, because 25% of the jobs in the next 10 years are going to be based in skilled trades.

1630

So I am proud that our government has put this bill forward, and I look forward to seeing everyone support it when it comes up to the vote.

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

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Peterborough—Kawartha.

One of the things he talked about—and I apologize if he saw me giggling—was getting drywall done in his house. He said that he's handy—but not that handy—in that sort of work. I was thinking about my wife. Once, we broke a chair, and she gave it to me, and I said, “What do you want me to do with this? Did we just meet? I'm an electrician. I don't know anything about this.” She said, “I want you to fix it.” So I put it in the garage, and I broke it into pieces with a hatchet and put it in the garbage.

One of the things he said was that if you're a tradesman, you have a career for life. So I'm just asking for support on this, because what's important—and the voice on the Conservative side is going to be louder, because you have government; you have a majority. But I'm asking for a commitment to also talk about the importance of the spinoff jobs of the trades and the other work. When you get into trades, you can move on to become—

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

Mr. Jamie West: —health and safety. Can I have support on encouraging people to talk about what else you can do after you come into trades?

Mr. Dave Smith: I think one of the things you're going to see with the portal we're putting in here is that it's going to demonstrate all of the pathways for things you can do—so, yes, you can start off in a trade, but where does that actually lead you to if you decide that you want to go on and do more with it? What we have been talking about, what we have demonstrated since we were first elected, is that we have to put that value on it. We have to show

pathways of success for all of these people who want to get into a trade. That absolutely is one of the things we will be doing—making sure that you see the pathway: “You can start with this, but here are the opportunities that it opens up, because it creates lifelong learning for you and lifelong career jobs.”

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: I enjoyed the member's dissertation with great interest.

One of the concerns we've heard many times—through the Speaker—is about the old system, OCOT, and this new proposed crown agency called Skilled Trades Ontario. Could the member speak about some of the difficulties in the past and how he expects this new system will work?

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much for the question.

There was a perfect example that was brought up about the challenges with OCOT. The OCOT inspectors would go to a job site and they would look—you had to have your card, and if you didn't have the card, then there would be a fine. Well, imagine what it's like, then, when you're a high school student on a co-op placement and you go in there. The College of Trades doesn't issue you a card, but you've got to demonstrate to the inspector when they come in that you're a high school student and you're there on an OYAP placement. How we got around that was that we actually created something that was printed off when their PPLP was created and printed, so that they had something they could give to the Ontario College of Trades to show that they were a high school student who was doing it.

That is a bureaucratic barrier that does nothing for learning in the trades. That's one of the things that we're getting rid of by getting rid of the College of Trades—that bureaucracy that did nothing but create challenges.

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

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Thanks to the member from Peterborough—Kawartha. I listened to his presentation intently, and I agree that skilled trades are very important, well-paying jobs.

We need to attract women into skilled trades. We need to attract Black, racialized and First Nations into trades. We need to put in place actual measures that ensure that we attract and recruit specifically from these communities. Is there a set of targets that this bill sets out that targets them?

Mr. Dave Smith: I liken back to a movie I once saw—there's a line in it that I think is a great line: “Green money doesn't know what race you are.” Green money doesn't know what gender you are.

When you're a skilled tradesperson and you're doing this work, you're doing exceptional work that you are very well compensated for, and so you should be.

What we're going to be doing with the new focus is making sure that we have that full promotion, all the way down to kindergarten, so that everyone has an opportunity to see the value of experiential learning and how they can

move towards a career in skilled trades. We're starting all the way back in kindergarten.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Our government has said many times that we want more skilled tradespeople to fill the gaps in Ontario's workforce.

Can my colleague please explain how the proposed legislative changes will attract more people to the skilled trades?

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much for that question.

It is something that has been a challenge all the way along. What we saw under the previous government was that there was a reduction in people going into skilled trades. Why? Because there wasn't a clear pathway.

The Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development has talked about how, when he looked at that map, it looked like the subway system in Tokyo.

What we're talking about now is a clear and concise path—an education program that starts all the way back in elementary school, to promote skilled trades, to bring people into them and make it easier for someone to get into them; having a grant program, because we recognize you're going to have to buy the tools of the trade in order to actually learn; having an incentive program for employers, so that employers are incentivized to go out and say, "Give me somebody I can train," so they can head down that path of a good career.

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

Mr. Jamie West: A question that has been raised as I reach out to people about this switchover from the College of Trades to the new organization is: What became of the money that was in the College of Trades? I can speculate on it, but if the member has an idea—if it has just been reinvested or absorbed. What has happened to that money that was paid into the College of Trades?

Mr. Dave Smith: It's actually something I heard an awful lot when I was doing software for the school boards—what was being done with that 130 bucks a year that the journeypeople had to pay into the College of Trades? There was a lot of money that seemed to have been wasted. They didn't see any value in it.

What we're talking about doing now is getting rid of the College of Trades. Yes, there is going to be some stuff that will have to be cleaned up as we transition into the new one, and that will all be part of the regulations as we move forward with it.

Ms. Jane McKenna: Thank you so much for joining this debate. I appreciate it immensely.

Your son took one path, but obviously, his friend Mr. X took another path.

I want to say a couple of things here which I'm very grateful for. I appreciate all that you've said in your speech here today—because it's important for people to know that it's very cumbersome, obviously, to navigate. I know we all tried to help my son with all of it. It was exhausting for all of us—and that was five of us trying to figure that out.

Do you not agree that we needed a one-stop shop, finally, in the 21st century for this?

Mr. Dave Smith: I'm going to agree 100% with that. We needed a one-stop shop.

Since I was elected, one of the things I have discovered is that a lot of times, the bureaucracy engine of government designs programs that make perfect sense to them but that don't make any sense to the end user—the client, the customer, the taxpayer, the person who actually needs to use it. A lot of times, the programs were designed because a bureaucrat looked at it and said, "Well, I need to know this, this, this and this, and I'm going to lay it out this way because it makes sense to me"—but it doesn't make any sense whatsoever to the person who is trying to navigate that system.

This is a one-stop shop, one place. You want to know how to become an apprentice? Here's where you go. You want to find out how you fund being an apprentice? Same place to get it—one location, everything that you need.

1640

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Anybody with a quick question? Okay. It's time, then, for further debate.

Ms. Doly Begum: I'm very honoured to rise and speak to this bill. I understand that enough time has passed, so I do appreciate the opportunity to rise on behalf of the good people of Scarborough Southwest and speak briefly about some of the things that I have heard regarding this bill.

As we speak to Bill 288, Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act, I must first say, I took quite a bit of time just to understand what the bill was going to offer and see what kind of details I could offer to my constituents as well, because as I understood it, we—and I've heard quite a few members across the aisle here talk about how it's going to modernize and re-shape the system and what it's going to mean for those who are trying to get into the trades. I do appreciate the stories that I've heard, because I hear many of these stories in Scarborough, and especially in our communities where a lot of young students who are struggling in school but are extremely talented can sometimes fall through the cracks because they are not recognized for the skills they have and they're not given the right advice.

It's interesting, because we all seem to have one story at least with a family member or with a community member or a neighbour where the kid has gone to a guidance counsellor and asked to take shop, for example, and was discouraged. Either you're told, "Well, your grades are really high. Why don't you keep up with English or math or what you're studying, get into university, go into whatever they might offer?" The other side of it is, "You're failing really badly and we're not too sure what to do, so maybe we'll get you into the applied courses." This is what I remember—many of the students in the past few years, when there were the applied and the academic courses that were available for students. What it does is it discourages a lot of people.

I went to SATEC @ W.A. Porter and we had shop there. It was one of the best schools that I know of. I'm

biased; I realize that. And I do appreciate the teachers that we had who would encourage our students to find a different career path.

So what this bill does, after dissolving the College of Trades—and I do recognize there are a lot of problems, and a lot of people have come forward and talked about how difficult it was for them to get through the system, to get into a profession that they wanted for themselves. This bill is the approach to re-shaping the skilled trades industry.

But when I look at the bill, there are quite a few pieces that are missing from this bill. I do understand that we're looking into regulations. The phrase "the devil is in the details"—I'm looking forward to when those details come out because I want to make sure that the government does a good job and is accountable to the people of this province, because we have already had a bad system. You don't want to replicate the bad system. I hope that the members on the government side will understand and agree with me on that front.

One of the things that I want to highlight is that the ministry may collect fees for registration and for training and certification. I have asked this question already, and I'm going to highlight it again because it's not specified in this bill but the various trades want to know: What became of fees paid to the College of Trades before it was effectively dissolved? It's probable that the collection of the professional fees will continue under the new system of STO.

If we're looking at the new system, some of things I want the government to consider as they come up with regulations or as this bill goes into committee are, how will this bill impact the cost of certification as well as the maintenance of licensing? Previously, trades and professionals had inquiries about the fees which were not addressed. Also, who will be collecting the fees now and how will that be managed or used, for example? Because that's something that I think we can definitely look into more as we talk about the stigma or the fact that this profession, the trades, is not something that we normally encourage our kids to go into.

My colleague from Sudbury talked about the fact that it's actually a well-paid, well-respected profession. Unfortunately, when you have young kids in high school who are trying to decide on different professions, this is not something we think about. Trust me, as someone who comes from a racialized background in a community that's marginalized—in Scarborough, for example, I have a lot of parents who I hear from who want their kids to go into things like law, engineering or sciences, because those are the typical professions that you would want. This is an ongoing challenge that we talk about and we want to address, especially for our next generation.

Many of the specifics of this legislation are left to the regulations and the details, so it's really difficult for us to confidently assume that the current legislation will actually provide workers in the skilled trades with the support and the opportunities that they need. And trust me as I say this—I want to say this as a cautionary sort of note, not as negative feedback about the bill, because we have

seen this government introduce bills that have had a really poor, negative impact on the people of this province and I want to make sure that we do justice to the things that were addressed in the previous years, especially with the College of Trades.

We have seen questions from stakeholders around the leadership of the new regulatory body, as well as transparency. Another cautionary note I want to highlight here is the idea of transparency. As we look at the new system, the new body, how are we making sure that there will be enough transparency and that there will be accountability? What does the leadership look like, what does that body look like, and who will be making up that regulatory body? I think that selection process is going to be very important, and it has to also reflect the people who are on the ground and the union leaders and the labourers who have been working in the field.

On that note, I want to really recognize the Toronto community benefits program, for example, that works with the carpenters' union, that works with skilled trades. We frequently talk about and promote how we can help people in our communities get jobs and get the opportunities to learn the skills. They do a fantastic job promoting the skilled trades and they do a fantastic job helping people find employment, so a big shout-out to the Toronto community benefits program. I know that with the Eglinton Crosstown and Metrolinx construction happening, one of the things we continuously push Metrolinx or the city of Toronto to do is to make sure that all the construction work has a community benefits piece so that kids who want to learn those skills and people who are looking for employment have the opportunity to get that chance. I think it's going to be very important that we continue to encourage that, as well.

I also want to highlight my colleague the member from Sudbury's bill, Bill 266. I think it's really important to do that. He was too humble, I think, to talk about it in his own speech. The system within that bill that he proposed, which is a wage-floor increase for personal support workers, is an approach that I think we can definitely recommend here for the minister to adopt for the skilled trades as well, because that's something that's missing when we look at our workers. Depending on where they are or how much support they have, sometimes they're not recognized for the tough work, tough labour that they do.

Just like PSWs, for example, who are out there working a tough job, it's so important that we recognize every single worker for their labour and make sure that they have the pay and the benefits that they truly deserve. So I want to commend my colleague for his Bill 266, and I hope that it could be a really good way for us to kind of look into, when we look at Bill 266—sorry, this bill as well, Bill 288.

1650

I understand there are a lot of other different pieces that will be highlighted, and it is really to modernize the skilled trades program. We're also eliminating paperwork. So my next cautionary note I want to highlight here is—and trust me, we want to modernize the system. We want to be able to eliminate paperwork. We want to be able to help the

environment, help streamline the whole process. While many of the ways that this can be done—we have to make sure that that is accessible and people have the information and have access to be able to go through the application process, for example, and the information.

The reason I want to highlight that, Speaker, is because just recently, over the past few months, I have been dealing with constituents in my riding through the vaccination process. If I may just take a few seconds to explain why I'm highlighting this: It's because when we had the vaccine rollout, and it was online, we had a lot of people we were trying to target, in marginalized communities, who don't necessarily have access to the Internet or have enough computers at home or know how to operate the system. They were left behind even though we were targeting, through our vaccination programs, the hot spots where people are racialized, marginalized and affected badly in these hot spots. It really showed the disparity, the lack of access when it came to our vaccination rollout across this province, and especially in areas like Scarborough.

So I want to highlight that while I recognize and appreciate the government's approach to modernize the skilled trades program, to eliminate paperwork and to have a whole digital approach, it's really, really important that we make sure that it's accessible and that for people who may not be tech-savvy, for example, and are attempting to enter the skilled trades, we make sure we do justice for them. Maybe we need to have supports as well. Are we going to have enough supports for those who do not have access to the Internet or technology, to be able to eliminate that digital divide across this province that continues to exist in our province?

One of the final things that I want to end off with are the newcomer services and settlement organizations that I've been hearing from recently. It's interesting because just this morning, I was talking to someone who has been here for a while now, quite a few years. Since 2015, I believe, he's been trying to get recognized for his skills. He's in construction. He's been trained. He's a foreign-trained worker and has been wanting to do the job that he has done back home. Unfortunately, he's getting contracts, at times, but he's not able to get secure positions or do the jobs that he is actually qualified for, all the time.

So I want to make sure, when we look at the details and when we're making the regulations as this bill goes into committee, that we look at how the regulations impact newcomer organizations that are tasked with the responsibility of helping refugees and immigrants find work, as well as how this impacts the funding that is directed to newcomer services that support scaling services and delivery. Because that's something I think that's always overlooked. These organizations do a fantastic job trying to support newcomers who have settled in this beautiful country, one of the best countries in the world, filled with opportunities. But we have to make sure that we provide access, that we provide the ability for the organizations that are doing the work on the ground to be able to help these people find the job that they're qualified to do. There

are newcomer organizations that are tasked to do that, but unfortunately without enough support—if we have a new system in place, then we should definitely work toward helping these people, especially through the new STO or whatever that body looks like.

I just want to wrap up with the fact that I think—we talk about consultations. I think I've heard from government members that they have done comprehensive consultations with many unions, many workers. I do appreciate that, but I think there's a little bit of imbalance in terms of how many of the workers or how many of the labour unions were consulted. I think it's very important for us to have a very even consultation so that we focus on unions that will be impacted and make sure they're heard.

I know this bill was just recently introduced, so as we go through the process, let's make sure that the labour leaders, who are working hard, who are protecting our workers, are at the table so that they get to be at the table, making the decisions and also giving feedback.

One of the things we can do is make sure that we're accountable to the people that we represent in this province, and that includes hearing their feedback and reflecting on that and doing regulations that are necessary.

I'll end off with that and say that I thank the government for bringing the bill forward. I hope they will take all the cautionary notes that I have highlighted and hope that will be reflected when we go through committee, that some of those questions I asked will be answered in the regulations and the bill will actually reflect the needs of the people across this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for questions. The first question goes to the member from Burlington.

Ms. Jane McKenna: Thank you so much, Speaker; I appreciate that.

I listened intently to your speech. It was kind of hard to hear at times because I'm old and my hearing goes, and with the mask on it's even more hard to hear. Nevertheless, I just want to say a couple of things. You did bring up the unions, and I've said this numerous times that we were thrilled to be able to see all of them that were supporting this bill. They were thrilled that we've come into the 21st century. As I mentioned earlier, we've had 15 years where skilled trades had been neglected, along with long-term care with 611 beds and numerous other things that we brought up today.

But I have a question for you: Do you not feel that it's about time we all work together in here? Because we all know skilled trades is a massive issue; we all have people, if we've got a quarter, who are retiring. Do you not feel it's time to have a one-stop shop to make sure it's easier for people to be able to get into the skilled trades, support them and do everything we can as a government and as opposition to make sure their life is easier and we're not saddled with nobody being a plumber or anything at the end of day?

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the member for her question. I think it's a very important question. Absolutely, I think it's about time. In fact—and I do agree with her: There's been 15 years of neglect. Whether we're talking

about long-term care or labour or any sort of workforce, really, a lot of people have felt left behind. When we look at the College of Trades, I think the fact that there are so many issues that were not addressed highlights the problem that we had with the previous government.

While we work together, I think there's also an opportunity for the government to take some of the feedback that we have given and members on this side have given to take into consideration, especially when they go into committee, and I hope to see that happen as well.

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

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I would like to thank my colleague from Scarborough Southwest for the eloquent presentation. I understand you talked about community benefit and also the skilled trades, the work that's going on. We know the neglect of the last 15 years. The projects that came to our communities have not benefited.

I know that I've also asked the same question to the member from the government side—that we need to attract and recruit women into the skilled trades and also the racialized and First Nations. I wanted to see also a set of, kind of, targets. What's your opinion? We also need a she-covery because the pandemic is disproportionately affecting women and the racialized and also First Nations. What is your view to really making sure that the opportunity of the skilled trades is provided to those who have been left behind—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The member for Scarborough Southwest?

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the member from York South–Weston for his question. It's really, really important, especially as we get through this pandemic, that we look at a she-covery. I think more than ever before, we're seeing so many women in the workforce who have been left behind, who have lost their jobs, despite being more than 50% of the workforce. It's going to be so important that we provide them with the support they need to be able to get back to work.

1700

One of the things I talked about when I highlighted the list of my cautionary notes was, are we going to have programs that support people who are trying to get into the workforce? I think child care is going to be a big piece of that, as well. When we talk about women in the workforce, we have to make sure that there is child care available for women across our province who are trying to get back into the workforce.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Northumberland–Peterborough South has a question.

Mr. David Piccini: I'd like to thank the member opposite for her speech. It was a great speech. I listened intently. I always appreciate, as a rural member, hearing the perspective of a colleague from the GTA.

I have a great LIUNA training centre in my riding. I know that Joe Mancinelli and Jack Oliveira, who have been out to our neck of the woods, to Cobourg, talked about Minister McNaughton exemplifying collaborative and strategic leadership in eliminating red tape, talked about the recommendations of the Skilled Trades Panel,

and ended by talking about removing barriers and empowering Ontario's future workforce.

So we know that LIUNA thinks this is a positive step in the right direction.

Skills Ontario plays an important role.

What important role do you think we can continue to play to break down those barriers? Specifically, maybe she can touch on a GTA setting and urban centres.

Ms. Doly Begum: My colleague and I get along very well; you can see it on TV all the time. Thank you very much. I appreciate the question.

My riding of Scarborough Southwest is like mini-Ontario, if I may say, because I have people from across the country and other provinces, I have people from across the world—people who bring in different skills, people who are from different walks of life, and people who are going through many different struggles. Every single day, I get to learn and appreciate those challenges and help them.

There are a few things that I would address—and I think one of the pieces I highlighted in my cautionary note was providing services for newcomers and foreign-trained workers to be able to be included in this, as well, so that they can bring in their skills, which are also valid.

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

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Scarborough Southwest. It was a great debate. You always bring a new perspective.

You talked about consultations, and it reminded me of how sometimes in committee we would joke, “Everyone here put up your hand”—it's finding those voices that don't get heard.

The former president of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council, Brother John Cartwright, for more than a decade, was talking about how he had to reflect the membership—and I'm proud to announce that Sister Andria Babbington, the first woman of colour, the first female president, the first Black woman on the Toronto and York Region Labour Council was elected.

So who is missing in these consultations? I'm not presuming the government didn't speak to everybody—but who do they need to ensure that they're speaking with, so that they get perspectives from all communities?

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the member for his question.

I also want to congratulate Andria Babbington for becoming the first Black woman president of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council. It's a huge, huge milestone, and we have to celebrate her, and the new leadership.

There's a lot of work that needs to be done when any legislation is put into place. We have seen the impact of poor consultation way too many times, I think, with the previous government and, frankly, with this government. People are left behind. People's voices are not heard.

There are so many different workers across this province who are not part of labour unions. There are a lot of contract workers, for example, who, unfortunately, have no representation.

I think it's really important that we make it easy for people to unionize and—

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

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I just want to ask her a quick question.

I know she's very passionate about immigration and whatnot, since she talked about skilled trades and immigration in her speech.

One of the programs we amended was the provincial nominee program so that less immigrants have that struggle of getting their credentials recognized by the federal government. We can easily apply their skills from overseas before they come here, through the provincial nominee program—what her thoughts were on that change. In fact, this change will also make it even easier for those immigrants in the settlement services, because they'll have one place to go—rather than hunting around between ministries.

Ms. Doly Begum: I really want to thank the member from Barrie–Innisfil for her question.

I wish I had an hour to talk about this. I just met with so many different organizations, especially from the health care sector, who are so disappointed right now because of the provincial nominee program and how they felt like they were left behind. A lot of people who come here with a dream come here with the skills, but they are not able to practise; they are not able to find the way to get into the profession that they were recognized as when they came here. So then we have doctors who are driving taxi cabs; we have skilled nurses who are now in restaurants, working in the kitchen. It's so important that we go back and make sure that we are actually refining the system.

Last year, when we had the government talk about including more health care workers through their online portal, I believe there were only 16 people who were actually able to apply—because others did not even qualify.

I wish there was more time for me to recognize and talk about what these workers are going through.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I recognize the member from Barrie–Innisfil on a point of order.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: If you seek it, you will find we have unanimous consent to see the clock at 6.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Barrie–Innisfil is seeking unanimous consent to see the clock at 6. Are we agreed? Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

TENANT PROTECTION

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I recognize the member for Toronto–St. Paul's, who will move her motion.

Ms. Jill Andrew: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Ford government should, as part an affordable housing strategy and efforts to protect renters, implement an immediate ban on above-guideline rent increases, AGIs, to protect tenants until at least 12 months after the official end of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Pursuant to standing order 101, the member will have up to 12 minutes to make her presentation. We turn to the member from Toronto–St. Paul's.

Ms. Jill Andrew: I am always grateful for the opportunity to rise on behalf of my community of Toronto–St. Paul's.

Over 60% of us in St. Paul's are renters. Tonight, I am fighting for our renters—renters who deserve and need full support from this Conservative government, especially now, during this pandemic, and well into our recovery. As such, my motion calls on the Ontario government, as part of an affordable housing strategy and efforts to protect renters, to implement an immediate ban on above-guideline rent increases to protect tenants and their wallets until at least 12 months after the official end of the COVID-19 pandemic. After all, housing is a human right, and we shouldn't have people now, more than ever, worried and anxious about affordability.

Not only was there a real affordable housing and homelessness crisis in Ontario well before COVID-19, but we have seen individuals and families lose their homes—in essence, their very sense of safety, well-being and dignity—during the pandemic.

My community members and others across our province shouldn't have to live in fear of bad-faith landlords using this government's above-guideline rent increase loophole to increase tenants' rents, especially during a pandemic.

While the government has claimed to offer a rent freeze for 2021, the government has not stopped AGI increases. Landlords can still apply for and receive AGIs during the pandemic, which means more debt for tenants. St. Paul's tenants have expressed that bad-faith landlords are using AGIs as a backdoor method to try to recover some of the rent increases they're unable to legally get from their tenants during 2021. The wealthy landlords—the Starlights, the Akeliuses, the CAPREITs of the world—shouldn't be able to make a profit on the backs of tenants who are vulnerable during the pandemic. This government has the power to stop that today.

1710

What the government has in place currently is not complete legislation. It is incomplete, offering a temporary rent freeze that expires on December 31, 2021, an arbitrary date. The government is fully aware that the pandemic and its effects are not going to magically disappear on December 31. Hundreds of thousands of people have lost their livelihood by no fault of their own. Many are right here in our city and our province.

The year before COVID-19 arrived, our unemployment rate in St. Paul's was higher than Toronto as a whole. Our people have lost jobs because of the pandemic. These have

included women, part-time workers, BIPOC community members, those working in retail and hospitality, gig economy workers, artists and cultural workers, among others, who, even before the pandemic, were over-represented in cycles of precarious, underpaid work.

Many of our essential workers, as we know, have struggled with covering rent. They have missed pay staying home sick or tending to sick kids and grandparents, as essential caregivers.

Too many in St. Paul's are paying more than 30% of their gross income for rent. Some have told me they are paying upwards of 50%, are living paycheque to paycheque and just can't afford more expenses—and that's exactly what AGIs are.

We've got seven food banks in St. Paul's, four hot-meal programs, and six Out of the Cold programs/drop-in shelters. We've got local community initiatives like #One2Give and Seeds of Hope Foundation supporting our front-line health care workers, essential workers, education workers, artists and other residents, who, even though they've literally been keeping our communities standing during this pandemic, have struggled in silence to find the basics of rent and food for themselves. Even with some of our programs having to scale back due to the pandemic, our demand is higher than ever. Ask any one of our Churches on-the-Hill Food Bank sponsors or supporters, and they'll tell you.

Our seniors in St. Paul's, injured workers and community members on ODSP/OW have also expressed heartache over AGIs. Living on a fixed income makes it even harder to manage multiple AGIs. These rent increases are in excess of the cost-of-living increases by a significant margin, placing many renters in between a rock and a hard place.

It is also really difficult to know your last pennies are going towards an AGI while right there, within your own unit, you've got no cold or hot water, a toilet that always breaks down, or other repairs that the landlord never gets around to fixing. It stings to be paying multiple AGIs for large-project capital repairs while your own unit falls apart. It adds insult to injury when tenants' emails, phone calls and letters to corporate landlords often go unheard.

These are the stories I'm hearing, and I know many in this chamber are hearing them too.

My motion calling for a ban immediately on AGIs during COVID-19 and at least 12 months after the official end of the pandemic will help Frank, who lives with a disability after a workplace injury in St. Paul's. Mr. B—he didn't want his last name mentioned—is a tenant in our midtown community who has told me he cannot afford a land line or a cellphone. We've communicated through postcards and letters, via snail mail, since last year. Next week, he'll be calling me at a scheduled time for the first time by a pay phone. My office and I are helping Frank through his ODSP issues, as he says purchasing groceries gets tighter and tighter by the month. He cannot afford another AGI; he cannot afford to move. He is stuck.

I'm calling on the Conservative government to place an iron ring around tenants, not developers and billionaire investors and corporate property owners.

Liza Butcher is one of our community members in St. Paul's. She's the president of 70, 80 and 90 Heath Street West tenants' association, a co-coordinator of Tenant Network Toronto, and an executive member of our Toronto St. Paul's Tenant Associations Network. Liza said, "I stand in firm support of MPP Andrew's motion to freeze AGIs until at least 12 months after COVID-19 ends officially. In my building, we get AGIs every year, and when Premier Ford left AGIs out of his 2021 'rent freeze' it meant that for us, it wasn't a rent freeze at all."

Liza and many other Hollyburn property tenants, during the pandemic, are still receiving AGIs. These AGIs can result in tenants paying literally hundreds if not thousands of dollars on top of their rent in any given year or over the course of their tenancy. This could mean \$5,000, \$10,000, \$20,000 more, on top of the rent during the duration of their tenancy. This causes chronic financial burdens, which of course simultaneously sweeten the pockets of corporate landlords, and it contributes to our community members having to leave the neighbourhoods they know and love, leaving all their support systems behind—local community parks, schools, daycares, small businesses—and memories.

And AGIs drive up the rental market, which only makes the affordable housing crisis worse. And they surely don't help young people—or anybody across the life spectrum—who want to one day become homeowners.

Above-guideline rent increase applications have increased by 250% in the past six years. According to a report by the group RenovictionsTO, over 84% of AGI applications were from corporate landlords rather than mom-and-pop landlords. Mom-and-pop landlords, by and large, are not the issue. The RenovictionsTO report concludes that if AGIs are intended to incentivize landlords who are otherwise unwilling to perform repairs and upgrades, there are ways to do so that do not include passing costs to tenants. It is clear that AGIs are, for many, a cash grab—for corporate landlords looking to make extra profits on their tenants.

I quote from a CBC article: "The province's rent freeze legislation has seemingly done little to stem the rising number of AGI applications.

"In the first five months following the legislation's enactment, landlords filed 266 AGIs in Ontario. Of those, 91 were in Toronto."

Speaker, we need real supports for tenants, especially during the pandemic. The government could make real strides towards a recovery—one that includes our NDP calls for rent control, for scrapping vacancy decontrols, scrapping unfair renovictions, and fixing the Landlord and Tenant Board, so people can find justice, so they can be treated equitably, like human beings.

Our official opposition housing, urban planning and tenants' rights critic, the MPP for University–Rosedale, is in full support of my motion 157 calling for the ban on AGIs during the pandemic. In fact, this Thursday, the member from University–Rosedale and I are co-hosting a virtual event on tenants' rights and a fair LTB. Virtual Landlord and Tenant Board hearings make fighting AGIs

that much harder for tenants. We'll be discussing this with our communities, along with another piece of government legislation that seeks to silence tenant advocacy; namely, the proposed fine of up to \$25,000 against tenants recording and sharing problematic and inequitable experiences at the Landlord and Tenant Board, as per the government's Bill 276, schedule 27. This is yet another move that will hurt tenants. I have called on this government to remove any proposed fines against already financially burdened tenants in a previous motion.

Today, I am asking the government to support my motion 157 calling for a ban on AGIs. People need security and affordability now more than ever. Banning AGIs will help provide the real rent increase freeze tenants need now.

And if the government won't listen to me or the opposition, I hope they will listen to some of these people, who have nothing to benefit other than a few more pennies in their pockets for food:

Bill Worrell, chair of Oakwood Vaughan Community Organization, said, "In this pandemic, some of the hardest-hit members of our communities are tenants, many of whom are going to unsafe work or working at home in crowded conditions in lockdown. We have heard too many stories of AGIs forced upon our vulnerable community members. This has got to stop now. Motion 157 will provide critical protection for members of our community already under huge stress."

Alejandra Ruiz Vargas, chair of East York ACORN, said, "ACORN members have been fighting for a real rent freeze for a long time! So this motion is a dream come true for tenants all over the province. Allowing above-the-guideline increases during this pandemic is absurd for a government that is claiming to have delivered a 'rent freeze.' The fact is that landlords are using AGIs to continue to increase rents and push out tenants from their homes during the pandemic, and it has to stop. ACORN demands a real rent freeze with real rent control with vacancy control, and fully supports this motion from MPP Andrew."

Patrick Plestid, a tenant advocate and chair of the 100 Vaughan Road Tenants Association, said, "As a renter and the chair of my building's tenants' association, I ... support" this motion. "This represents a critical step toward keeping housing affordable for renters during the pandemic, many of whom are suffering from reduced income, an unstable job market and unsafe work conditions at this time. Pausing AGIs will also dramatically improve work-from-home conditions for many renters during the pandemic, as it will remove a major incentive for disruptive, non-urgent daytime construction work"—which I have written to the government about—"in rental buildings" during COVID-19. "I urge other members of the Ontario Legislature to lend their support for MPP Andrew's motion."

1720

Thank you, and I'll continue the rest—

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: It's a pleasure to rise in the House today to discuss the member opposite's private member's motion.

From the onset of this global pandemic, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has introduced a number of measures to support tenants. That's because our government recognizes that many Ontarians continue to face financial unpredictability as a result of COVID-19.

Let me take this opportunity to outline what our government has done to support tenants during the pandemic.

First, the government has frozen rent increases for the vast majority of Ontario's tenants for 2021. Again, I'm going to repeat myself: The government has frozen rent increases for the vast majority of Ontario's tenants for 2021. This change is in effect starting on January 1, 2021, until December 31, 2021. This includes households that receive rent-geared-to-income assistance. We've also given municipalities the ability not to penalize their tenants through RGI calculations even if a tenant receives temporary payments under the Canada Emergency Response Benefit or employment insurance.

Ontario was the first province to freeze rent for the entirety of 2021, and that's something we can all be proud of.

Last summer, we passed the Protecting Tenants and Strengthening Community Housing Act, which mandates the Landlord and Tenant Board to consider whether a landlord attempted to negotiate a repayment agreement with tenants before resorting to an eviction for non-payment of rent during COVID-19. This measure promotes repayment agreements over evictions for non-payment of rent, and it aims to maintain tenancies, rather than resorting to evictions.

Mr. Speaker, at the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak, our government took decisive action to stop residential evictions and keep Ontarians safe in their homes. In response to the concerning rising number of COVID-19 cases and variants of concern, our government declared a state of emergency and put in place a stay-at-home order to prevent the spread of COVID-19, to protect the health and safety of Ontarians.

This is the third time during the course of the pandemic that we have put a pause on residential evictions. We want to ensure that no Ontarian is forced to leave their home while a provincial stay-at-home order is in place. We have tenants' backs, we will continue to have their backs, and we will continue to support them during this unprecedented situation.

We were the first government to sign a joint investment agreement with the federal government to provide funding directly to people to help them with their housing costs. The Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit makes \$1.4 billion directly available to those who need it most. I am proud to update members of the House today that this number now includes over 7,900 Ontario households that have received direct rent assistance through this program. Actually, we surpassed our first-year goal by 50%, helping thousands more additional Ontarians than we originally thought we'd be able to in the first year. Recipients can use this money

towards rent in a unit of their choice anywhere in Ontario, instead of waiting for traditional rent-geared-to-income assistance in social housing.

I must also point out that under the National Housing Strategy, Ontario receives \$490 million less than its fair share, when compared to households in core housing need. I know that the minister, on multiple occasions, has already raised this with his federal counterparts, and he will continue to do so. We will continue to work with all levels of government to create and sustain much-needed affordable housing units. In order to ensure that we can keep delivering, Ontario needs its fair share of National Housing Strategy funding.

Our government also recognizes that COVID-19 has highlighted how important it is for every Ontarian to have a place to call home. It has shed light on the pressures felt in the community housing system and underscored the urgent need for affordable housing, but Mr. Speaker, these issues are not new. Years of inaction on the housing file by Steven Del Duca's Liberal Party have created a crisis in our community housing, affordable housing and market housing. That's why housing is a priority for our government and will continue to be a priority for the years to come.

I am proud that our government is tackling housing pressures head on by investing directly into more affordable housing, reducing the upfront cost pressure on our partners working to build affordable housing and accelerating the construction of affordable housing units across Ontario. In fact, in 2021, we are making a historic investment of more than \$1.8 billion into our community housing sector. We believe everyone deserves a place to call home, and we are taking action to deliver on that statement.

I want to bring up social services funding. I will first remind the members of the opposition that we are providing municipalities with almost \$1 billion in additional COVID-19 financial relief. This includes \$500 million to support municipal operating pressures and recovery in 2021. It also includes \$150 million to support municipal transit systems in 2021, including expanded eligibility for municipal-provincial priorities, such as fare and service integration and on-demand micro-transit. It includes \$255 million in new provincial funding through the Ontario Social Services Relief Fund to support municipal service managers and Indigenous program partners in immediately responding to rising COVID-19 caseloads in shelter settings through December 31, 2021.

The additional SSRF investment builds on the \$510 million provided through the fund in 2020 and 2021 that ensured the continuity of critical supports for vulnerable people based on local need. I am bringing this funding up, Mr. Speaker, because I want to be clear that we are supporting every type of housed Ontarian.

I also know that the NDP and the Liberal Party are against the use of the ministerial zoning orders. But let me remind the members of the opposition that every single MZO issued on non-provincially-owned land has been at the request of the local municipality—

Interjection.

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I will repeat myself, Mr. Speaker: Let me remind the members of the opposition that every single MZO issued on non-provincially-owned land has been at the request of the municipalities. MZO's are helping to accelerate local projects located outside the greenbelt—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Members of the opposition, come to order, please.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I will repeat myself again for the members of the opposition: MZO's are helping to accelerate local projects located outside of the greenbelt, because our government will not develop or remove any part of the greenbelt. We are committed to protecting the greenbelt. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we recently consulted on expanding the greenbelt.

Let me list off a few examples of the positive impacts MZO's are making when it comes to affordable housing. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing issued two MZO's in Toronto earlier this year for two modular supportive housing projects. The minister made these MZO's less than 12 months ago, and today there are vulnerable Ontarians living in these completed modular housing units. This is only possible because the minister utilized MZO's to cut through red tape and accelerate those critical projects that are keeping vulnerable people safe today.

Of course, the minister has issued multiple MZO's in Toronto's West Don Lands as part of our government's goal to bring nearly 1,000 affordable units to surplus provincial properties. It's a shame to see members of the NDP protesting these new affordable housing units and, in fact, lending their support to projects that would see fewer affordable units created while we continue to face a housing crisis.

1730

At the request of the city of Hamilton, which is within the Leader of the Opposition's own riding, we helped to accelerate the creation of 15 new affordable housing units to allow the city to meet their timelines to access federal government funding for the project, and we did this by issuing an MZO. Our government has been clear that we will leverage ministerial zoning orders to help communities get critical local projects such as these and others moving faster.

The motion we are debating today speaks to implementing a ban on above-guideline rent increases until at least 12 months beyond what makes sense. Let me clarify a few points for the House on this issue. Above-guideline rent increases allow landlords to make capital-intensive upgrades to their units. This is a critical process to ensure that people who rent have homes that remain safe and well-maintained.

In order to ensure that only AGIs related to safety and maintenance were allowed to proceed, our government passed legislation to ensure that AGIs related to extraordinary increases in municipal taxes and charges could

not take effect during the freeze period unless they had already been approved by the Landlord and Tenant Board before the legislation passed on October 1, 2020. If a tenant believes that a landlord has not followed the rent-increase rules, the tenant can apply to the LTB for a remedy. Our government continues to call on landlords and tenants to work together during this unprecedented time.

Mr. Speaker, this motion calls on our government to implement an immediate ban on above-guideline rent increases to protect tenants until at least 12 months after the official end of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are already providing fulsome supports to tenants across Ontario as we ensure they are protected through this global pandemic.

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

Mr. Faisal Hassan: It is with pleasure that I rise in the House to speak to and fully support my colleague from Toronto–St. Paul's motion to place a COVID-19 ban on above-guideline rent increases. I know in my riding of York South–Weston, housing is in a state of crisis. The pandemic has only amplified the disparities and inequities that exist when it comes to marginalized folks. People like essential workers and their families struggle to get by.

Tenants need the protection this motion provides by providing an immediate end to allowing above-guideline rent increases until at least 12 months after the official end of COVID. I know in my community, like much of the GTA, we have seen renovictions taking place during the pandemic, leaving tenants with nowhere to go. Tenants struggling to pay the rent because of lost jobs or fewer hours due to COVID is a common occurrence.

The government urgently needs to step in and implement legislation to give tenants the support they need during this pandemic. We know that the evictions and rent increases that are above guideline continue, as the most marginalized in our society—that includes seniors and people living with disabilities and racialized people—are the ones that are most impacted.

I recently tabled a bill calling for housing strategies to be viewed through the lens of equity and calling for housing to be a human right. Unfortunately, the bill did not pass, but we now have before us another opportunity to address the disparities faced by everyday people by supporting motion 157.

Housing is a human right, and everyone in this province deserves a good, stable place to call home. The instability and fears tenants face need to stop. I have seen residents have to leave their families and neighbourhoods they grew up in because they were unable to afford the rent or purchase a home.

This problem is not a new one, and years of Liberal and Conservative governments have only made the housing crisis worse. With no housing strategy with an eye to affordability and with the Landlord and Tenant Board hearings now even harder for tenants to navigate and receive a chance to tell their side, the deck is increasingly stacked against tenants.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House do have a very solid housing platform and strategy, so that young people can afford a good home, and protection for tenants that is fair to small landlords that my colleague from Toronto–St. Paul's talked about, mom-and-pops that are really doing a good job. This government has a majority. They just need the will to put tenants first and realize that making it easier for all Ontarians to have affordable housing helps our economy and contributes to making Ontario a desirable place to live.

I will be proudly supporting my colleague's motion to have a COVID-19 ban on above-guideline rent increases, and I urge everyone to do the same.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's an honour to rise and speak in support of motion 157. I'm supporting this motion, Speaker, because I believe that everyone in Ontario deserves to have an affordable place to call home. COVID has highlighted this now more than ever. COVID has exposed the inequities in our society, and it has made them worse. There may be no place we've seen that more profoundly than in the inequities in the housing market.

And so one of the benefits of this motion is that it closes a loophole in the government's 2021 rent freeze by not allowing above-guideline rent increases, which is a tool that's being used to increase rent on a number of tenants that simply cannot afford it, mostly any time, but especially during a global pandemic, especially in a time when so many people are unemployed or even more precariously employed than they were during the pandemic.

Speaker, the reality is that we had an affordability crisis in housing prior to the pandemic, and this pandemic has only made it worse. In Toronto, pre-pandemic, the average minimum wage worker had to work 79 hours to be able to afford a one-bedroom apartment and 96 hours for a two-bedroom apartment. Zero per cent of market rental housing is affordable to a minimum wage worker in communities such as Barrie, Peterborough, Guelph, Toronto, Kitchener, Ottawa, Thunder Bay—community after community after community in this province, which highlights another important part of this motion, which says that this should be part of a housing affordability strategy.

That's what this province needs: a housing affordability strategy that increases the amount of affordable housing in this province without paving over the places we love, the farmland that feeds us, the wetlands that protect us from flooding. We can do this, if we redesign our communities in a way that puts people first, if we start investing in social housing. The wait-list for social housing in Ontario is 185,000 people. We can do this if we start investing in co-op housing. We can do this if we start investing in co-housing, in non-profit housing. We can do this if we provide the incentives needed to build deeply affordable supportive housing.

The other thing that has been highlighted during this pandemic is the mental health and addictions crisis facing

so many people. When we talk about a housing affordability strategy, we have to understand the connection between the need for mental health supports and wrap-around services and housing affordability, and we need government at all levels to work together to make sure that we have supportive housing that is designed to eliminate homelessness in our province.

Speaker, this motion makes an important step in closing a loophole that has been used primarily by global investors treating housing as a commodity, as a speculative investment tool, when housing should be designed for people. And so that's why I'll be supporting this motion.

1740

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

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: On behalf of the tens of thousands of tenants in Parkdale–High Park, I support the motion for an immediate ban on above-guideline rent increases until at least 12 months after the end of the pandemic.

Speaker, we have guideline rent increases based on inflation and other factors. Last year, it was 2.2%. However, an above-guideline rent increase allows rents to go up much higher—5% or 6% a year, maybe higher—and then it gets used year after year, meaning rents are increasing 10% to 12% in just a few years. At this rate, it becomes unaffordable to rent. If you really think about it, the AGI system is simply a loophole, and it's one that's exploited.

AGIs are particularly devastating for people on a fixed income, those on social assistance, seniors, newcomers, refugees, immigrants, younger people, racialized workers, many precarious workers and working-class folk. And the use of AGIs is on the rise. A recent report from RenovictionsTO found that the number of AGI applications has increased significantly over the last few years.

This Conservative government froze rent for 2021, but failed to include AGIs in their legislation. They left that loophole open and we're seeing it play out. During the pandemic, there have been more AGI applications than ever. In the five months before the rent freeze legislation, landlords filed for 84 AGI applications. In the five months since, 266 AGIs have been filed. That's an increase of over 300%. It's not a coincidence.

Tenants are paying the price for this. For Shaun, a tenant in Parkdale, that means an increase of almost \$50 per month starting in June. Most of these AGIs are not being filed by small landlords. The report from RenovictionsTO estimates that approximately 84% of AGIs are brought forward by corporate landlords.

As well, this government recently introduced a bill that imposes a \$25,000 fine on anyone who records a part of a Landlord and Tenant Board hearing. Anyone who has seen these hearings will know that they often contain horrific abuse of process. I've seen adjudicators trying to evict tenants in minutes, even as they struggle to connect to the hearing. Disabled tenants and those with language and technology barriers endure hearings without any support. People's very lives are on the line in these hearings. Legal

experts have said that this goes against the open courts principle. I join tenants and advocates in opposing this fine.

Finally, under the Residential Tenancies Act, tenants have the right to form and be members of a tenant union which represents their collective interests. Landlords know tenants are powerful when organized and so try to negotiate with tenants individually, but right now, there is no legal obligation on landlords to recognize tenant unions or to engage with them in any way. What tenants want is to be able to negotiate through a tenant union on solutions that apply to all tenants in the building.

Lots needs to be done when it comes to protecting tenants. Let's start by passing this motion by my colleague the MPP from Toronto–St. Paul's. We need to ensure that AGIs are banned so that tenants are protected.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I want to thank the member for bringing this forward. Above-guideline increases: There is a problem with them. There is no question about that. Putting a pause or a freeze or a ban for at least 12 months, especially considering the kinds of pressures that are on people right now—we can see very clearly from COVID that there is an imbalance and that people are struggling.

The right to housing is something that's critical. And it's not just critical for people; businesses are finding that out, too. That's not just here in Toronto. We just don't see it. If you look at a place like Prince Edward County or a place like Stratford, where workers can't find a place to live, where they can't afford to live—companies don't work very well when they can't do that.

I'm pleased to be supporting this motion.

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

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: It's a real honour and it's important to be able to speak to this motion by my colleague the member for Toronto–St. Paul's. I want to thank her so much for bringing this forward.

I was heartbroken listening to the government member defending the government's position it appears to be taking in opposing this motion. I really wonder how the government can take this stance. I wonder if the members understand how completely out of touch they appear to be. We are in a pandemic. When tenants—and particularly lower-income, working-class tenants, communities of essential workers—are struggling not only to keep body and soul together, but to keep a roof over their heads, it's not a joke. They have found that when they've lost income due to COVID, it has also meant that they get a notice of eviction, and although the government has indeed put a moratorium on the knock of the sheriff at the door—the sheriff will not come to your door, but you will be evicted, even during a pandemic.

The Landlord and Tenant Board process, which you've been hearing is incredibly problematic—heartbreakingly so—and extremely inequitable, continues to proceed. And on top of that, the government will not put in place rent relief, so people are being evicted. Even if they're working

their tails off and have managed to scrape together enough work and enough savings, they're being evicted for arrears. They're being evicted for debt that they accrued when they lost income due to COVID.

Last summer, when the government announced the rent freeze, ACORN and other groups like it—tenants said AGIs are going to be the loophole. This is how corporate landlords that have continued to make profits throughout this time are going to continue to put the screws to tenants who can't afford it, who are struggling to put food on the table. This is how corporate landlords are going to continue to hike the rents. As was mentioned earlier, that's because corporate landlords are concerned with their profits, which they've continued to make, because housing, for them, is a way of making money; it is not about providing that fundamental human right.

I want to say to the government of Ontario that housing is a human right according to the United Nations, and that means that the government of Ontario has an international legal obligation to make sure that everybody is housed and that they remain housed. So what is going on right now during this pandemic, when poverty has been increasing exponentially, is an absolute crime. The government's recent budget didn't even mention the word "poverty," when so many Ontarians are plunged so much deeper into poverty than they have been ever.

You know, I'm the critic for poverty and homelessness, and people reach out to me about food insecurity. People can't eat. There are folks on ODSP who have applied for medically assisted death, because at the end of the month they have nothing to eat. Every food bank, every volunteer organization that has come together during the pandemic, has found that the need has doubled over the past year. We're dealing with a crisis, and yet we have the government sitting on its hands and saying that everything is fine.

One more thing: Bill 184, which passed last summer, made it easier to evict people. If those repayment plans are not met, if somebody feels coerced by the problematic Landlord and Tenant Board to sign one and they're a day late or a dollar short, they are getting evicted now, because the landlords don't have to go back to the Landlord and Tenant Board. It is a crime, and it's up to the government to fix it. We need to pass this motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Toronto—St. Paul's has two minutes to reply.

Ms. Jill Andrew: I'd like to thank my colleagues and friends from the official opposition and also members from the independent parties for speaking in support of my motion 157, calling for an immediate ban on AGIs during the pandemic and at least a year out—at least a year out—following our recovery.

1750

I just want to land with this here: According to RenovationsTO, large landlords "make more than enough to invest in maintenance, repairs, security, or whatever upgrading is currently used to apply for AGIs, while still turning hefty profits."

Caryma Sa'd, a housing lawyer representing tenants and landlords, also says that this ban on AGIs should be

an obvious decision for the government to make and that "the exception for AGIs allows landlords to circumvent the rent freeze, and to do so in a way that costs tenants more money. If we understand that people cannot afford standard rent increases, it follows that higher-than-usual increases" will also be a burden. This is Caryma Sa'd, again, a housing lawyer who represents both tenants and landlords.

In my last 45 seconds, I just want to say this: Housing is a human right. I have stood up in this Legislature many times, listening to the Conservative government. And you know what? They're really good at reeling off numbers. They're really good at presenting faceless stories that give no name to constituents, to tenants, to community members. We've spoken on this side today about real, live people who need this AGI ban. I challenge the government to support the motion. I challenge the government to stand in the House more. Speak about the trials and tribulations that your constituents are actually facing, that we're all facing in Ontario. Stop patting yourselves on the back. Help tenants.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The time provided for private members' public business has expired. Ms. Andrew has moved a private motion, number 157. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

A vote being required, this matter will be voted on at the next time deferred votes are on the agenda.

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

LONG-TERM CARE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): However, we do have a late show this evening. The member for Ottawa South has served notice of dissatisfaction with a question he posed to the Minister of Long-Term Care. The member for Ottawa South will have up to five minutes to state his case, and someone from the government side will have up to five minutes to respond.

We turn now to the member from Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to say that I'm trying to be very judicious about my late shows. I'm not often satisfied with an answer, but this one I'm particularly not satisfied with. I want to thank you for being here, the table for being here and everybody who is here right now for taking the time this evening.

I think it's critical, now with what we've seen in the long-term-care commission's report, that we all take

responsibility and accountability for that. I want to start with three things.

We know that Bill 160, which was the Strengthening Quality and Accountability for Patients Act, 2017—it was passed in 2017. It received royal assent, but this government never enacted it. They never enacted it.

Inside that bill, there were three things that would have helped you during this pandemic:

(1) It would have made it easier to pause a permit, to suspend a permit of a long-term-care home operator.

(2) It would have given more protection around restraints and isolation.

(3) It would have increased the fines for repeat offenders. It would have increased the fines for homes that repeatedly offended.

But instead, what the government did was indemnify the homes, protect them. I'm not sure that that was the best thing to do in this situation. Those homes and those big corporations that were protected, well, their executives got bonuses. The dividends were paid. There was no sacrifice or penalty, like the rest of the world had to do with COVID-19.

We've all read the reports of the Canadian military, and they are deeply, deeply disturbing: the conditions, talking about feces underneath fingernails, talking about the lack of cleanliness. But you know what? The most disturbing thing is that 26 people died of dehydration and malnutrition—dehydration and malnutrition. That means they didn't get water. People died because they didn't get water in Ontario.

The Premier said—and I remember this very clearly after this report came out—“We've launched an investigation, and if there's anything there it will be turned over to the police.” Well, guess what? That investigation was never launched. It's a year later, and the people had to go to the police. They had to go to the government and pressure them, and finally there's something happening right now. That is incredible and unjust. I don't care how many times it's in the minister's notes that something needed to be done; the basic fact of the matter is nothing did get done. It took 12 days. It doesn't matter that it was in the notes, so I really wish that wouldn't have been raised.

And finally, the long-term-care commission delivered to us a very thoughtful report that covered a lot in the little time that they were given, and they weren't granted an extension. There's a lot of accountability to go all around. I don't want to anticipate the member's answer, but I know what it is going to be. So I just want you to know very clearly: I'm very acutely aware of—building 30,000 beds and not doing enough over 15 years and then not doing more to get four-bed ward rooms—is something that motivates me. I take responsibility for that. Having raised the wages of PSWs \$4 an hour but not doing more—I take responsibility for that.

So what I would like the government to do is to take responsibility for the decisions they made, or didn't make, but more importantly, to take responsibility for this report that has been laid in front of them. It's very thoughtful,

very objective and very accurate, and so far, the government has failed to make any firm commitments for any one of the 85 recommendations—not one; not one that said, “We're going to do this.”

I don't want this report to be like all the rest, which is “Another one hits the shelf.” It can't happen. Bill 290, which I introduced yesterday—for which I could have asked for another late show but I'm going to include it in this one—actually makes it mandatory, as the commission requested, for the government to report one year from now and three years from now on the progress on the recommendations in the report. I know the government supported it yesterday. They need to enact it. They need to make it happen. It's the easiest one to commit to.

I appreciate, again, the members for being here. Thank you very much for the time, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The parliamentary assistant from Flamborough–Glanbrook will have up to five minutes to reply.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Knowing that I cannot ascribe motive to another member of this House, I will instead suggest that the member for Ottawa South understand the facts. The Patient Ombudsman, Auditor General and commissioners have all scrutinized the COVID-19 pandemic in long-term-care homes. The Ontario Ombudsman is still investigating. All deaths in long-term-care homes are required by law to be reported to the coroner, and where appropriate, he investigates.

The Premier promised an investigation in the wake of the Canadian Armed Forces report. Here is what the Minister of Long-Term Care said at the time: “In addition to continued regular inspections, the Ministry of Long-Term Care inspections branch will immediately investigate specific critical incidents referred to in the report.”

That is precisely what occurred:

—each home was inspected by two or more inspectors;

—those inspections were in-depth and thorough, investigating the contents of the CAF at each home, and cross-referencing it to any complaints and critical incidents;

—the shortest of these inspections were 10 days, and some lasted over a month.

Those reports were posted publicly last year. Had inspectors found potentially criminal conduct, they would have passed that information on to police.

Now that he has undeniably heard the facts, I hope we will not hear the member for Ottawa South sharing incorrect information. Often we see him pat himself on the back, and his government on the back, for a bill that he says would have fixed everything. He said the same about his government's last budget commitments, which fall well short of our government's actions. That is the difference in approach: The government that he was part of made commitments; ours takes action.

The member for Ottawa South has suggested that if some administrative penalties had come into force, everything would be fixed. But Mr. Speaker, you and I both know there are no easy fixes. There is no magic-wand solution.

The member's memory is either selective or short. He should remember that his Liberal government promised a comprehensive inspection of every home. Three years after that promise was made, only 123 homes were inspected. Five years after that promise was made, they still had not finished. Even when they had made it to every home, the complaints and critical incidents backlog grew to vast proportions.

In 2018, our government inherited a backlog of 8,000 unanswered complaints and critical incidents. That's 8,000 residents, caregivers and staff that this former member of the former Liberal government let languish. That backlog of complaints and critical incidents includes allegations of sexual assault, physical abuse and negligence. Unlike the previous government, we could not let these files remain left unopened. It was simply not fair to the families.

The member for Ottawa South would do well to remember it was his government that also froze funding for inspections from 2014 onwards. Let's not forget the

tears of the then-health minister on the front page of the Toronto Star more than 15 years ago. He promised at the time that Ontario nursing homes would become known for "quality and dignity" and vowed to bring about a new era, "a revolution."

Where the Liberal record is one of hollow promises, our government is taking action. Our government cleared the unconscionable backlog that grew on the member for Ottawa South's watch. Our government has increased the funding envelope since 2018, and we have hired 30 new inspectors. Our government has been clear: We are actively working on changes to the inspection regime. It was recommended by both the commissioners and by the Auditor General, and residents deserve it.

The member for Ottawa South can keep talking, but our government is taking action.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): There being no further matter to debate, this House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1802.

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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
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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**

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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