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CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Monday 19 April 2021 / Lundi 19 avril 2021

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

Persian Heritage Month Act, 2021, Bill 271, Ms. Ghamari, Mr. Parsa / Loi de 2021 sur le Mois du patrimoine perse, projet de loi 271, Mme Ghamari, Mr. Parsa	
Mr. Michael Parsa	12717
Mr. Joel Harden.....	12718
Hon. Stephen Lecce	12719
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong.....	12720
Mr. Kaleed Rasheed.....	12720
Mr. Stan Cho.....	12721
Mr. Michael Parsa	12721
Second reading agreed to	12722

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Ontario Day Act, 2021, Bill 173, Mr. Parsa / Loi de 2021 sur le Jour de l'Ontario, projet de loi 173, M. Parsa	
Mr. Michael Parsa	12722
Mr. Michael Mantha	12723
Mr. Joel Harden.....	12725
Third reading debate deemed adjourned	12727

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

COVID-19 immunization	
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong.....	12727
Infrastructure funding	
Mr. Robert Bailey	12727
COVID-19 response	
Ms. Jessica Bell.....	12727
Agricultural colleges	
Mr. Will Bouma	12728
COVID-19 response	
Mr. Joel Harden.....	12728
Public transit	
Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne.....	12728
Infrastructure funding	
Mr. Mike Harris	12729
COVID-19 response	
Ms. Marit Stiles.....	12729
Community services	
Mr. Lorne Coe.....	12729

COVID-19 immunization

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed	12729
--------------------------	-------

Holocaust memorial

Hon. Paul Calandra	12730
--------------------------	-------

QUESTION PERIOD / PÉRIODE DE QUESTIONS

COVID-19 response

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	12731
Hon. Christine Elliott	12731

COVID-19 response

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	12731
Hon. Christine Elliott	12732

COVID-19 response

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	12733
Hon. Christine Elliott	12733

COVID-19 response

Mr. Stan Cho	12733
Hon. Paul Calandra	12733

COVID-19 immunization

Ms. Doly Begum	12734
Hon. Christine Elliott	12734

COVID-19 immunization

Ms. Mitzie Hunter	12735
Hon. Christine Elliott	12735
Hon. Paul Calandra	12735

COVID-19 response

Mr. Stan Cho	12735
Hon. Paul Calandra	12735

COVID-19 response

Ms. Sara Singh	12736
Hon. Christine Elliott	12736

COVID-19 response

Mr. Mike Schreiner	12737
Hon. Christine Elliott	12737

COVID-19 immunization

Mr. Stan Cho	12737
Hon. Paul Calandra	12738

COVID-19 response

Mr. Peter Tabuns	12738
Hon. Sylvia Jones	12738

COVID-19 response

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne	12739
Hon. Paul Calandra	12739

COVID-19 response

Ms. Peggy Sattler	12739
Hon. Monte McNaughton	12740

COVID-19 response	
Mr. John Fraser	12740
Hon. Monte McNaughton	12740
Hon. Paul Calandra	12741
Private members' public business	
The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott)	12741

DEFERRED VOTES / VOTES DIFFÉRÉS

Executive Council Amendment Act, 2021, Bill 265, Mr. Calandra / Loi de 2021 modifiant la Loi sur le Conseil exécutif, projet de loi 265, M. Calandra	
Second reading agreed to	12741
Maternal Mental Health Act, 2021, Bill 176, Ms. Karpuche / Loi de 2021 sur la santé mentale maternelle, projet de loi 176, Mme Karpuche	
Second reading negated	12742

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES / RAPPORTS DE COMITÉS

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs	
Mr. Dave Smith.....	12742
Report adopted	12742

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS / DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI

Environmental Protection Amendment Act (Microplastics Filters for Washing Machines), 2021, Bill 279, Mr. Arthur; Ms. Bell / Loi de 2021 modifiant la Loi sur la protection de l'environnement (filtres à microplastiques pour machines à laver), projet de loi 279, M. Arthur; Mme Bell	
First reading agreed to.....	12742
Ms. Jessica Bell.....	12742
Protecting Seniors' Rights in Care Homes Act, 2021, Bill 280, Ms. Bell / Loi de 2021 sur la protection des droits des personnes âgées dans les maisons de soins, projet de loi 280, Mme Bell	
First reading agreed to.....	12742
Ms. Jessica Bell.....	12742

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Land use planning	
Ms. Jennifer K. French.....	12742
Places of religious worship	
Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios.....	12743
Optometry services	
Ms. Peggy Sattler	12743

Optometry services	
Ms. Jennifer K. French.....	12743

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act, 2021, Bill 276, Mr. Sarkaria / Loi de 2021 sur le soutien à la relance et à la compétitivité, projet de loi 276, M. Sarkaria	
Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria	12743
Ms. Donna Skelly.....	12746
Mr. Dave Smith.....	12749
Ms. Jennifer K. French.....	12751
Mrs. Robin Martin.....	12751
Ms. Jennifer K. French.....	12751
Mr. Toby Barrett	12752
Ms. Jennifer K. French.....	12752

Royal assent / Sanction royale

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky)	12752
--	-------

Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act, 2021, Bill 276, Mr. Sarkaria / Loi de 2021 sur le soutien à la relance et à la compétitivité, projet de loi 276, M. Sarkaria	
Ms. Peggy Sattler	12752
Mr. Jim McDonell	12758
Mr. Michael Mantha.....	12759
Mr. Mike Harris	12759
Ms. Jennifer K. French.....	12759
Mr. Robert Bailey.....	12759
Mr. Michael Mantha.....	12760
Mr. Norman Miller.....	12762
Ms. Sandy Shaw.....	12762
Mr. Will Bouma	12763
Mr. Percy Hatfield.....	12763
Mr. Mike Harris	12763
Mr. Mike Harris	12763
Mr. Chris Glover	12766
Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios	12767
Mr. Robert Bailey.....	12767
Mr. Jeff Burch	12767
Mr. Toby Barrett	12768
Mr. Peter Tabuns	12768
Mr. Will Bouma	12771
Ms. Sandy Shaw	12771
Mr. Mike Harris	12771
Mr. Michael Mantha.....	12772
Mr. Mike Harris	12772
Mr. Percy Hatfield.....	12772
Mr. Will Bouma	12775
Mr. Jeff Burch	12775
Mr. Norman Miller.....	12775
Ms. Sandy Shaw	12776

Mr. Mike Harris.....	12776
Ms. Sandy Shaw	12776
Mr. Will Bouma.....	12779
Ms. Peggy Sattler.....	12780
Mr. Jim McDonell	12780
Mr. Jeff Burch.....	12780
Hon. Jill Dunlop	12780
Second reading debate deemed adjourned.....	12781

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 19 April 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 19 avril 2021

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

PERSIAN HERITAGE MONTH ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LE MOIS DU PATRIMOINE PERSE

Mr. Parsa moved second reading of the following bill: Bill 271, An Act to proclaim the month of March as Persian Heritage Month / Projet de loi 271, Loi proclamant le mois de mars Mois du patrimoine perse.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 101, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Michael Parsa: Speaker, it really is a pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to Bill 271, An Act to proclaim the month of March as Persian Heritage Month. This morning, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Carleton, who is co-sponsoring this bill with me, and who is also a proud Canadian of Persian decent.

Speaker, at this time, I want to explain why I am putting this bill forward and why it's so significant to members of the Persian Canadian community.

As many in this House may know, peoples of Persian decent are the proud inheritors of a history and culture that spans across thousands of years. It is one of the oldest in history, and at its height in 500 BCE, its controlling influence reached as far as Libya and Greece to the west and India and China to the east.

During this period of time, the Persian civilization made contributions to humanity that have shaped much of how we live our lives today. For instance, the first known iteration of a declaration of universal human rights was set down by the Persian King Cyrus the Great in the sixth century BCE. The Cyrus Cylinder, as it has come to be known, was the first such work of its kind, and has been the foundational inspiration of what we have come to know as universal human rights. Concepts such as religious tolerance, racial equality and freedom from slavery were all decreed from this charter and played an important role in establishing the basis of what we have come to know as a free and democratic society. This declaration has stood the test of time as perhaps one of the most significant contributions of Persian culture to mankind. However, it is by no means the only one.

Another example of a creation we can credit the ancient Persians with is the way we receive our mail. The creation of the world's first postal code system can be credited to the creative ingenuity of Persians and the necessity of having a swift method of delivering mail across a vast empire—although I'm pretty sure the ancient Persians would have had second thoughts if they could predict the creation of junk mail. But I digress.

The list of modern technologies and systems that have their roots in the ancient Persian culture are endless. For instance, the concept of refrigeration, known back then as yakhchāl, which literally translates to "ice pit," was the forefather of modern-day refrigeration. So, yes, we owe our modern-day abilities to have Thanksgiving turkey all weekend to the Persians and the ancient Persians. Coincidentally, the ancient Persians also created ice cream, which, in my biased opinion, is perhaps our best creation, but I'll leave that to everyone else to judge.

Speaker, I can go on and on about all the amazing inventions that the ancient Persians gave to the world, but I would be remiss if I didn't mention some of the more contemporary contributions of peoples of Iranian descent.

Among the sea of notable individuals of Iranian descent, there are a few who stand out from the rest because of their monumental accomplishments. For instance, the late Maryam Mirzakhani is the first and only female to have ever been awarded the prestigious Fields Medal for mathematics, a truly remarkable accomplishment. Anousheh Ansari was the first female private space explorer to travel to space. Pierre Omidyar created and founded one of the biggest tech companies in the world, eBay. Right here in Canada, the Ghermezian family were the longest-running title holders for having built two of the biggest malls in the world: the Mall of America and the West Edmonton Mall.

Speaker, these are just a few of the countless accomplishments of individuals of Iranian descent who have done truly remarkable things. There are countless others just like these individuals who have significantly contributed to every field known to man. Whether it be in the arts, academia, engineering, business, science, theatre and even politics, you'll find an individual of Iranian descent always striving for the stars.

Speaker, right here in Ontario, over 150,000 individuals of Persian descent call this great province home. Many of them, like me and my family, came to this country decades ago in search of a better life and a brighter future. Canada and Ontario opened their arms to us and thousands of families, individuals like us, by giving us an opportunity to start our lives all over again. We were provided with

boundless opportunities that have spurred the success of a thriving Persian Canadian community that has not skipped a step in making sure they give back to a province and country that have given them so much.

Everywhere you look, Canadians of Persian descent have risen to the upper echelons of their respective fields and have worked to enrich their surroundings by contributing to them as best as they can. Whether it be through their work or through their personal interactions, there's always a flair and sparkle that a Canadian Iranian brings to the table. But don't take my word for it: Just attend a Persian dinner party, or better yet, go to one of the countless Nowruz celebrations which take place throughout the month of March. If there is a time of year when Persian Canadians make their presence known, especially right here in Ontario, it's definitely during Persian New Year in March. The ancient customs, music and dancing that are on display during this time of year are what truly differentiate Iranians from the rest. As I've mentioned before many times in this House, they definitely know how to throw a party.

And the food: What can I say about the food? If you haven't had Persian food, you don't know what you're missing. There is simply nothing like it in the world. And lucky for Ontarians, there is no shortage of Persian restaurants in this province; in particular, right here in the GTA.

0910

Speaker, I just want to circle back to why I'm bringing this bill forward and what it would mean to the many Iranian Canadians living here in the province of Ontario. At the core of this bill is the essence of recognition for a community of peoples who are hard-working citizens with a rich pedigree of history and traditions. At heart, every Persian Canadian is a poet, historian and humanist, and it is through this lens that they often interact with the world around them. So for me, like many other Persian Canadians, recognizing Persian heritage means that I'm able to honour my own family, traditions and heritage while also celebrating the place that makes it all possible, right here in the beautiful province of Ontario.

On that note, I'd like to end with a quote from one of my favourite poets, which I think reflects the theme of gratitude. Rumi said:

Whatever happens to you ...
Don't fall in despair,
Even if all the doors are closed ...
A secret path will be there for you that no one knows,
You can't see it yet ...
But so many parades are at the end of this path ...
Be grateful ...
It is easy to thank after obtaining what you want ...
Thank before having what you want.

Speaker, I want to thank every one of my colleagues, I want to thank you, and I look forward to celebrating Persian Heritage Month with all of you once this has passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you to my friend MPP Parsa for introducing this bill. I think it's terrific that we're to take a moment to acknowledge those of Persian heritage in the month of March in this province. I congratulate the member for putting this forward.

In the time I have to speak to this bill, what I'd like to talk about are some of the fantastic lessons I've had occasion to learn from friends who are in the Iranian diaspora here as Persian Canadians, who brought stories to me from their homeland. I had the great fortune to go to school at York University and study political science with people from all over the world, including from Iran.

What I learned very quickly from my Iranian friends and from Persian friends, as a student of Canadian history, is that we put up with too much from government sometimes. There is a feistiness and a resilience to Iranian civil society that I think most Canadians don't understand, and I want to talk about that for a bit as we celebrate what Persians have brought to our country. Every wave of immigration that arrives in Canada brings its own gift. So I want to talk about the resilience of Iranian civil society and what people right now are even engaged in, just so Canadians are aware.

I think many Canadians look to Iran right now, given the nature of global politics, and see a poor people suffering under a regime that doesn't allow them much freedom of expression. There's often this attitude that Iranian Canadians are somehow to be pitied. I want to say to every single Canadian watching this speech that I'm about to make in reading MPP Parsa's bill, you have a lot to learn from Iranians. You have a lot to learn from the Persian tradition of politics.

My friend talked about the historic millennia-old contributions that Persian society has made to the world. I want to talk about the gift of resistance that was brought to the world, starting in 1908, when the British discovered oil in what we now call Iran. From the time the British discovered oil in Iran, Britain took it upon itself to pay Iran over the next 25 years the equivalent of £16 million while taking for themselves £200 million. This legacy of colonialism that we know too well, as my friend MPP Mamakwa says to us many times in this place, was the legacy that Iranians had to struggle with, Persians had to struggle with. What did they do? They organized for decades, and they elected a popular Prime Minister, Mohammad Mosaddegh, who was deposed from power in 1953, because sadly the ancestry of this Legislature, the British government, and the American government of the day did not want to see a Prime Minister in power who wanted to bring those oil fields into popular ownership for the people of that territory so that the development of those resources would help people in those areas. The UK and US governments, we now know from historical record, collaborated to depose Mohammad Mosaddegh and install a shah who ruled with absolute terror for the decades after. And what did the Iranian people do? What did Persian folks do? They organized. They fought. They resisted.

In 1978, when the Iranian revolution that historians tell us about happened, my friends whom I had occasion to study with at York University told me about the nature of resistance in those communities. It's wasn't only in political parties. It went right down to faith communities, right down to corner stores and right down to members of the family. At the height of that resistance, organizations called "shoras," which, in English, as I understand, and my friend can correct me if I'm wrong, translates into workers' councils—community workers' councils were literally running factories, running the bakeries and producing things for people in need, when a shah had absolutely spoiled the country for decades, hoarding money for himself and his allies. It was the shoras and the Iranian resistance that stood up against him.

The thing that people are probably more familiar with is the green revolution—people thought about it as a Twitter revolution—in 2008-09. People I know who were there told me explicitly, "This was not a Twitter revolution." This was community organizing replicating on the example of the shoras, insisting upon liberty, freedom of expression and freedom of organizing. I think every Canadian should look at that.

I had occasion on my drive down here to talk to two friends, Saman and Mehdi, and both of them are telling me that pensioners, right now, in Iran are organizing across the country because their pension cheques have been slashed by the regime; that the global sanctions brought to bear on Iran have not hurt the regime in Iran, but they have certainly hurt regular people, particularly pensioners. Are pensioners putting up with it? No, they are not. In keeping with great Persian political traditions, they are organizing.

I take my hat off to every single person in the Iranian diaspora helping and encouraging their friends at home.

I ask our own Prime Minister to think seriously about the impacts of those sanctions on the people of Iran right now, and the pensioners who deserve their freedom, who deserve the wage they earned for building that society up—inasmuch as we respect our folks here.

I want to thank my friend for introducing this legislation. I think it's terrific that we'll have a month to celebrate, Persian Heritage Month. I hope—as a white Canadian with no ties to Iran, who has tried to learn from friends of mine who have lived there, whose families trace back to there—I've been able to communicate what Canadians can learn. Maybe we can take this month as an opportunity to awaken ourselves, because we need civic engagement. We need political participation now more than ever.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It's good to be standing with legislators today to highlight this important bill, and to thank my colleague the member from Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill for his leadership in bringing it forward and celebrating the incredible contributions Persian Canadians have made, going back to the first immigrants who came to the shores of this country in 1901.

Speaker, as the son of immigrants and someone who is proud to represent their values in this chamber, I think this

bill resonates most with me, appreciating full well the story of enterprising immigrants choosing Canada as a safe haven for freedom—a country that represents the values that unite us as Canadians, and values that are wholeheartedly embraced by Canada's Persian community, a community that has made a difference. Considering that over 117,000 Ontarians of Persian descent are living, working, raising their families, and contributing to our economies and our societies, we are incredibly better off for their story.

I believe that legislation like this, the Persian Heritage Month Act, serves an important purpose to remind us, as an affirmation, of the contribution Persian Canadians have made in every field of human endeavour. It also reminds us, I think, as somewhat alluded to by the member opposite, that components of Ontario's civil society are diverse and come from every corner of the world.

Madam Speaker, everyone deserves to be treated with the universal principle of freedom.

As the member from King—Vaughan, with a growing Persian community—neighbours with my colleague from Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill—I can appreciate full well why they chose this country.

Like many immigrant parents, Persian Canadians have worked hard. They have played by the rules. They have made countless sacrifices, especially now, during the time of this pandemic.

I believe that all new Canadians share a unique understanding with each other, regardless of their religious or ethnic origin, because they faced similar circumstances when they came to this country.

0920

You will not find any more determined opponents of authoritarianism than those Persian Canadians we know, who are very much committed to the values of freedom. It's why they chose this country. It's why they continue to act in the pursuit of liberty in all regions of the world. Speaker, these folks came to this country in search of the Canadian dream. They came here to get away from the despots back in Tehran.

It's important to remember that the Persian diaspora we speak of is freedom-loving. They have made a difference in our economy, in our politics, in law, in science and the arts. This civilization, for a millennium, has contributed to the development of our world.

Iran's loss has been Canada's gain, because Persian Canadians are very proud members of this truly beautiful, pluralistic mosaic that we call our country. This bill serves as a recognition of their sacrifice.

Right around this time in March, some weeks ago, we celebrated, with the Persian community, with the member from Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Nowruz—worldwide, on March 20, the first day of spring. I think the timing of this bill, reflecting the principles of Nowruz, of rebirth and the triumph of good over evil, is a very promising development—and a very well-timed introduction of this bill.

I want to thank the member from Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill for everything he has done to embrace the

values of the community and to ensure that his forefathers and foremothers, those who have come to this country, those who have worked hard to build this country, get recognized for generations.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to thank everyone in the Legislature, especially the colleague from Ottawa Centre, for giving us really interesting information about the politics behind the Persian people and how they had to fight for what they believed in in their country.

Speaker, I do support this bill because it's going to establish Persian Heritage Month—especially considering that March is a special month for Persian folks. I want to talk about why that's so significant. It's especially important to my community in London.

Just over a year ago, the Iranian community in my city was grieving after a plane carrying 176 passengers from Tehran to Canada crashed moments after taking off. In the plane, there were four students at Western University. Allow me to read an excerpt from the Global News article reporting on the one-year anniversary of the tragic event:

"Gone but not forgotten, a year after four Western University students were killed in the crash of Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752, their memory and the possibility of what could have been are still very much alive.

Ghazal Nourian, Milad Nahavandi and Hadis Hayatdavoudi were all finishing PhDs in the sciences. Sajedeh Saraeian was an incoming master's student about to start her studies in chemical engineering. Her husband, Mohammad Javad Mianji, was also killed in the crash.

"It's been a year and it seems as fresh as yesterday. We still think of her a lot," said Jamie Noel, an assistant professor of chemistry at Western....

"Because of the coronavirus gathering restriction, Noel said it would be hard for people to get together for such an 'emotional situation' without being able to comfort one another, so he said each will mark the anniversary in their own way."

There was so much life and potential that we lost in our community when the flight went down, and this community hasn't been able to properly grieve or mark the anniversary due to the pandemic.

It is a good step to recognize the Persian Heritage Month Act. We need to have it for the good things that have happened in the Iranian diaspora, and also for the tragic things that we must remember and learn from. I think this bill is a good first step, because it's showing the approximately 100,000 members of the Persian community in Ontario that they do matter.

It's important to note that in recent immigration populations, as of 2016, Iranians are among the highest to settle in the province, with nearly 21,000 calling Ontario home since 2011.

Another way we can support the Persian community is to be serious about combatting racism and rooting it out of provincial systems. We know that exists. Ontario could be doing so much more to stop racism and discrimination in

its forms. Instead of moving forward in the fight against racism and discrimination, we know that this government dragged us backwards and cut the Anti-Racism Directorate. That would have been a very important step in the context of life, of what happens every day, but especially during the coronavirus—how that could have helped so many people who are victims of racism.

Another step, and the member mentioned it—he talked about Persian restaurants throughout Ontario, how there's not a shortage of them and how great the food is. A lot of those Persian restaurants are owned and operated by small businesses. Another step in supporting this community is honouring their contributions to our province and ensuring their hard work doesn't go unappreciated by supporting small business. They need to make sure that not only do they survive the pandemic, but they come out thriving.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business said it wants all governments to look at "lockdown alternatives and increased financial support for small businesses" as several jurisdictions move to tougher restrictions. Small businesses did their part by hiring staff, making structural changes for the sake of safety and stocking up in hopes of customers returning, only to be shut down all over again. The province needs to compensate them to cover their rent, utilities and other costs for the duration of the lockdown. The provincial government has repeatedly dropped the ball on curbing the pandemic. Small businesses have to pay the price, and that's not right.

As the member said, there are so many small businesses out there, and when we're talking in the context of the Persian community, there are a lot of people who own small businesses, who keep our local neighbourhoods thriving and alive and contribute so much by hiring people.

The Persian Heritage Month Act is a good first step and I do support it. I'm glad it's going to honour the Persian people. I thank everyone today for participating in this debate, and I hope your act passes so that we can actually put words into action to help the Persian Heritage Month Act move along.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: I rise today to speak in support of Bill 271, An Act to proclaim the month of March as Persian Heritage Month, brought forward by my good friends and colleagues the member for Carleton and the member for Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill.

Speaker, I have said many times in this House that Ontario is proudly one of the most diverse jurisdictions in Canada, if not the whole world. I truly believe the rich mosaic of cultures and traditions we experience here is what makes this province such a great place to live and work.

Persian Heritage Month will highlight and celebrate a cultural group that has made countless contributions to the fabric of Ontario. Persian Ontarians like my colleagues are serving in government, health care, transportation, law, education, trades, infrastructure and any sector you can think of. I'm glad my Persian neighbours, friends and

colleagues are here doing their part in making Ontario the best province it can be.

I appreciate that Persian Ontarians have been so diligent in bringing their wonderful cuisine to our province so we can all enjoy the flavour and variety of Persian food in many restaurants all across this province.

Speaker, have you seen what Persian cuisine does with pomegranate? I have seen that. One of my favourite dishes is kebab with a pomegranate sauce that is indescribably delicious—honestly, mouth-watering delicious. I love it. I highly recommend that. If you and members gathered here and those watching on TV or online haven't tried the fesenjan at Shahyad Kababsaray in my riding of Mississauga East—Cooksville, you are definitely missing out.

If you are wondering what would be nice to have for dinner this week, I encourage you to check out your local Persian restaurant.

In all sincerity, the Persian community is an integral part of Ontario, and I am all for celebrating their presence and contributions by proclaiming the month of March as Persian Heritage Month.

Diversity is our strength here in Ontario.

I want to once again thank the members for their collective effort in bringing this great bill to the floor.

0930

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Stan Cho: Good morning to everybody. Dorood. Speaker, to you: Haletun chetore? It's an honour to rise today to speak in favour of my colleague and friend's private member's bill to declare March Persian Heritage Month. I want to thank the member from Carleton and the member from Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill for bringing this bill forward.

I think all members of this House will agree that, objectively, Willowdale is the best neighbourhood in the world, but there might be some debate as to why that is. Certainly, part of that debate has to include that Willowdale is very much the world in one neighbourhood. Two of its largest constituencies are Korean Canadians and Iranian Canadians. I think my colleague and my friend will agree that these two cultures really do get along. You see evidence of that up and down Yonge Street. But why do we have a cordial relationship? One can make the argument that we have a long relationship. That relationship certainly extends back not just centuries, but millennia—in fact, to the Silla dynasty, nearly 1,500 years ago. Even in the year I was born, in 1977, a little known fact—

Mr. Mike Harris: God, you're old.

Mr. Stan Cho: Yes, I am old. Thank you for that.

A little-known fact is that back in 1977, the Korean government named a street in Seoul, its capital, Tehran Street, and in a friendly gesture back, the government of Iran named a street in Tehran Seoul Street—two streets that still exist to this day.

We've heard members talk about the rich, storied culture and art history, and that certainly has something to do with it, but I think there are other reasons why the two

exist in harmony. One of them has to be the values that these two cultures represent of discipline, of respect for our seniors, of taking care of those who are important to you and always working hard. I think no further than to two constituents in Willowdale, John Ko and David Seo, tae kwon do fourth-dan masters who have a tae kwon do studio in Willowdale. They say that some of their best students are those of Persian descent, because they work hard, they are disciplined and they show that respect—three key pillars of the martial art of tae kwon do.

Speaker, I think one of the things that unites Iranian Canadians and Korean Canadians—and we've spoken about it in the House at length today—has to be the food. In Willowdale, you can go to one restaurant and get a kebab and sabzi polo, and walk next door and get bibimbap and kalbi. These are absolutely delicious.

I do want to talk about the Korean dish of nurungji. Nurungji is created when you cook rice and you have the crispy parts left at the bottom of the pot. You're not going to see this on a menu at a Korean restaurant, because this is the stuff the restaurant owners keep for themselves and put on the tables of their families. The Persians, I have to say, have their version. It's called tahdig. Tahdig is prepared by taking basmati rice, rinsing it, salting it, parboiling it and removing the rice. Then, at the bottom of the pot, you add some vegetable oil, some ghee and some butter. You add the parboiled rice back in, you add herbs and spices like saffron, and then you leave the top of the pot slightly ajar so that the moisture escapes. What happens as a result is that at the bottom, the rice turns into this crispy, amazing, delicious treat that you also won't find on any menu of a Persian restaurant, because I know Persian families are saving this for themselves. I will say this, at the risk of my mother being very offended: The Persians do tahdig better than the Koreans do nurungji, Speaker. It is a food that unites us in Willowdale.

I am going to support, and I am proud to support, this bill to declare March Persian Heritage Month.

My offer to those watching at home, if I made you thoroughly hungry and you can't wait until next March to enjoy these delicacies: Come for a walk on Yonge Street. Start at Steeles and walk all the way down, and you will see fine establishments like Khorak Supermarket. You will see Korean groceries next to these beautiful Persian restaurants. You can get the sabzi polo at Gol and a grill down at Spring Garden. Speaker, come enjoy what Willowdale has to offer. It is the very best of Persian culture and Persian cuisine.

It is with great pride, great honour that I will absolutely be supporting my colleague and my friend's private member's bill to declare March Persian Heritage Month.

To all of you watching from home, merci, and we'll see you soon. Thank you so much.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate? Further debate?

I return to the member for Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill.

Mr. Michael Parsa: I want to start by thanking my friends and colleagues from Ottawa Centre, King—

Vaughan, London-Fanshawe, Mississauga East-Cooksville and, of course, Willowdale. Thank you very much for all your supportive and kind words.

The importance of this bill at this time for our community speaks volumes.

Just earlier, my colleague across referenced the downing of the plane. It wasn't a plane crash; it was the downing of a plane by a regime that does not respect democracy.

We talk about having Iranians come to Canada for a better life. It's true. If you look at every walk of life, whether it's academia or in business—you will see Iranians leading the charge or being strong supporters and leaders in every sector.

As I've said many, many times, I'm very proud of the contributions Iranian Canadians have made. This bill will allow us to recognize the contributions of the many Iranian Canadians who are living here in the province of Ontario.

My colleague referenced small businesses. It's very true: The sense of entrepreneurship by Iranian Canadians—they're very loud and proud about it. They love contributing; they love giving back to a country and a province that have given them so much. I think by having the month of March declared as Persian Heritage Month, it's a gesture for us to say we recognize their contributions, we thank them for their contributions, and we look forward to celebrating with every Iranian Canadian.

Only in this part of the world, only in this province do we have—and I mentioned this in committee when my colleagues asked me questions. I said this doesn't happen in other parts of the world. Only in Canada do we embrace and celebrate our differences, and it's something that actually brings us closer; in parts of the world that don't, usually differences divide people and separate people—but not in this province, not in the greatest country in the world, Canada.

I thank each and every one of my colleagues for their support of this bill.

I look forward to celebrating Persian Heritage Month with all of you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Mr. Parsa has moved second reading of Bill 271, An Act to proclaim the month of March as Persian Heritage Month. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Pursuant to standing order 101(h), the bill is referred to the Committee of the Whole House—I recognize the member for Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill.

Mr. Michael Parsa: Thank you, Speaker. To the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills, please.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Is the majority in favour of the bill being referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills? Agreed.

This bill is referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO DAY ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LE JOUR DE L'ONTARIO

Mr. Parsa moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 173, An Act to proclaim Ontario Day / Projet de loi 173, Loi proclamant le Jour de l'Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Parsa: When this bill was presented to committee, I truly enjoyed listening to my colleagues from all sides as we talked about what Ontario means to each and every one of us.

When I put this bill forward, it was a way for me to recognize, as I said previously, that we do live in the greatest country in the world. I have proudly said this, and I scream it for a reason. We want people to know how we appreciate the fact that this country and this province opened their arms to me and my family and literally have given us everything we have. Within the greatest country in the world, there's this province that's truly unique to the rest of the country, one that allows all of us to be able to live, work, live in democracy, practise our own faith and our own religion, all in peace and harmony. As I said before, that doesn't happen everywhere.

0940

When you look at the province of Ontario and compare it to other provinces—we have some of the best all across this country, but the uniqueness of this province truly deserves for us to be able to celebrate it. When it comes to some of our political leaders, people in academia and people in sports, for example—with a population of almost 38 million, we've done a lot and we've achieved a lot here. Some of the people who have contributed to our country and what has made this country so great come from right here in Ontario. For me and my family—again, having gotten literally everything we have because of this country and this province, it's very important for us to take every opportunity, to take every chance to celebrate what makes our province so great.

In committee, I heard one of my colleagues talk about the fact that this sort of bill allows us to get to know each other better. One of my colleagues from the opposition in committee said, "I had never gone to an event that was different than how I grew up here in this part of the province. Recently, it has allowed me to be able to go in and learn more about the people who are living in this culture in this riding"—and that's what an Ontario Day bill will do.

Hopefully, when and if this passes, the very first day of Ontario Day—to everybody, it will mean something different, and it could mean something different, and that's okay. But for me, this first Ontario Day is going to be a recognition of my deepest gratitude and thanks to all the front-line workers in the province of Ontario, who have done so much in the last 13 or 14 months for the rest of us. Every single front-line worker, whether it's in the

hospitals, the doctors and the nurses, the PSWs, the clerks in the grocery stores—when this becomes law and it passes, and hopefully it does, I will be thinking about them on Ontario Day and thanking them for everything they have done for us throughout this pandemic. At a time when we were retreating, when we were told to stay home and stay safe, they went to the front lines to protect us. Although this, again, could mean something different to everyone else, and that's okay, on this Ontario Day I urge all my colleagues and everyone who is watching—if this passes, and hopefully it does—to think of Ontario Day, the very first Ontario Day, and thank them and keep all of them in mind, who did so much for us during the pandemic.

Think about the small business owners who had to sacrifice so much in order to help us stop the spread of this virus, those small business owners who we have referred to as the engine of our economy, as the lifeblood of every single community. Help us remember them on Ontario Day and give back to them on Ontario Day. Once we get open, when it's safe, go and support them. Support your neighbours and get to know more of this province when it is safe to do so. Travel around and get to know more of our province, because it is truly unique, truly beautiful.

I look forward to celebrating Ontario Day with everyone.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's always a pleasure to stand on behalf of the good people of Algoma-Manitoulin.

This morning, we're talking about Bill 173, An Act to proclaim Ontario Day.

We have lots to celebrate here in Ontario. I'll get to the discussions, a little bit later in my comments, about the things that we have to celebrate and the things we have to remember. But the things that we have to really highlight as one of the priorities this government has this morning—is to talk about Ontario.

Right now, to be honest with you, Speaker, Ontarians aren't celebrating. Ontarians are angry. Ontarians are looking at this government and saying, "What the heck is going on?" That's what a lot of Ontarians are saying.

I agree with the member who just spoke that, hopefully, some day—I know we will. The resilience of our front-line workers and the people across this province will bring us there, with their care and compassion, and the fact that people are going over and above the call of duty. We've heard over and over again the commitment from our front-line workers and those in the professional medical field who continuously step up. We'll be able to celebrate that, and maybe on this particular day, if this bill does go through, we'll be able to recognize the actual work that they've done, the contributions that they've consistently done through this entire pandemic, the sacrifices they've done for their families.

I want to go back to the anger that people across this province are feeling. Last week, the government came out with several announcements and more restrictions. Speaker, I have never seen this province so angry but so united on something, and so caring. We heard the voices of

everyday people and our health care professionals come out and scream to this government, "What are you doing? Where are you taking us? Why are you not taking the actions that are absolutely required to get us to the level of security that we want to feel for our family and our loved ones and our workplaces?" I have never experienced that level of anger in this province. It was gut-wrenching. You heard from people—from their inner emotions. They're scared and angry. Why are we going down this path? Why are we making political decisions instead of scientifically based decisions?

Hopefully, one day, we're going to be able to celebrate Ontario Day and recognize those who have passed away, those who have succumbed to what we're going through right now with COVID-19. Let's make sure that on Ontario Day, when that day does come, we don't forget them.

Right now, as proud as I am of being from Ontario, I'm really not in a celebratory mood. I'm more concerned with people who are scared to go in to work but have no choice but to go in to work.

I come from northern Ontario. A lot of people are asking—paid sick days: We need those across the province.

Actually, I had a discussion with one of my colleagues this weekend, and he explained to me a perception that I didn't quite grasp, but I fully grasped it this weekend. Here in Toronto, there are a lot of people who go to work—they get up each and every morning, and they get crammed onto the subways and on buses. They have no choice. Because they're working at \$16 or \$17 an hour, they cannot afford to stay home. They cannot afford to get sick—well, yes, they can afford to get sick, but they do not have any paid sick days. They do not have the discretion or the ability to sit at home for an extended period of time and wait to possibly be eligible and qualify for the federal program. So they go to work.

Interjection: They put their life on the line.

Mr. Michael Mantha: You're right; they do put their life on the line. They go on that bus, shoulder to shoulder, arm to arm with the people who are on there. They go on the subway.

In northern Ontario, where I'm from, we have the ability—some people were carpooling. Now they've restricted—they're not carpooling anymore.

I'm very proud of a lot of the mining and forestry companies throughout northern Ontario that have stepped up and brought in rapid testing and made sure that a lot of the protocols are there in the process of the day-to-day activities of their workers, made sure that they're coming in and working in a safe environment. There are still concerns, yes, but it's not the same thing as where you have large companies that just don't have that ability to provide that safe environment for the workers who are there because they have bills, they have mortgages, they have payments. They have to go to work. They don't have a choice.

0950

If we wanted to celebrate something here in Ontario, why not—we have the ability. This government has that

ability. Why not bring in paid sick days—time so that individuals can get paid and not worry about missing hours of work? Let's celebrate Ontario. Let's be that Ontario that we can be and implement those days. Let's stop putting that spin on, "The federal program is there for people to apply, and people aren't applying for it." They just don't meet the criteria. They cannot sit at home for three or four days and then miss an extensive period of time—and the pay isn't going to come in in a couple of weeks. Can you afford three days? I know that a lot of people in my riding just can't. That's the reality of it; you know it. We can fix it, but this government chooses not to. What we're doing is recycling notes with the messaging and saying, "No, there's a program federal program is available." Well, that federal program is obstructive, and it is not easily accessible to individuals.

There's another big part of what's going on in this province that was happening way before COVID-19 started.

This weekend, I was invited—and I've asked permission from the family to utilize this story. I won't use last names. I was invited to the community of Sagamok First Nation. Two things happened there. They finally decommissioned their checkpoint. Their entire community is now vaccinated. Many of the younger people who are eligible are being vaccinated as we speak. The chief and council and those who were at the checkpoint were celebrating, finally, the opening of the community, which was welcome news.

Prior to attending that, I attended another family event. I was invited by a family member to do a prayer walk within the community. They were walking in the memory of their daughter, who had succumbed to an overdose. In Ontario, we are dealing with a huge opioid crisis. In Algoma-Manitoulin, in the Algoma region, per capita, we have the largest amount of individuals who are dying from the opioid crisis. That is nothing to celebrate.

When we have Ontario Day—one of these days, if this piece of legislation passes—will we be able to celebrate that Ontario has finally stepped up and we are addressing the opioid crisis? That's something that we desperately need to do.

I'll tell you, Speaker, there are a lot of individuals out there who have a conscience, who work within the mental health and addictions in a variety of locations and organizations, who are proud to do what they do. They have been stressed for a very long time.

Communities have been hurting, because as you know, Speaker, when an individual dies from an overdose, it's not just the individual who is affected; it's the individuals in that circle, as well—the family, the mother, the father, the children, the grandfather, the people around, the people who are providing the services. It affects a lot of people, and it affects the well-being of that community.

The young lady's name was Charisse. She was beautiful. She was 27 years old. Her birthday, I believe, was on Friday. We did the walk on Saturday. Two boys, three girls, ages ranging from two years old to 11 years old, are left behind to be raised by their grandfather. The grandfather, who has been carrying so much pain, carried the

community eagle staff as we walked through the entire community during the prayer walk. They asked me if I wanted to share a few words. My words that I shared were very few. I wanted to be there in presence, to be there with the community. Some of the words that were shared by the grandfather—at the end of ceremony we got down by the baseball field, where they unveiled a plaque with a message to those who are bringing the drugs inside the community: "Your days are numbered. You will not be permitted to kill any of our loved ones—our children, our mothers, our daughters, our fathers, our sisters, our brothers—in our community anymore."

That was one walk that I did, but that is something that is repeated time and time again in so many communities across this province. Is that going to be part of Ontario Day that we're going to be celebrating—that we finally addressed that? I hope so. I hope it's something that we're going to be talking about.

Are we going to be celebrating, on Ontario Day, that we finally provided the services that we need for small businesses? A lot of them are also being affected right now, some that we were successful—and I say "we" on behalf of the organizations that lobbied and put in some very strong efforts towards this government to expand on the small business loan, in order to expand it for them to qualify, particularly in the tourism sector.

There is a good way that we're going to be able to—again, going back to the member and some of his comments that he brought forward. When we have that ability once again to travel through this province and go to the many events—because I know I'm in desperate need of a powwow dance. I'm in desperate need of a sacred fire. I'm in desperate need of getting into Gilbertson's on St. Joseph Island to go to the maple fest. I'm in desperate need of heading up to the Wawa salmon fishing derby. I'm in desperate need of going to the Winnie the Pooh festival. I'm in desperate need of the Country Fest on Manitoulin Island.

We are all in need of these events. These are things that we will be able to once again celebrate. But we need to get to that point, and those small businesses and tourist outfitters need that support—and again, a big shout-out to them for having lobbied this government in order to get the government to respond and provide them with some help. But there are still many small businesses that just don't qualify. One of the biggest asks that was asked from small businesses is to open the criteria—create greater eligibility, expand the program—so that they can qualify for this, as well.

I want to go back to what I started out by talking about, celebrating Ontario Day. I would sure like to see an amendment put into this bill and have it include paid sick days. Wow, do you want to pass a bill that will be significant? You can do it. Just imagine that those individuals—and this is not just coming from our labour organizations and health care professionals; this is coming from everyone.

How is it that last week—which elevated everybody's frustration, the changes that this government brought forward. They lacked the fundamental ask that has been there

consistently from everyone, all organizations, labour, health care professionals and so on: having paid sick days included.

1000

Bill 173: Let's make that amendment and make sure it's added in there, and let's celebrate that—Ontario finally recognizes that workers across this province are that important that we're going to provide them with paid sick days and paid time to go get the vaccine. I see a few heads nodding on the other side. It would be nice to see it actually implemented. Go back to your cabinet, go back to your ministries, go back to your members and say, "Hmm, that's a pretty good suggestion. Maybe it's something we can do together."

There's so much more that we can do in this province right now.

Yes, celebrating Ontario Day, proclaiming it is key. Like I said, I'm extremely proud.

Je suis extrêmement content. Je suis super fier d'être une personne de l'Ontario, un petit gars—je m'appelle tout le temps un petit gars de Gogama, un petit francophone qui ne pouvait pas parler un mot en anglais jusqu'au temps qu'il arrive au secondaire. La seule chose que je savais comment dire quand j'étais jeune, moi, c'était « poutine » puis « ketchup ». Et puis, regarde : aujourd'hui, je me présente ici dans l'Assemblée de la part de tous les gens à travers Algoma-Manitoulin et d'une grosse partie de tous les gens à travers cette province, et je donne mes commentaires sur le projet de loi pour proclamer le Jour de l'Ontario.

J'espère, comme j'ai dit dans mon discours en anglais, que le gouvernement va réaliser que ce qu'on veut vraiment voir—de la viande, comme on dit, dans la soupe, ou bien dans notre salade—c'est qu'on mette des jours pour combler des jours payés pour les gens qui sont malades pour qu'ils puissent rester à la maison, pour qu'ils puissent faire le bon choix pour ne pas exposer pas seulement eux autres et leur famille, mais les gens avec qui ils travaillent dans leur lieu de travail.

Oui, un beau jour on va célébrer—j'espère qu'on peut célébrer—ensemble; on peut reconnaître tous les gens qu'on a perdus à cause de cette pandémie. J'espère qu'on peut célébrer aussi les bonnes actions constructives qu'on a prises et puis qu'on a mises en place pour aider les gens. J'espère que ce jour-là, il vient. Et puis je l'offre au gouvernement : pensez-y. Mettez de la viande dans votre salade et rajoutez des jours pour reconnaître les gens qui vont au travail, et puis mettez des journées de maladie dans votre projet de loi 173 pour vraiment aider les gens de cette province.

Again, Speaker, I'm a proud francophone from northern Ontario. I'm a small guy who comes from a small community called Gogama, but I bring a lot of history with me.

There are a lot of people who are counting on us here.

I look towards that day when, yes, we can actually celebrate Ontario Day. But when we do celebrate that day, let's make sure that we're celebrating it and recognizing our front-line workers, that we're recognizing the fact that

we did the right decisions and that we included paid sick days.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Joel Harden: I'll say candidly, because I respect MPP Parsa, I liked your other speech. I liked the Persian Heritage Month speech. I had a lot to connect with there. It's a great initiative.

At this very moment, given all the phone calls, given all the emails, given all the contact I've received from people all over the city where I live, in Ottawa and Algonquin territory, I feel the same way as the member from Algoma-Manitoulin. I don't feel very celebratory this morning.

I woke up to news that police checkpoints were set up at 4 a.m. on our five bridges and two ferry crossings and that no one from this government contacted the chief of police in Ottawa or the mayor of our city to collaborate on that.

Interjection.

Mr. Joel Harden: I hear some of my friends saying it's not true. Well, I guess they're calling Mayor Jim Watson a liar. That's deeply disturbing. If the member for Sarnia-Lambton is calling the mayor of Ottawa a liar, that is deeply disturbing. The mayor of Ottawa was on CBC Radio this morning, saying very clearly that he was on a conference call with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing on Friday. Ontario Big City Mayors were on a conference call with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, my neighbour in eastern Ontario. Did the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing tell the mayor of Ottawa or any other big-city mayor that this was coming? No.

Is the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, is this government prepared to compensate municipalities for asking our police forces to staff checkpoints where they are simply asking, "Are you following public health rules?" Speaker, of course we're following public health rules. This is a pandemic. We've been in it for more than a year—and they ask our security forces to set up checkpoints across our interprovincial borders to ask you, "Hey, are you doing your part?" What a colossal waste of resources.

Mr. Robert Bailey: You're a waste of resources.

Mr. Joel Harden: If the member for Sarnia-Lambton wants to point a finger at me and say that it's wrong to say that, Speaker, I'll take my charter rights in this place and I'll tell that member, through you: Stand up at your cabinet table and tell your government to pick up the phone and call the mayors and the chiefs of police of the cities you ask to follow your ridiculous plans.

There is a statue right outside this building, on the west side, right outside the window of the office I was privileged to get, working hard for the people of Ottawa Centre. It's from the 1837 rebellions of Upper Canada. On that statue, if you read the epitaph, it talks about a time when people in this province had to take up arms to deal with the colonial government in England that would not abide by the rights of people. The statue says, "May we never get

back there again”—where a government doesn’t listen, where a government does whatever it wants, where people are dying and governments do nothing.

Interjection.

Mr. Joel Harden: They’re laughing, Speaker, and it honestly breaks my heart to know that members of this government find that funny.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I find you funny.

Mr. Joel Harden: Because people working in warehouses right now—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Stop the clock, please.

I’m going to ask the member from Sarnia–Lambton to withdraw.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I’m also going to remind everyone in the House that we’ve had a really nice, quiet morning where everybody gave everyone an opportunity to speak without interrupting. It seems to be going in the opposite direction now. I’m going to ask folks to bring it back to where we’re all being respectful. Thank you.

Back to the member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you, Speaker.

What I’d really like this government to do is to withdraw its autocracy from the province of Ontario; withdraw the one-way channels of the communication they have from the Premier’s office to everywhere else, because in Ottawa, we can’t figure it out.

Our health experts are literally on television almost crying. Our health teams on the front lines are completely exhausted. And this government wants to at one moment ban playgrounds and police our way out of this pandemic—knowing nothing from the experts they were supposed to listen to. And they find it funny when a member stands up in this House and says, “Pick up the phone and call the mayor of our city before you tell our police forces to staff ridiculous, pointless checkpoints.”

I have a question, through you, Speaker, to the government. Think about the money it takes to put women and men who are first responders on five bridges and two ferry crossings in the Ottawa area. Think about all the money that you are wasting, at a time when people need paid sick days and immediate financial support to wait for their results from a test or to take a vaccination.

I tell you right now, there are two priority neighbourhoods in Ottawa Centre. I’ve been in those communities; I’ve knocked on those doors. The highest proportion of rooming houses in the city of Ottawa are in Ottawa Centre. I’ve talked to those folks who are living with trauma, who are struggling with all kinds of things, who work in precarious jobs.

I heard earlier when the member from Algoma-Manitoulin got up and asked, “Can anybody in this place wait three days before they get vaccinated?” Of course we can. We make \$116,000 a year when we start out here. When you’re a cabinet minister, you make much more. Of course we can wait. But for people piecing together Uber Eats contracts or piecing together personal support work

contracts and working at the grocery store—those front-line heroes who have been keeping us going for the last year can’t wait.

But for some reason, this government finds the money to set up useless checkpoints at our bridges and ferry crossings in the city of Ottawa—and you’re darn right I’m furious about it this morning. I don’t feel celebratory about this morning. I’m insulted that the government finds it funny. The government thinks it’s political theatre for me to express these points.

1010

I am coming from the bottom of my heart to people over here—I know many of the members over here, who I’ve encountered in various pieces of legislation, who are decent folks, who want to stand up for their communities. I’m saying, through you, Speaker, to them: Now is your time to tell your Premier that he has to listen to more than his consultants from the United States, McKinsey and Co., who I guess are being paid millions of dollars to give us the charade we’re seeing at these press conferences. You are parliamentarians. Your people sent you here. People are dying in our ICUs right now, and when I look at the geography of who is dying, so many of them are Conservative-represented ridings. They voted for you—not to sit here and do theatrics and to talk about a failing federal program which is not helping the most marginalized people get the benefits they need to stay safe. They fought for you to help them right in the here and now, to do what countries like Australia and New Zealand and Singapore and Norway have done.

What are we seeing? We’re seeing the blame game. The Premier gets up: “It’s your fault, Prime Minister. I don’t have the vaccines.” Come on. Anybody with the mental capacity to read what the public health experts are telling us knows very well we cannot at this moment vaccinate our way out of this pandemic. It’s a crucial piece, and I plan on getting, personally—now that the age limit has been lowered to 40—the AstraZeneca vaccine. I’m setting up my appointment this week. Every vaccination we get is a brick in the wall against this virus. We should all be doing it. The member for Kiiwetinoong showed leadership in doing so himself. But that’s not the only way out.

When you have experts like Dr. Peter Jüni getting on radio and saying that he’s pondering leaving his position because he just can’t see the suffering anymore, that he just can’t handle the gaudy spectacle of people being intubated who days ago were at a Dollarama helping somebody, who needed to stay home, who needed to have the financial capacity to stay home—we’ve really hit rock bottom in this province’s politics.

I talked about 1837. I want to talk about 1872. There’s another plaque across Queen’s Park Crescent, just outside of the building. It typifies the typographical workers’ union strike, which brought us union recognition in this province. Hundreds of thousands of women and men fought for them. They were declared illegal. They were told that they were doing unlawful combinations in the workplace by asking for an eight-hour day and a 40-hour work week. They fought, and they won, and they

struggled, and they were victorious. That's a great thing to celebrate in the province of Ontario. When they fought against tyranny in 1872 and when people fought against tyranny in 1837, and all of our families who may trace back to those families—could we ever have imagined a moment in which a plague, a pandemic, hitting our province was treated like a game by the government in power to score political points or to suggest it was someone else's fault, when the evidence is staring us right in the face?

Interjection.

Mr. Joel Harden: Apparently—I just heard—they don't like being yelled at. Well, get used to it. My phone is ringing off the hook with people yelling at me, and they have every right to yell at me. People are furious. They're losing family members in long-term care. What did these people do—Speaker, through you. Nothing. In fact, so many of their top staffers are tied to the for-profit LTC industry. There's a revolving door between this government and that lobby.

What have they done for the essential workers who have kept us alive, who have kept body and soul together?

What urgency did they have for so many of our small businesses that are getting flushed down the toilet?

I can't tell you the amount of small business owners in Ottawa Centre, Speaker, I've had occasion to speak to, who have said—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I apologize for interrupting the member. Unfortunately, time for debate is over. You'll have an opportunity to finish your time when the bill is called again.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: By choosing policing over public health policy in his most recent slate of restrictions, the Premier showed that this government is either in over its head or ignoring the advice of public experts.

Currently, the Premier is sitting on one million vaccines that have not yet been distributed. Meanwhile, essential workers, particularly in hot spots, continue to have to put themselves and their entire households at risk by doing the simple act of going to work.

This rollout has been a mess from the start, leading to so much confusion and waste. For example, last week, my office called eight pharmacies in my riding that were listed on the government's website. Only one of those pharmacies was actually offering the vaccine; the rest said they weren't.

Public health units are still waiting for further direction from this government.

Hot spots like N6A in London weren't included as a priority postal code.

The COVID-19 vaccine supply for Middlesex-London Health Unit is being cut by 25%, according to the region's medical officer, Dr. Chris Mackie.

This government has staked everything on the vaccine, only to turn around and muck it up. We knew supplies would be limited and inconsistent. The truth is that we wouldn't be in this position today if this government had done its job and implemented the expert advice and data driven by public health policy.

Legislate paid sick days, grant paid time off for vaccines, fund on-site vaccine clinics in workplaces like Cargill poultry processing plant in my riding, and give local public health units the information and funding they need to do their jobs. Anything short of this is irresponsible.

INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's my privilege to rise today and update the House on important new investments in Sarnia-Lambton by the government of Ontario.

After many years of being considered one of the worst roads in southwestern Ontario, it was great to learn the first phase of the Plank Road reconstruction work in Sarnia is expected to start in July and be completed by October. If you recall, a total of \$4.2 million in combined federal-provincial funding was announced last summer for this project. The money will support the reconstruction and widening of Plank Road between South Indian Road and Highway 40, which will increase road safety and improve traffic and travel times. This is great news for everyone who uses Plank Road on a regular basis.

In more infrastructure news, I was pleased with the recent announcement that the governments of Ontario and Canada are providing more than \$10 million to our Sarnia-Lambton school boards to upgrade infrastructure at their local schools to protect against COVID-19. The Lambton Kent District School Board will receive almost \$6.3 million, while the St. Clair Catholic District School Board is in line for \$3.7 million. Upgrades in our local schools will include HVAC renovations to improve air quality, installing water-bottle refilling stations to improve access to safe drinking water, and space reconfigurations such as new walls and doors to enhance physical distancing.

Speaker, these are just some of the important investments that the government of Ontario is making in Sarnia-Lambton. I look forward to sharing more updates with you again soon.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Jessica Bell: The government's announcement on Friday to bring in a police state regime while utterly failing to quash workplace transmission is going to lead to more people in Ontario dying—people who shouldn't have to die.

I want to read some statements from health care professionals and their response to this. Here's Michael Warner—he feels anger and defeat: "I'm ... resigned to our shared destiny. I cannot see any circumstance where I can now protect my patients from being forced to be palliated because of the lack of beds."

This is Dr. Brooks Fallis: “They’ve done nothing to meaningfully protect them. And today they prioritized allowing those people who can stay at home to have non-essential goods made and delivered to them by people who end up in the ICU. It just felt like today”—this announcement—“was sending a whole lot of people to their death when they didn’t have to.”

These are heartbreaking words from people who are on the front lines helping people survive this pandemic.

It takes a very foolish group of people to respond to a pandemic primarily driven by workplace transmission and weighing primarily on racialized citizens by allowing cops to ask where you live and where you are going if you are outside.

You know what to do: Tackle workplace transmission, bring in paid sick days, listen to public health. Do your job. You are killing people.

1020

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I’m going to ask the member to withdraw.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Withdraw.

AGRICULTURAL COLLEGES

Mr. Will Bouma: I rise in the House today to offer my congratulations to the 16 students who have completed the inaugural agricultural equipment operator program at Conestoga College in Brantford. The success of these students will be celebrated virtually on Friday, April 30. This pilot program, based out of the Brantford airport location, is offered by Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning. This is a program funded by both the provincial and federal governments through the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, or CAP.

As we recognize the immense value the agriculture sector provides for our local economy and our food security, programs such as this one seek to address the need to train skilled workers to fulfill the demands of farm operations. This program provides training in such areas as spraying, fertilizing, custom tillage, harvesting and machine operation.

My hope is that this initial group of students will be the first of many seeking to achieve in-demand skills training, addressing this critical workforce need both for farms today and those in the future.

My sincere appreciation to Conestoga, as well, for being a provincial leader in the delivery of skilled trades and apprenticeship training.

I wish these students all the best as they embark upon their careers in the agricultural sector.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Joel Harden: I woke up early this morning to find out that there were checkpoints set up at the five bridges between our province, our city of Ottawa, and our neighbours in Gatineau, and at our two ferries. Do you know what was curious, Speaker? I heard the mayor of our city,

the honourable Jim Watson, say that he didn’t get a single phone call from this government about how that was going to happen, and that he is defying this government’s request—the earlier request, at least—for them to profile people.

This is people power in action. Good people all over this province know that the government right now is adrift without a rudder. The least they expect, when they implement measures that on their face don’t make any sense, is that they would pick up the phone and call Ottawa’s chief of police, call the Ottawa mayor, call our authorities, and not issue dictates from Toronto, as the mayor said this morning on CBC Radio. But that’s where we’re at, sadly. We have a situation in which people are filling our ICUs who are essential workers and dying. But this government would rather spend money on 24/7 checkpoints at five bridges and two ferry crossings that make no public health sense, at least not in the way they’re doing it right now.

Take that money and don’t do this charade. Put it in the hands of people who need to stay home safe, who need to be back with their families. Stop disrespecting essential workers, and start standing up for the people of this province with a real paid sick day program.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: I’m very pleased to be here in the Legislature today. For the last few weeks, I’ve had the privilege of being in a closed household bubble with my daughter Maggie; her partner, Dan; and their beautiful new baby girl, Violet Jean Hambly. I’ve been working solely from home in order to be able to help with those first few challenging weeks in a first-time mother’s life.

To all of the young moms who have given birth during COVID-19: Please know that you’ve had a very, very difficult and lonely road. Becoming a mom is challenging at the best of times, and COVID-19 is not the best of times, so please be gentle with yourselves and take care.

Speaker, there is an issue in my riding of Don Valley West that needs the attention of the Minister of Transportation. The building of the Ontario Line and the accompanying maintenance and storage facilities will be very disruptive to the Thorncliffe and Flemingdon Park communities, whatever the final design and alignment. These are dense, diverse urban communities that need vital transit links but that also need government to respect and understand the unique character of the services, businesses and faith institutions that serve them. Right now, community members feel that they have been excluded from the decision-making process and that information is not accessible.

I’m calling on the Minister of Transportation, respectfully, to establish a direct connection with community leaders and to visit the community as soon as possible to better understand local needs. I’m willing and available to facilitate such a visit and to introduce her to the community whenever she should choose to attend.

INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members' statements? The member from Kitchener-Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know you probably know this—but to everybody else who's here today: Did you know that one of the oldest covered bridges in Canada is located in Kitchener-Conestoga, right in the heart of Woolwich township, in the community of West Montrose?

The West Montrose covered bridge, or, as it is known locally, the Kissing Bridge, was built in 1880 and is still used today by many members of the community to cross the Grand River. While it was only meant to last less than a decade, today, 140 years later, it still stands as one of Waterloo region's most iconic landmarks.

Earlier this month, I had the honour of joining my friend the member from Oakville and parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Infrastructure to announce that Ontario would be investing \$2 million to rehabilitate and protect the bridge through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. This investment, along with funding from our local and federal partners, will support a much-needed retrofit of this long-standing piece of history.

Speaker, for too long, infrastructure in rural communities like Woolwich township had been forgotten about. But as the government voice for rural Waterloo region, I will continue to advocate for their needs, and I'm pleased to have the support of my government colleagues here in the chamber.

Our Minister of Infrastructure has delivered on funding that will bring a new Glasgow Street bridge to Conestoga, along with repairs to the Woolwich Memorial Centre and the Weigel stormwater management system. These repairs are long-overdue investments for Woolwich, and I thank the Minister of Infrastructure for hearing the voices of my community.

I look forward to delivering more good news to the people of Kitchener-Conestoga in the not-so-distant future.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Marit Stiles: Over the last few days, the government has managed to do what even their supporters thought was impossible: make matters in Ontario worse. My constituents in Davenport, like people across this province, are tired of the confusion, the mixed messaging, the reactive short-sighted decisions that are putting their families and their neighbours at risk.

Mr. Speaker, it has become clear that this government can no longer be trusted to lead us through this pandemic. They have lost the confidence of Ontarians. Our ICUs are overwhelmed. In some cases, whole families are being admitted. Kids are at home taking care of kids. SickKids hospital is repurposing beds for adult patients for the first time, health care workers are pleading for our help, and this government's response was to ban playgrounds and bring back carding.

Government members across the way bear as much responsibility as the Premier, but today I am challenging them to put the health of their constituents and the future of our province first.

Speaker, it is time for us to work together to save Ontario: Repeal the new police powers; bring in paid sick days and paid time off for vaccination; close all the non-essential workplaces; and get vaccines where they are needed now most. It is not going to be good enough to shuffle the deck chairs on the Titanic. Either allow us to turn this boat around or get off.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm pleased that the government is providing more than \$42 million to help non-profit organizations across the province, including many in Whitby and other parts of the region of Durham, to support staff and volunteers, to reimagine programming and renovate facilities as they deal with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This funding helps organizations like Luke's Place, Catholic Family Services of Durham and many others across the region of Durham adapt to the challenges created by the pandemic, ensuring that they can provide the best services possible and make a positive difference in the lives of individuals and families in Whitby and across the region of Durham.

Speaker, the Resilient Communities Fund grants will bring needed support to many community organizations across the region trying to meet local needs.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: I know that this last year has been very hard on our province. It has been tough on everyone, with no exceptions. As a father with three school-aged kids currently learning from home, I know how challenging things have been for the families of Ontario.

Everyone has been working hard to help stop the spread of COVID-19. I'm so grateful to be part of a community that cares so much about one another. That is why today I'm asking Ontarians to continue to do their part and get vaccinated. If you or someone you know qualifies for a vaccine, please do not hesitate to register or book an appointment online at ontario.ca/book-vaccine or by contacting your public health unit.

My parents recently received their vaccinations, and I can tell you what a relief it has been to know that they are now so much safer, and they feel great about it, too.

As a father, I want nothing more than to see my kids safely back at school with their friends and educators. Together, we can make this happen.

1030

I also want to remind the people of Ontario that the federal government is offering Ontarians up to four weeks of paid sick leave through the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit. This program gives income support to employed and self-employed Ontarians who are unable to work

because they are sick or need to self-isolate due to COVID-19. You can contact the CRA to find out more or apply online through the CRA website.

I want to thank our Premier and my colleagues for their work in supporting our constituents.

And I want to thank our front-line and essential workers as well as every individual for doing their part to stay home, stay safe, save lives.

Let's get through this together so we can come back stronger than ever.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I seek unanimous consent to bring forward a motion requiring the government to implement paid sick days legislation to help protect workers across Ontario from COVID-19 so no one has to make the difficult choice between staying home when sick and being able to pay the bills.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition is seeking unanimous consent of the House to bring forward a motion requiring the government to implement paid sick days legislation. Agreed? I heard a no.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Point of order.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I seek unanimous consent to bring forward a motion without notice calling on the Ford government to revoke O. Reg. 298/21 and the unprecedented and potentially unconstitutional powers it has extended to Ontario's police services.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition is seeking unanimous consent of the House to bring forward a motion without notice calling on the government to revoke O. Reg. 298/21. Agreed? I heard a no.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Point of order.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I seek unanimous consent to move a motion without notice calling on the Ford government to implement paid time off for vaccinations, helping facilitate the timely vaccination of Ontario's workers as part of the fight against COVID-19.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion without notice calling on the government to implement paid time off for vaccination. Agreed? I heard a no.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Point of order.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I seek unanimous consent to move a motion without notice calling on the Ford government to implement a full shutdown of Ontario's non-essential businesses where the risk of COVID-19 spread is high and extend adequate financial supports to help the workers and businesses impacted by the interruption.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion without notice calling on the government to implement a full shutdown of Ontario's non-essential businesses where the risk of COVID-19 spread is high. Agreed? I heard a no.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Point of order.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I seek unanimous consent to immediately pass private member's motion 136, calling on the Ford government to provide financial assistance for small businesses not eligible for other supports during the pandemic.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Point of order.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I seek unanimous consent to move a motion regarding the immediate passage of Bill 247, the Paid Personal Emergency Leave Now Act.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Scarborough-Guildwood is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion to provide for the immediate passage of Bill 247. Agreed? I heard a no.

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I understand the government House leader has a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I seek unanimous consent to immediately pass the motion tabled this morning by the member for Eglinton-Lawrence, respecting the establishment of a Holocaust memorial.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion without notice with respect to the immediate passage of a private member's bill regarding the Holocaust—

Interjection: It's right here.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Well, send it over, then. Thank you.

The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent of the House that the Legislative Assembly should, in broad consultation and direct engagement with Ontario's Jewish community, establish a Holocaust memorial on the grounds of the assembly. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I seek unanimous consent that the House continue to meet today past 6 p.m.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I think I can manage that one.

The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent of the House to allow the House to continue to meet today past 6 p.m. Agreed? I heard a no.

It appears we're done with the points of order, so now we have question period.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question this morning is for the Premier.

Speaker, COVID-19 is tearing through our communities. At this point, almost 750 people are in ICUs literally struggling to breathe.

On Friday, the Premier chose not to take the advice of the medical experts who asked him to deal with this horrifying situation in our province. Will he instead do that today?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, we have been taking the advice of the medical experts since this pandemic began. We have been taking their advice with respect to the need to maintain physical distancing, to follow the public health rules, to the declaration of the state of emergency most recently and the stay-at-home order. We also followed the advice that was given to us that we needed to step down on scheduled surgeries, which we did.

We followed the advice with respect to rolling out and redeploying health human resources from one location to another to make sure that in hot spots we had adequate people to care for those in intensive care. We also followed their advice in order to be able to move patients around, if necessary, from one location to another, to deploy all of our health workforce and our health availability in intensive care and other units across the province.

So in that and everything else, we have followed the health experts every step along the way during this pandemic.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, the Minister of Health knows that is not the case. In fact, every single member of the science table disagrees with the statement that this minister just made.

Front-line staff were literally sobbing in hallways of hospitals when they saw the Ford government's press conference on Friday. Experts have been pleading with this government to protect vulnerable workers. The Premier instead decided to close playgrounds and give police sweeping powers that they didn't want and that they won't use.

Speaker, the government's expert advice from the science table has been very, very clear.

Why will the Ford government not take the advice of the experts? And will they finally do so today and help save lives of Ontarians?

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, our government has taken the advice of the health science advisory table; the public health measures table; Dr. Williams, our Chief Medical Officer of Health; and the medical health officers in each of the 34 public health unit regions. That is why we decided to deploy 25% of all of the vaccines off the top, before they are delivered to the 34 public health unit regions—in order to dedicate those extra vaccines to the hot spot areas. We know that's where a lot of the transmission is happening, and if we're able to do that, we will be able to get the numbers more under control, to reduce the number of people in ICUs, to save more lives. That is the goal of all of this. That's what we're following. That's what the medical health officers recommended, and that's what we're doing.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Mr. Speaker, the experts were very clear on what we need in Ontario to save lives and save the health of our people: paid sick days, not carding; essential workers being vaccinated, not being stopped for checks; shutting down of workplaces where COVID-19 is spreading, and not shutting down playgrounds and soccer fields.

1040

The advice was very, very clear. I think that we need to hear from the Premier and this government exactly whose advice they are taking, because they clearly are not taking the advice of the experts.

Will this Premier finally start listening to those front-line health care workers and the experts who are pleading with him to do the right thing?

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, what the Chief Medical Officer of Health has recommended, what the science advisory table has recommended is that we need to have enhanced public health measures because this is spreading within our communities. We need to stop that. That's why the recommendation was made with respect to the closure of playgrounds—because of close community interaction. However, we did hear from people that this was not something they wanted. We are listening. That is why we made that change. But we are still asking people to please follow those public health measures. That is how this transmission is happening. That is what the medical experts have told us.

That is also why we're deploying 25% of the vaccines off the top to go into those hot spot areas. We know if we can deal with those hot spot areas, that is going to be good for the entire province, because that will reduce transmission and make our hospitals be able to cope with the numbers of people who are coming in, and reduce the number of people we have in intensive care units.

That is all part of the advice we've received, and that is what we are following.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my next question is also for the Premier.

Nobody agrees with the Premier. The science table has publicly asked for a course correction; not what the minister is suggesting. The police publicly rebuked this government on the regulation they brought forward on Friday. Even the PC caucus seems to be in revolt when it comes to the decisions their own government is making.

We need to fix this scenario. The government can do that. We need to prioritize the saving of lives, the health and well-being of Ontarians, the saving of our hospitals and our health care system.

Will the government do the right thing: reverse course and actually implement the measures that the experts have been telling them are necessary to save Ontarians' lives?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Our government has been following the recommendations made by the medical officer of health, the science advisory table and others. Our goal is to save the lives of the people of Ontario, to protect their health and well-being. That is why we've taken the steps that we have.

We understand that there's a lot of transmission in the community, that we need to limit mobility as much as possible for the next few weeks. This is a very, very difficult state that we're in. We recognize that. We know that we need to roll out those vaccines as quickly as possible. That's why they're available in vaccination hot spots, they're available in private clinics, they're available in pharmacies. What we need is a greater supply so that we can get more needles into more arms as fast as possible. That is what we're doing. We are working with the federal government, and we know that we need to move fast on this and to reduce transmission. We have followed this advice from the Chief Medical Officer of Health all along.

With respect to the science advisory table, I know there's an issue with respect to some of the items that they are concerned about. I will deal with that in my supplemental.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the very science advisory table that this minister claims the Premier is following the advice of said that we cannot vaccinate ourselves out of this crisis. They said that weeks ago, but the government didn't listen.

Doctors, including the government's own experts, feel betrayed and frightened. Dr. Peter Jüni said this: "Yesterday"—referring to Friday—"was one of the darkest days in my professional career and also personally.... It's just wrong, you know? It's just wrong." Dr. Ashleigh Tuite said, "I feel sick. I actually feel sick ... if they don't get this now, they're not going to get it. It's been a few hours, but I'm still shaking."

Speaker, lives are at stake in our province. People are dying of COVID-19.

Will the Premier finally admit that the measures he announced Friday were the wrong measures and actually take the advice of the experts and implement measures that

will save lives and get us out of this horror show that we're all living?

Hon. Christine Elliott: We have been following the recommendations made by the science advisory table all along.

I understand that Dr. Jüni is concerned that not all of the public health regions that they recommended were included in the list that we projected. However, it's really important to understand that that is not the only thing that one needs to look at in identifying the hot spots. We looked at the recommendations made by the science advisory table, but we also need to look at hospitalizations, outbreak data, low testing rates and deaths during the second wave of the pandemic. We also need to look at some of the socio-economic barriers that are preventing people from coming in to receive the vaccines.

All of those were taken into account in identifying the hot spots across this province. All of those were taken into account with the best interests of the health and well-being of the people of Ontario. We started with that at the beginning of this pandemic. It continues to be our main focus, and it will be throughout our response to it.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): This is the final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, lives are at stake; lives are being lost. People are struggling to breathe in the ICUs, which are bursting at the seams with COVID-19 patients.

Dr. Andrew Morris says this: "Eighteen months ago, we talked about hallway medicine. Now we're talking about hallway deaths and tent deaths.... We need a government that will listen to science."

The Premier has to start listening to the pleas of the front-line ICU doctors and nurses, not to the anti-shutdown, anti-science wing of the PC caucus. Will he start doing that?

Hon. Christine Elliott: We have been listening to the recommendations made to us by the medical experts and by the epidemiologists. That has been the case every step along the way.

What we've been trying to do—in addition to reduced transmission—is to build capacity in our ICUs. We started that a year ago. We've built over 3,400 beds in our system—which is the size of six community hospitals. We've added over 285 intensive care beds.

What we're doing now is making sure that we can use our entire health capacity to make sure that we can use every single bed we need to use. That is why we're transferring patients, if we have to, from one location to another, as close as possible to their home location. That is why we're redeploying staff from all across the province. We are working with other provinces to enlist some of their assistance, as well.

That is why, unfortunately, we've had to postpone slightly the scheduled surgeries and procedures, so that we will have the people in the hospital to care for the COVID-19 patients, who would otherwise be caring for the surgical patients.

All of that is on the basis of medical advice that we're receiving on a daily basis.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my next question is also to the Premier.

The Premier had a whole year to plan to avoid the crisis that we're in. Instead, what he's ended up doing now is having to deal with this scramble—begging Conservative Premiers around the country for help that they can't provide and, unbelievably, rejecting help from the Red Cross when it was offered last week. He is putting petty politics ahead of human life, and it's a disgrace.

There is a nightmare scenario happening right now in ICUs: almost 750 patients in ICUs in our province.

How can the Premier possibly justify rejecting any offer of help when Ontarians' lives are at stake?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: We have taken every step possible, and we are continuing to do so, to build the capacity in our health care system and in our intensive care system. It's one thing to have the beds; it's another thing to have the health human resources to be able to operate them. In some part, we will already have the health human resources because they are already there. They would otherwise be dealing with surgical patients. We have to postpone that somewhat. We'll get back to that as soon as we can. We know we have that internally, but we're also looking at Ontario Health, at the former LHINs. We're looking at making sure that we can bring in more students—a student extern program that we already have. We had 900 spots filled as of February. We can extend that to 3,200 people, with pharmacy technicians and other technicians. We are building that capacity to be able to deal with this.

1050

As the Leader of the Opposition should probably be aware, this is not just happening in Ontario; this is happening across Canada and around the world because of the variants. This is a new situation that we're dealing with now. They're very, very transmissible. That's why it's so important—we are asking people to please follow those public health measures so—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier of this province needs to stop the political posturing. People are dying of COVID-19 by the thousands.

What we need in our province is paid sick days, not carding. What we need is giving essential workers the vaccinations that they need, not giving them spot checks on the side of the road. What we need is to shut down workplaces where COVID-19 is spreading, not to shut down playgrounds and soccer fields.

The Premier needs to start putting human life above his political pride. So my question is, can this Premier actually do that?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Protecting human life has been our primary goal since this entire pandemic began. I can assure the Leader of the Opposition, through you, Speaker, that that is the Premier's primary goal right now. He has

been working day and night trying to get assistance for Ontario right now. He is working very, very hard. He's working with other Premiers. We're looking at other countries to try to get assistance, to make sure that we have the health human resources, in part to relieve the people who we know are already on the front lines, who are working day and night to save lives. That is our goal, as well. That is what we're working on.

In terms of what we're doing to protect human life, we are dedicating 25% of all vaccines that come in to go into those hot spots, to go into those factories, to go into those workplaces, to make sure that we can vaccinate people who are living in some of those hot spots. That is the plan, that is what we're going to do, and that is what is going to save lives.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Stan Cho: In the week of April 4 to 10, the data available shows that no fewer than 39 international flights landed at Pearson International Airport with confirmed cases of COVID-19. On these flights, combined, more than 450 rows of passengers are considered affected by the confirmed positive cases. Speaker, depending on the size of these planes, we are talking about maybe 1,300 to 2,700 passengers or more.

The spread of COVID-19 and dangerous variants of concern is only made worse by cases coming from other countries.

Will the government call on the federal government to secure our airports, as the federal government should have done months and months ago?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I want to thank the member for Willowdale for that question.

It is obviously something that is very serious and certainly impacts Toronto, Calgary, Vancouver and Montreal. This is really where the variants of concern started to come into these provinces. We have been calling on the federal government right from the beginning to secure our airports.

As the member highlighted, it's up to 2,700 passengers a week who could be infected—into our communities right here in the province of Ontario. It's just too much, Mr. Speaker. So, yes, again, we will be calling on the federal government to do its part to secure our airports, so that we can continue to make progress on not only attacking, but defeating, COVID-19.

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

Mr. Stan Cho: The data also shows that no fewer than 14 domestic flights landed at Pearson with confirmed cases of COVID-19. On these flights, combined, more than 80 rows of passengers are considered affected by positive cases. Depending on the size of these planes, we're talking about maybe 200 to 250 passengers or more.

The spread of COVID-19 and dangerous variants of concern is only made worse by the fact that this virus is coming in from other provinces.

Speaker, will the government call on the federal government to secure our airports, as the federal government should have done long ago?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member is quite correct: It is also domestic flights—because, as you know, many of the international flights then result in domestic flights across the country. That is why Ontario is working with both Manitoba and Quebec to ensure that we can secure our borders.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, we need the federal government to take a more active role. We have been calling on them for months. When we started hearing about the variants of concern—whether it was from Brazil, whether it was from the UK—we called on the federal government to show some leadership at our airports. It was this Premier and this government that had to institute testing at the airports. We had to lead the way in terms of isolation. But ultimately, whether it's international flights or domestic flights, we need the federal government to start showing some leadership and help us by securing those international airports so that we can save and protect, as we said, up to 2,700 people just on international flights and up to 500 on domestic. It's a big number and we need to get it under control.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Doly Begum: We have over 4,447 new cases as of today. Scarborough has an average of 24%—once again, positivity rates with neighbourhoods where there are almost 1,000 cases per 100,000 people.

Mr. Speaker, I really hope the Premier is listening. Frankly, these days I feel like he's not listening to me or the people of this province or his caucus members. And I know that many Ontarians are listening to us as we speak in this House. I hope he understands the reality that we're facing in this province and the outcry that's in this province right now. We are on the international news or on CNN, BBC. People are talking about us like they were talking about Italy last year.

Last week, 10,000 of our vaccine appointments were cancelled and two clinics closed. Yesterday, I heard that two more days were cancelled in Scarborough. I know the minister will blame the federal government, and I know they have their procurement failures.

But I'm asking the minister—because they have a responsibility for the disaster we have in Ontario, because they have failed to protect our essential workers and distribute vaccines equitably—why is this government still not providing Scarborough and—

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member for the question.

Of course, we have been listening every step along the way. That is why 15 neighbourhoods in Scarborough have been identified as hot spots. As you probably heard in my response to a previous question, 25% of all vaccines that we receive are now going to be designated to hot spots.

That means that some areas that have low rates of transmission will be receiving fewer vaccines, but that means places like Scarborough, which has 15 areas that are in hot spots, will be receiving more vaccines. We understand that there are high rates in Scarborough. That is why we're making this change—so that there will be additional vaccines coming to Scarborough, making sure that your constituents and all the people in Scarborough will be protected.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the minister for her answer.

There are 15 areas identified, and I have personally identified locations in my area for mobile clinics. I'm going to reach out to the minister's office directly, because we don't have a single mobile clinic in Scarborough yet. We have a 24% positivity rate and essential workers, racialized community members who still cannot get their vaccines, and seniors—people who are still waiting from phase 1.

If you're listening to experts, listening to Ontarians, well, let me tell you this: Doctors have repeatedly told us that Scarborough is on fire with COVID-19. Our hospitals are on the brink, with ICUs full and these patients who are critically ill with COVID-19—our essential workers, the most vulnerable people. The science table has made it very clear that we need to prioritize our hardest-hit regions, that we need decisive actions around workplace safety to protect our essential workers.

Instead, on Friday, this government chose a police state over public health, chose regulations that unfairly harm low-income and racialized people like those in my community.

Mr. Speaker, I want to quote Dr. Shail Rawal, who very beautifully said, "They looked us in the eye and said your labour is essential, but your lives are not."

My question is, why is this government refusing to listen to experts and provide paid sick days—

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

Interjections.

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I would say to the member, through you, Mr. Speaker, that what she is suggesting is absolutely not the case. You've already heard the indication that, recognizing that there are 15 hot spot areas within Scarborough, Scarborough will be receiving additional vaccines.

With respect to where people can receive the vaccines, I can advise that there are 51 pharmacies in Scarborough that are providing vaccines, six mass immunization clinics and four primary care locations, which are going to be expanding, of course, as we receive more doses of the vaccine. No one in Scarborough is being forgotten. Everyone who wants to receive a vaccine will get one, and we are going to prioritize people in their workplaces to make sure that they can come in and get the vaccines.

1100

You are in a hot spot. There's no question about that. We've recognized that. We're providing more vaccines, and we're going to make sure we have more mobile units go in to help make sure that people in the workplaces can receive them.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is to the Premier.

This weekend, I spoke to many people in Scarborough who had their vaccination appointments cancelled. There were no alternatives offered. It has been over a week—no mobile clinics coming to support these people. Scarborough has been devastated by the cancellation of over 10,000 vaccination appointments at the Centennial College SHN clinic.

All of Scarborough is a hot spot, not just the 15 postal codes—a 24% positivity rate in the highest region. Last Friday, we were looking for a vaccination plan from this government to address our community. Instead, Scarborough and the province were left with something that really looks like police surveillance and government-mandated carding. The only announcement addressing the vaccination gap in Scarborough was a vague promise of 25% more vaccines allotted to hot spots. The people of this province deserve more. Scarborough residents deserve specifics.

So will the government tell us: How many vaccines will the Premier deliver to the SHN, the Scarborough Health Network, this week to get all sites in Scarborough vaccinating people today?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I can advise the member opposite that all of the hot spots that have been identified to date, and others as they come forward, will be provided their share of the 25% of vaccines off the top before the next allocation is given to the public health unit that they would normally receive equitably, as with the other 34 public health unit regions.

As far as the closure of the clinics in Scarborough is concerned, I think it's important to remind the member opposite that the public health units themselves are responsible for receiving the distribution of vaccines and making sure that they're allocated to all of the distribution spots where the vaccines are going to be administered.

In the case of the Scarborough Health Network, as with others, it's important to remember that Toronto Public Health has a system so that when they receive the vaccines, they are allocated, and each vaccination site is advised how much they are getting and when they will be receiving another allocation.

However, there is a plan that is being delivered in accordance with the plan. All of the public health units are very well—

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Back to the Premier: It is your government's responsibility. The modelling tells us that

hot spots are vaccinating at 5% lower than non-hot spots. That's wrong, and that has to be corrected quickly.

Speaker, this government's enforcement of measures is offensive and erodes public trust in the government's ability to manage this crisis. Right after the Premier's announcement, police services made statements against implementing random checks, including Toronto and Peel. These powers have the greatest impact on Black, Indigenous, brown and other people of colour who feel targeted by these measures. They know what it's like to be carded and stopped without cause. BIPOC make up a large amount of essential workers leaving their homes this morning to get to the front lines. The Premier needs to support these workers and not fine them.

Will the Premier do the right thing for essential workers: give them paid sick leave, paid vaccination—

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the question.

As the honourable member is fully aware, the first federal budget in two years will be presented today, and it is our complete expectation that the federal government will move to supplement the Canadian sick benefit program. As you know, there is a significant surplus in the Ontario account, and we expect that those changes will include a paid vaccination day for essential workers and an elimination of the gap between when a worker can apply and receive that benefit. We're anxiously waiting, but we do expect that to be in the federal government's budget today, and we look forward to the support of all members of the House for that measure in the federal budget.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Stan Cho: I want to talk about the data from last week, April 11 to 17. It's not all in yet, but it shows that at least 16 international flights landed at Pearson airport with confirmed cases of COVID-19. On these flights combined, more than 120 rows of passengers are considered affected by confirmed positive cases. Depending on the size of the planes, we're talking about maybe 350 to 700 passengers or more.

The spread of COVID-19 and dangerous variants of concern is only made worse by cases coming in from other countries.

Speaker, will our government call on the federal government to secure our airports, as the federal government should have done many months ago?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I want to again thank the honourable member for the question. I know how important it is not only to him and his community—recognizing the fact that Toronto, Peel and York regions are three of the hardest-hit regions, having been in lockdown since November.

The member is quite correct. International flights and, in many cases, domestic flights have been a serious cause

of community spread, Mr. Speaker. The Premier was well ahead of this—and it wasn't just our Premier; it was Premiers in some of the larger cities where we're now seeing a third-wave impact most significantly. We're all calling on the federal government to take control of our borders, to institute testing at the borders, to provide isolation centres at the borders. It was the Premiers of these provinces who had to take steps, in the absence of federal leadership on this.

But the federal government can still do the right thing: take control of our international borders so that we can control these variants of concern. There is still time to do this. When you see the numbers each and every week, the threat is continuous, and we need to take action right away. I call on the federal government to do that.

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

Mr. Stan Cho: I'm glad the government House leader brings up domestic flights, because the data available also shows that four domestic flights landed at Pearson with confirmed cases of COVID-19. That's, combined on these planes, 20 rows of passengers who are considered affected by confirmed positive cases. Depending on the size of the planes, we're talking about maybe 60 to 120 passengers.

The spread of COVID-19 and these variants of concern is only made worse by cases coming in from other provinces.

Speaker, will the government call on the federal government to secure our airports, as they should have done a long time ago?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, Mr. Speaker, it is very important—and it cannot be understated how important it is. While we appreciate the assistance of the federal government on issues where we can work co-operatively, we are pleading with the federal government to do its part, to secure our international borders.

When you see what is happening at our airports, the member was very correct in highlighting the data. We're talking about thousands of people who are coming through our borders, possibly infecting hundreds of Ontario residents, putting more stress on our health care system.

We need the federal government to move quickly to do this. We have been calling for this for months. Before the variants of concern started having such an impact on the province of Ontario, we begged them to do this. There is still time. They can still institute better testing at our airports. They can close the airports down. They can close those international airports. When we see the impact it's also having on domestic flights, now is the time for the federal government to work with us to secure our international borders so that we can defeat COVID-19 once and for all.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Sara Singh: Doctors have been warning that our ICUs were in crisis and that, in communities like Brampton, essential workers and their entire families were getting sicker much faster. But on Friday, as hospitals and

ICUs were on the verge of bursting, as case counts and outbreaks were at all-time highs, and as thousands of doctors and nurses were struggling to keep people alive, Dr. Williams, this government's top COVID-19 adviser, just shrugged his shoulders and said there was nothing that could be done.

Speaker, there was a lot that could have been done. This government could have implemented paid sick days to help save lives. They could have provided vaccinations in hot spot communities, but they failed to do that. To say there was nothing more that could have been done is just horrifying, and it shows that this government just simply doesn't care.

My question to the Minister of Health: Will she denounce Dr. Williams's heartless comments and finally take some responsibility for this crisis that she and this government are responsible for?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I would say to the honourable member, through you, Mr. Speaker, that Dr. Williams has done an incredible job for this province. Over the course of this pandemic, he has provided invaluable advice to us as a government, along with the public health measures table, the science advisory table and numerous others. We are indebted to him for the work he has done.

1110

Any suggestion that he made that he couldn't have done anything about it, I'm sure, was with respect to the fact that these variants of concern are so much more transmissible and relate to so many more hospitalizations, so many more people in acute care and ICUs, and unfortunately, many more deaths—including young people.

Dr. Williams is dedicated to preserving the lives and safety of the people of Ontario, as is our government, and we are taking every step possible to make sure that we can do that.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: Speaker, doctors don't feel like this government is doing everything that it possibly can.

I'll quote some of these leading experts.

From Dr. Michael Warner: "I do feel defeated.... I'm kind of past anger, and on to defeat."

From Dr. Brooks Fallis, critical care doctor at Brampton Civic Hospital: "It just felt like today was sending a whole lot of people to their death when they didn't have to."

Speaker, through you again to the Minister of Health: These are the words of doctors, nurses and science table advisers, yet the government keeps pretending that there's nothing more that they could have done.

How many more people need to die in this province before this government is going to step up with a plan, help us get through this third wave, and help us save lives in the province of Ontario? How many more people need to die before they will take action?

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, our government does have a plan that has been informed by medical experts on the COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force. The goal of all of us, which I'm sure is yours as well, is to save lives, protect people, make sure that they're going to be safe.

That's why our vaccine rollout is going to start with age, risk and the hot spots. That's why we have distributed 25% of the vaccines off the top to those hot spots, making sure that those people living in those areas can be protected and receive the vaccine, which will be of benefit to everyone across the entire province. That's why we've had to postpone some of the scheduled surgeries. That's why we're rolling out more people to help, with deployment of forces from different areas. That's why we're having to transfer patients, in some cases, to make sure that we can use our entire health system—every single part of it in every part of this province—to save lives. That's the goal. That's the plan. That's what we're doing.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

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

On February 11, the chair of your science advisory table predicted a disaster if the government eased restrictions. The government did indeed ease restrictions, against the public advice of many public health care officials and scientists, and the disaster is here. Instead of paid sick days and safe workplaces, the Premier, on Friday, closed playgrounds and enhanced police powers. Public health officials were shocked and angry, and yet the government today keeps saying they are following the advice of scientists and public health officials.

Speaker, will the Premier commit today to sharing the scientific data and public health table advice that led to his decision to close playgrounds and institute carding instead of focusing on making workplaces safe and helping essential workers stay safe in the workplace?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member for the question.

I can certainly advise that all of the information that was provided to us by the science advisory table has been provided to you and provided to the people of Ontario. Dr. Brown has been very outstanding in providing public health measures—the advice of the science advisory table, what is happening across Ontario.

What we've seen in the last month or so is an incredible rise in the number of cases due to the variants of concern. We anticipated that based on what they told us, and we have been building up—building up our hospital capacity, building up our human health resources, trying to build up our vaccine supply. We are working with the federal government, but several of the shipments have been delayed. Notwithstanding that, we are working very hard to get as many needles into as many arms as possible in order to stop the transmission and protect the people of Ontario.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, I asked that question because public trust is vital to combatting this pandemic.

How can we build public trust when so many public health officials, doctors, nurses and scientists and other experts are essentially saying that the government is not following their advice?

Even one of their own caucus members, the member from Scarborough Centre, put out a letter asking for the data.

How can we expect the public to be on our side if we're not going to be open and honest with them?

Dr. Jüni talked about Friday being the darkest day of his career.

I'm pleading, will the government please release the data and be transparent? Have the information accessible to the people of Ontario so we can indeed all be together and have the information we need to make the right public health—

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I can understand the concern you're expressing, I would say, to the honourable member, but this information has been released. This information is released by Dr. Brown on a regular basis. I know that Dr. Jüni works with him. Dr. Sander works with him. There are a number of public health doctors and epidemiologists who are working on this, trying to give us an indication of where we are going with this—which has been exacerbated times 10 by the variants of concern.

We knew this was coming. That's why we've been taking steps in order to deal with it, both in terms of blunting transmission, but also by building hospital capacity. We are working on both of those aspects right now to make sure that we can take care of the people who are coming into the hospital with COVID-19 and to do whatever we can to blunt that transmission, because it's happening in the community.

With respect to the playgrounds, we heard what people said. We understand from many that it's very important for children to be able to get out and to get some physical exercise. It's good for their physical and mental health. We understand that, but we are still asking people to please continue to follow those public health measures—

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

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Stan Cho: Last week, Moderna announced that they were cutting one of Canada's vaccine shipments in half. We were supposed to receive 1.2 million doses, but now we will receive just 600,000.

In Ontario, COVID-19 case numbers continue to rise, and the vaccines are desperately needed, and they just aren't here.

Today, we were supposed to receive 448,000 doses of Moderna, but I'm sad to say that they have not arrived.

Speaker, my question is for the government House leader.

Will the government tell this House where the vaccines are and when we will get them?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I want to thank the honourable gentleman for the question. It's an important question, especially in light of the fact that his community—Toronto, Peel and York are three of the communities that have been under lockdown, really, since November.

Obviously, we are anticipating a significant delivery of Moderna vaccines. It's not the first time that this has happened, but yet again, we've been disappointed. I believe this is the third time this has happened. This happened in February, March and now into April—vaccines that we were promised have not been delivered, which has caused us to modify the public health safety measures that we have to do to keep our province safe.

We really need to have proper information from the federal government with respect to the supply of vaccines: when they are coming, what we can expect. It has become increasingly more difficult for us to defeat COVID-19 without the vaccines that we've needed. We are hearing from members across the aisle and from members in our own ridings when clinics have to be cancelled or delayed because of the lack of vaccines. It is a problem that the federal government needs to address immediately.

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

Mr. Stan Cho: This is not acceptable.

South of the border, in the United States, and around the world, jurisdictions are able to procure vaccines, and that's just not happening here in Canada, unfortunately.

Appointments are no good if you don't have vaccines to fill them. We are 500,000 doses behind, and that is just in the last week.

Speaker, my question, again through you to the government House leader: Will Ontario call on the federal government to get their act together and get Ontario the vaccine doses that we desperately need?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I really do feel the member's frustration. I know how hard he has worked for his community. I know how difficult this challenge has been for the city of Toronto and for other regions that have been in lockdown in the province for so long. I know that he's frustrated when he hears about the impact that our international airports have had on his community, with respect to the thousands of people—the variants of concern that have been brought into the country from other jurisdictions, without a federal partner willing to take action for us.

1120

Ultimately, in February, March and April, we continued to see massive delays in vaccine distribution, not only to the province of Ontario, but across the country.

We need desperately to have a partner in Ottawa who can give us a secure supply of vaccines so that we can continue with our mass vaccination clinics across the province, so that we can go into these essential workplaces, so that we can continue to increase vaccinations for hard-hit communities. We can't do it without vaccines. So we need the federal government to step up to the plate and provide that secure shipment of vaccines.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is for the Premier.

Despite calls from public health experts saying that the only way to stop the pandemic from getting worse was to immediately bring in paid sick days, paid time off to get vaccinated, and ensure that people could afford to stay home and stay safe, the Premier decided he apparently knows much better. His big-brain solution? Give the police power to stop and fine anyone outside of the house. That's right, Speaker; not only do front-line essential workers have no choice but to keep going into work, even if they're sick, but the Premier thought it would be a good idea to make sure that they could get stopped and fined on their way to work, too.

My question, Speaker, is through you to the Premier: On what planet did you think this was going to help anybody?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: It is critical for all Ontarians to respect the stay-at-home order and stop the spread of COVID-19 and the very, very transmissible variants. Although the vast majority of Ontarians have respected public health measures put in place, certain individuals continue to put others at risk by gathering with those outside of their household.

Our priority has always been to address and discourage gatherings and crowds that violate the stay-at-home order and have the potential to further spread COVID-19. That is why we've provided police with the additional temporary authority to enforce the stay-at-home order by putting a stop to gatherings and crowds.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Minutes after the Premier rolled out his half-baked plan to try to arrest his way out of the pandemic, police forces all across the province started to push back, saying they wouldn't enforce the rules and they didn't want the increased powers. Mayors and councils warned that the Premier's plan was only going to hurt front-line workers and communities that have already been hardest hit by the crisis. Lawyers and civil rights groups warned that criminalizing people for being outside was going to create more problems for everyone.

Speaker, my question, again to the Premier through you: The cops, the municipalities, the legal community—literally everyone—thought it was a bad idea. Why did you think you knew better?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll invite the member to make his comments through the Chair.

I will allow the Solicitor General to reply.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: It has been pretty clear that the public health guidance remains for people to stay at home.

We have refocused O. Reg. 8/21, "Enforcement of COVID-19 Measures," and it clearly states that if a police officer or other provincial offences officer has reason to suspect that you are participating in an organized public event or social gathering, they may require you to provide

information to ensure you are complying with the restrictions. This is all about limiting mobility to keep people safe and make sure that the COVID-19 variants don't go rapidly through our communities.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: My question is for the Premier.

We know that this has been a dark year for everyone in the country—for some, it has been darker than others. People in Ontario have needed government more than at any time in most of our lives. Quick and difficult decisions have been required as circumstances have changed.

By definition, in these circumstances, we could expect some mistakes to be made, but we should also expect that this government would learn from mistakes. Time and time again, epidemiologists, ICU doctors and nurses, education workers on the front lines, women working in child care and groceries and factories have called for protective measures. And time and time again, this government has either ignored the calls—for paid sick leave, for example—or they have been dragged, in the case of making educators in hot spots a priority for vaccinations.

Then we had Friday's announcement and Saturday's reversal—an announcement of half measures and a reversal of only the most ineffective, probably unconstitutional, of those measures.

To the Premier: Clearly, the decision-making process has broken down. What is the Premier going to do to ensure that the confusion and anger of this past weekend does not happen again? What will he change?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I do appreciate the question from the member opposite.

These have been very difficult times. This is a pandemic that nobody was expecting, but we have been working full-on to ensure that the people of the province of Ontario are safe. That includes increased capacity in our ICUs. That includes increased capacity in our hospitals. That includes record numbers of new builds for our long-term-care homes. We are fighting back right now with respect to the vaccines that we do have, going into the communities, hot spot communities, vaccinating essential workers. We are doing all that we can, working with our partners municipally, working with the federal government when we can, to ensure that people are safe.

But ultimately it comes down to the same thing: We need people to stay home when they can. We need to reduce mobility, because the variants of concern are out of control. Until we get control of those international borders, this will not stop. Until we get more vaccines, this will not stop. But we are in control and we are doing all that we can—

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

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: The point that I was making in my first question was that, in fact, that list of things that

you have done—and I know you are all working hard, and I know you've had a really bad weekend, so I absolutely have some empathy for that. That's a personal comment. But what has been done is not working, and the decision-making process is not working. So even if the Premier institutes a cabinet shuffle, something has to change. Different voices need to be heeded, not just heard. Teachers, education workers and child care workers, for example, need to be vaccinated. We know it's critical that we get our kids back into school.

Would it not make sense, for example, to use this time, when school buildings are largely empty, to make all those workers who have contact with kids—child care workers, all our education workers—a priority, and ensure that they're all vaccinated before they go back into those buildings, not just in hot spots but across the province?

Can the Premier tell all of us what his plan is for getting the vaccine into the arms of all the people who work with our children? And how is the decision-making process going to change?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I have said on a number of occasions that this government has been focused on repairing 15 years' worth of damage that was left behind by the previous Liberal government. I said in an answer last week that it has been more difficult to face the challenges of COVID-19 because of the lack of investment that was made by the previous Liberal government. They have left us with the lowest ICU capacity—

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: You repealed our sick days.

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

Government House leader, please continue.

Hon. Paul Calandra: They have left us with the lowest ICU capacity per capita in North America.

This particular member, while Premier, built a lousy 400 long-term-care beds. That's it: 400 long-term-care beds is her record.

What have we done? We have poured billions of dollars into health care to recoup, because they did not. We put more money into building new ICU capacity, more money into critical care capacity, more money into long-term-care capacity.

We are doing the job that she, as Premier, failed to do for—

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

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier.

On Friday, the Premier told Ontarians that everything is on the field now. Ontarians might reasonably have expected that “everything” would include paid sick days, as Dr. Brown had recommended just a few hours earlier. They might have expected the Premier to announce my Stay Home If You Are Sick Act, so that essential workers wouldn't have to make the impossible choice about going to work sick or paying the rent.

Public health experts are angry and in despair. They know that things will keep getting worse if this government fails to act to reduce workplace spread.

When will this government give Ontario workers the paid sick days that they and we so desperately need?

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

Hon. Monte McNaughton: The member opposite knows that the very first measure our government took was decisive action to bring in job-protected leave. If any worker needs to be in self-isolation, in quarantine, if they need time off to get a vaccination, they can't be fired for that.

1130

Furthermore, we continued since day one to advocate on behalf of workers to the federal government. There are now 20 paid sick days available to workers in Ontario. They can apply at canada.ca/covid19. In fact, well over 300,000 workers have either received this benefit or are receiving it today. As the member opposite knows, we've been raising issues to the federal government. There will be a federal budget this afternoon. We want to see improvements to the paid sick day program.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Unpaid leave does nothing to help workers pay the bills.

The government's own science table stated that the federal program is not good enough. They said that without a provincial paid sick days program, things will keep getting worse. A retroactive federal program that requires workers to go online to apply, to wait days, sometimes a week or more without pay—and then that doesn't even come close to replacing their salary while they stay home—is not going to keep anyone safe, which is why Ontario workers aren't applying.

Workers need help today. They needed it last year, when the Premier first rejected the inadequate federal program.

So again to the Premier: When will this government pass my bill and stop forcing Ontarians to put their lives at risk?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: We're going to continue to ensure that the health and safety of workers is protected. In fact, our government has invested more than \$51 billion, providing additional investment into the health care system—billions of dollars to help individuals and families and businesses get through this pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, it was because of the advocacy of this Premier that we have 20 paid sick days here in Ontario for all workers. The member opposite knows more than 300,000 workers have either received the benefit through the federal program or are receiving it as we speak. Furthermore, 2.3 million workers in this province have paid sick days through their employers. All the provinces ensured that there was job-protected leave. That's what we've done.

But we've gone further. We've advocated to the federal government to improve the program. The federal budget is at 4 o'clock today. We'll see what improvements they bring forward.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier.

The Premier's announcement on Friday evoked a lot of emotions—mostly people losing hope. Announcing that playgrounds would be shuttered and police would conduct street checks was met with outrage. The people rose up and said, "Not every child has a backyard they can play in." And the police said, "It's a pandemic, and we're here to help people, not to hinder them."

For a year now, reasonable people have been calling on the Premier to reinstate paid sick days because they save lives. Everyone knows there's a gap. And the Premier can't hide behind the CRSB, because last June we wouldn't have had that program, if the Premier had had his way. Ontarians need a Premier who is going to fill that gap that he created in 2018 when he took paid sick days away.

Will the Premier do the right thing today and reinstate paid sick days in Ontario?

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

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows that the very first measure our government took was to bring in job-protected leave for every worker. In fact, we were the first jurisdiction in the country to do that. If you're a worker in self-isolation, in quarantine, if you're a mom or dad who can't stay home and look after a son or daughter because of the disruptions to the school system, you can't be fired for that.

Furthermore, we were the first jurisdiction to bring in job-protected leave for vaccinations, so workers are protected so they can go and get vaccinated.

The member opposite has a responsibility to the people of Ontario, to let them know that there are four weeks of paid sick days through the federal government, which is the same for all workers across the entire country. All workers need to go to canada.ca/covid19 to ensure that they receive the benefit. More than 300,000 workers in Ontario have either received this benefit or are receiving it today.

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

Mr. John Fraser: The minister knows there's a gap.

I want you to think about this: Imagine you're a low-wage worker. Maybe you work two jobs; you work in a warehouse. You've got three kids and your wife and your mother-in-law at home. They depend on you for rent and food and maybe medication, and you have no benefits. You wake up sick one morning. You're not feeling well—but you're not sure. So do you stay home or do you do what you need to do to make sure your family can survive? We know first-hand that too many people are going to work in that situation.

The gap exists. The federal program doesn't cover you if you're off for a couple of days; it doesn't come on your paycheque.

What we're asking for is for the Premier to stand behind essential workers. He's not doing that. He's not filling that gap.

And last June, if he had had his way, we wouldn't have had the CRSB. So stop saying that's a solution, because you know it's not. You need to do something.

Speaker, through you: Will the Premier commit to debating, this Thursday, MPP Coteau's Bill 247 on paid sick days and passing it here in this Legislature?

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

Government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: With respect to the bill, Mr. Speaker, that's in front of the Legislature, I believe, on Thursday, and we will see.

It was this Premier who negotiated a comprehensive return-to-work protocol, which included sick days.

At the same time, I note that it was the former NDP member of provincial Parliament and now leader of the federal NDP who claimed credit that this is a benefit that would cover all Ontario workers—and, frankly, it has, but it needs to be improved. We have said that right from the beginning.

There is the first federal budget today in two years. It should include payment for those who want to get vaccinated, essential workers who need to get vaccinated, and it should include the elimination of the waiting period, given that there is such surplus in the Ontario account. I hope the member opposite will join with us in ensuring that that is in there, and I hope the NDP will ensure that if it's not in there, their leader will do the right thing and vote against a federal budget that does not include these measures. I anxiously await commentary from the member opposite, if those measures aren't in there, but we fully expect that those advanced measures will be there—

Mr. John Fraser: Just fill the gap.

Hon. Paul Calandra: —which includes filling the gap, Mr. Speaker.

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

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 101(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business, such that Mr. Natyshak assumes ballot item number 85 and Ms. Singh, Brampton Centre, assumes ballot item 87.

DEFERRED VOTES

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AMENDMENT ACT, 2021 LOI DE 2021 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE CONSEIL EXÉCUTIF

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

Bill 265, An Act to amend the Executive Council Act in respect of attendance at Question Period / Projet de loi 265, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le Conseil exécutif à l'égard de la présence à la période des questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We now have a deferred vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 265, An Act to amend the Executive Council Act in respect of attendance at Question Period.

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

The division bells rang from 1138 to 1208.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 265, An Act to amend the Executive Council Act in respect of attendance at Question Period has taken place.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 33; the nays are 15.

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

Second reading agreed to.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes.

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

MATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021

SUR LA SANTÉ MENTALE MATERNELLE

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

Bill 176, An Act to proclaim Maternal Mental Health Day and to require a review of maternal mental health in Ontario and the preparation of a Provincial Framework and Action Plan / Projet de loi 176, Loi proclamant le Jour de la santé mentale maternelle et exigeant un examen des enjeux de la santé mentale maternelle en Ontario et l'élaboration d'un cadre et plan d'action provincial.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have a deferred vote now on the motion for second reading of Bill 176, An Act to proclaim Maternal Mental Health Day and to require a review of maternal mental health in Ontario and the preparation of a Provincial Framework and Action Plan.

The bells will now ring for 15 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes. I will ask the Clerks to once again prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1211 to 1226.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 176, An Act to proclaim Maternal Mental Health Day and to require a review of maternal mental health in Ontario and the preparation of a Provincial Framework and Action Plan, has taken place.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 12; the nays are 28.

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

Second reading negatived.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): This House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1227 to 1300.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Mr. Dave Smith: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Wong): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

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

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed?

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

All those opposed will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it. The motion is carried.

Report adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AMENDMENT ACT (MICROPLASTICS FILTERS FOR WASHING MACHINES), 2021

LOI DE 2021 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA PROTECTION DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT (FILTRES À MICROPLASTIQUES POUR MACHINES À LAVER)

Ms. Bell moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 279, An Act to amend the Environmental Protection Act with respect to microplastics filters for washing machines / Projet de loi 279, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection de l'environnement en ce qui concerne les filtres à microplastiques pour machines à laver.

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 care to briefly explain her bill?

Ms. Jessica Bell: The bill amends the Environmental Protection Act to prohibit the sale or offering for sale of washing machines that are not equipped with a specified microplastics filter, and to provide for corresponding penalties in case of non-compliance with the requirement.

PROTECTING SENIORS' RIGHTS IN CARE HOMES ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LA PROTECTION DES DROITS DES PERSONNES ÂGÉES DANS LES MAISONS DE SOINS

Ms. Bell moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 280, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 and the Retirement Homes Act, 2010 respecting tenancies in care homes / Projet de loi 280, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation et la Loi de 2010 sur les maisons de retraite en ce qui concerne les locations dans les maisons de soins.

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 University–Rosedale care to explain this bill?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Yes, thank you, Speaker. This bill changes the Residential Tenancies Act to protect the rights of seniors and residents in private retirement homes during eviction and to limit unfair increases to care services and meals in order to prevent the economic eviction of seniors.

PETITIONS

LAND USE PLANNING

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have a petition here entitled “Revoke the MZO for the Lower Duffins Creek Wetland.”

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario permitted the MZO on a provincially significant wetland it knew was of critical importance to habitat and biodiversity, ecosystem function, and ecological services (e.g., carbon sequestration, flood prevention);

“Whereas over 85% of existing naturally formed wetlands have already been lost in the greater Toronto area;

“Whereas the MZO undemocratically removes the period of public consultation and bypasses the planning process needed to correctly address this development;

“Whereas this development unnecessarily contradicts the federal government’s commitment to reducing nationwide emissions by 30% before the year 2030, as indicated in the 2016 Paris Agreement;

“Whereas the destruction of this wetland reduces available green spaces used increasingly by citizens through the COVID-19 pandemic to improve mental and physical health/well-being;

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

“Revoke the MZO that allows for the destruction of the Lower Duffins Creek Wetland and ensure its protection for years to come.”

Speaker, no surprise, I wholeheartedly support this, will affix my signature and send it to the Clerks.

PLACES OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas worship is critical to the lives of many Ontarians, and the gathering for worship is an essential aspect of religious faith; and

“Whereas the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms recognizes freedom of religion as fundamental, and the Supreme Court of Canada has interpreted this as including the freedom ‘to manifest religious belief by worship and practice;’ and

“Whereas both the federal and the Ontario provincial legislatures have recognized religion as a human right; and

“Whereas the social, emotional and spiritual elements of worship are significant; and

“Whereas places of worship provide many valuable social services through their members to the communities they are in, and the good work of places of worship in their communities is hindered by the inability to physically gather; and

“Whereas places of worship have been diligent in observing health and safety protocols and have not been a significant source of spread of COVID-19; and

“Whereas the safety and the well-being of religious communities are best preserved through the co-operation of religious leaders and the Ontario government;

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

“That the Legislature recognize the importance and value of worship, and to include places of worship as an essential service under the reopening Ontario act, allowing religious communities to gather for worship.”

I support this petition and affix my name to it.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a “Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario.” It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have a “Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas the government only covers an average of 55% of the cost of an OHIP-insured visit, the lowest rate in Canada; and

“Whereas optometrists must absorb the other 45% for the over four million services delivered annually under OHIP; and

“Whereas optometrists have never been given a formal negotiation process with the government; and

“Whereas the government’s continued neglect resulted in 96% of Ontario optometrists voting to withdraw OHIP services beginning September 1, 2021;

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

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately commit to legally binding, formal negotiations to ensure any future OHIP-insured optometry services are, at a minimum, funded at the cost of delivery.”

Speaker, I am pleased to submit this to the Legislature and will send it to the Clerk.

1310

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPORTING RECOVERY AND COMPETITIVENESS ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LE SOUTIEN À LA RELANCE ET À LA COMPÉTITIVITÉ

Mr. Sarkaria moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 276, An Act to enact and amend various Acts / Projet de loi 276, Loi édictant et modifiant diverses lois.

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

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I’m very happy to rise to speak to second reading of the proposed Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act. I’d also like to note that I’ll be sharing my time with two of my colleagues: the member for Flamborough–Glanbrook and the member for Peterborough–Kawartha as well. I also want to take this opportunity to thank them in advance for helping take this legislation through the House and for speaking today to lead off debate.

I really want to start off by providing some context around the current situation. COVID-19, as we know it, continues to hit hard as we go through the second year of this terrible virus. The pandemic has touched every corner of Ontario, and it has touched every corner of our country and this planet. Last spring, the outbreak triggered the sharpest global contraction since the Great Depression of

the 1930s. Since then, we have been on a long, difficult road. We can't quite see the end of the road, but there are some encouraging signs.

It's heartening to see the remarkable resilience the economy is showing. The job market has rebounded much more quickly than most forecasts had predicted. Over the past 10 months, our province has achieved a net employment gain of just over a million jobs, and with hundreds and thousands of Ontarians getting vaccinated every week, we know that there are better days ahead.

But we're not there yet. We continue to face enormous challenges as we respond to the third wave and work towards economic recovery, so we can't let up right now. That's why our government is continuing to work tirelessly to help people and businesses make it through the storm and get back on their feet. We are taking decisive action to support job creators struggling through a worldwide crisis unlike anything we have ever experienced before, and we are focusing on helping Ontarians recovering from the economic impact of COVID-19 and prepare them for a future of opportunities.

Since the early days of the pandemic, we have made temporary changes to regulations to help businesses get through this crisis and adapt to a dramatically different world. Many of the ideas for these changes have come from the people and businesses across this province. In April 2020, we launched the COVID-19: Tackling the Barriers website to gather ideas on how we could overcome the unique challenges that this pandemic brought forward. These ideas helped lead to over 50 temporary regulation changes that were enacted by our government. These included capping delivery fees charged to restaurants, as well as allowing licensed bars and restaurants to include beer and wine with food takeout orders, which they previously weren't allowed to do. Since then, we've made these temporary changes permanent, such as allowing takeout alcohol with your food order.

One of the most important changes we made was allowing trucks to make deliveries during off-peak hours to retailers. This has ensured that retailers in our food supply can keep their shelves stocked with things that our families rely on day in and day out. It has also reassured Ontarians that even during the worst pandemic in a century, they can count on a robust supply chain for essential supplies.

Over the past year, we have also provided far-reaching support to businesses to help them get through this pandemic. The Ontario Small Business Support Grant is one of those examples. Businesses with less than 100 employees that have been required to close or significantly restrict their operations and those that have experienced a 20% reduction in revenue can apply for the Ontario Small Business Support Grant. This is \$1.7 billion of support that our government put forward. In addition, as announced in the Ontario budget 2021, we increased that to an automatic doubling to account for \$3.4 billion in direct supports to Ontario's small businesses.

Through the main street relief grant, we are providing small businesses with up to \$1,000 to help offset the cost of PPE.

Through the Digital Main Street program, the largest investment by any government to help businesses go digital, over \$57 million was initiated to help businesses get online, expand their digital footprint, and connect with new customers.

Our government is also providing many other forms of support, which include free advice from financial advisers on responding to, and recovering from, COVID-19; the Workplace PPE Supplier Directory, which businesses can use to find Ontario-made PPE; and tailored local supports through the Small Business COVID-19 Recovery Network across the province.

We are doing everything we can to help businesses and the people of Ontario get through this pandemic. That includes working to create conditions that businesses can use to modernize government, reduce business costs, and create new opportunities to recover, grow and prosper.

The proposed legislation we're debating today would sustain and build on a wide-ranging effort across government since 2018 to focus on reducing the regulatory burden in the province of Ontario.

Before the pandemic, we worked diligently to modernize and streamline regulatory systems to restore Ontario's competitiveness and unleash the full potential of our communities. As part of this effort, we simplified laws and procedures that imposed needless burdens on people and businesses. This work has become even more important due to the pandemic. Demands on people and businesses have become more intense, time consuming, and costly. We have responded by intensifying our efforts to reduce burdens and build a modern regulatory regime in Ontario.

Over the past year, we have passed three high-impact burden-reduction bills to help businesses support recovery: the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, the Main Street Recovery Act, and the Better for People, Smarter for Business Act. Through these pieces of legislation, we have made substantial progress towards our goal of streamlining regulations and reducing the costs of doing business in Ontario.

As a proud son of two small business owners, I know how important it is to reduce barriers to business and ensure their success. I know how much a business means to the people who run it, and to the family, their employers, and their communities. Every day, people count on these local businesses to help them in so many ways, and now these businesses are counting on all of us.

That's why we are proposing a wide-ranging package of actions to bring regulatory relief to people and the businesses that they can rely on to help them get ahead. The proposed Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act will, if passed, support economic recovery and help businesses weather the fierce impacts of this pandemic. It would take us another step further in building an efficient and modernized regulatory regime that would ease unnecessary burdens on people and businesses across this province. This legislation would modernize rules, accelerate business growth, helping Ontario attract investment, create jobs, and build prosperity.

We understand that complex and duplicative regulations slow recovery and stifle entrepreneurial spirit,

making it harder for businesses to grow and thrive. We're working to simplify rules and processes that place unnecessary burdens on people and businesses while maintaining and strengthening standards that keep people safe and healthy.

1320

This act is at the centrepiece of the spring red tape reduction package that also includes a wide variety of regulatory changes and announcements. We are once again bringing forward a huge package, one that consists of 90 items. Although today we are focusing on the bill, I also want to take the House through five examples out of the dozens of regulatory changes that are included in this package.

The first change would help businesses save money by making it easier for them to track their usage of electricity and natural gas. We're proposing to make the Green Button Connect My Data standard mandatory for utilities that supply these types of energy. They would be required to provide their residential and business consumers with data on their consumption of electricity and natural gas. This would help people and businesses find ways to use less energy and lower their utility bills. It would also help foster a market that would give consumers a choice of new technology solutions to help them monitor and better manage their energy usage.

The second action would make it easier for employers to report workplace injuries and illnesses to the government and other specified workplace parties. The current reporting rules are confusing because they are spread across various regulations under the Occupational Health and Safety Act. We are proposing to clear up the confusion by consolidating these requirements into a single regulation.

The third action is about regulation of compressed air energy storage projects. These projects store massive amounts of renewable power underground by compressing it at very high pressures and storing it in reservoirs for later use. This helps smooth out the supply of renewable power during those times when the sun isn't shining and wind isn't blowing.

Ontario currently regulates these projects only if the compressed air is stored in a salt cavern. We're proposing to extend the regulatory framework to cover reservoirs and other underground areas. Making the framework clear and consistent would help attract more investment while ensuring that these projects are carried out safely and responsibly.

The fourth example is a suite of proposals to support the development of Ontario's first-ever Critical Minerals Strategy, which we announced earlier in March. Thanks to northern Ontario's incredible mineral resources, our province is well positioned to become a global supplier, producer and manufacturer of critical minerals needed for new technologies and high-growth sectors. These include an exciting opportunity to become a leader in the future of electric vehicle and battery manufacturing. As part of the strategy, we are working to streamline the processes and timelines for issuing mining licences.

We are also proposing to amend regulations on mine closure plans to make the regulatory system clearer, more flexible and scalable. This would, in particular, make it easier for smaller projects to go forward, including ones to extract critical minerals.

We'll also be reviewing the rules around bulk samples. These are fairly large samples that claim holders collect from a mineral deposit to determine its grade and quality. We'll be consulting on what the size threshold should be before a claim holder is required to file an advanced closure plan. With all these proposals, we're balancing a competitive mining sector with environmental protection and sustainability.

The fifth action concerns what we know as pre-start reviews. These are safety reviews by factories before they're allowed to start using or modifying certain machinery or processes. Our proposals would clarify when factories are required to conduct these reviews. They would also make it easier for businesses to comply with the rules while maintaining existing worker health and safety protections.

Next, I want to highlight a concern I know many people have when they hear about some of the efforts to reduce regulatory burdens. Sometimes they are worried that these could weaken regulations that are an integral part of our quality of life in Ontario. We understand this concern, and I want to address it head-on.

In our efforts to build a modern, efficient regulatory regime, we never lose sight of the fundamental truth that regulations are essential. We are not against regulation; we're against unnecessary regulation.

Ontario's families expect and deserve clean air and water. They expect and deserve safe products and working conditions. Regulations are there to ensure these things. That is why we continue our work to make regulations effective, targeted and focused, while maintaining and strengthening rules that keep people safe and healthy and also protect the environment.

In fact, the first of the five guiding principles for our approach to regulations is to protect public health and safety and the environment. We're working to reduce regulatory burdens in a smart and careful way that ensures that health, safety and environmental protections are maintained and enhanced.

The second principle is to prioritize the important issues. We're assessing which regulations cost the most time and money. We are looking for innovative ways to ensure that these rules are effective and efficient.

The third principle is to harmonize rules with the federal government and other provinces where we can. We're targeting duplicative red tape and, where possible, aligning with other jurisdictions to eliminate steps that cost job creators time and money.

The fourth principle is to listen to the people and businesses of Ontario. We want to hear their ideas about how we can remove red tape and create the right conditions for businesses and communities to prosper. I've had the opportunity to host over 120 round tables since the onset of the pandemic, and one of the consistent main

concerns that continues to come up is making sure that Ontario can be lean and accessible and ensuring that Ontario is more competitive through modernizing regulations.

The fifth principle is to take a whole-of-government approach. We are taking a coordinated approach to ensure that everyone is on the same page. We're applying a whole-of-government perspective to delivering smarter government, with the economic growth to match.

Mr. Speaker, I want to conclude by saying that our government will continue to remain committed to supporting businesses during one of the most difficult times they have ever experienced during this pandemic. Whether it be the Ontario Small Business Support Grant, a \$3.4-billion investment—second automatic payments hitting the accounts of small business owners; Ontario's Main Street Relief Grant, which helped with up to \$60 million in supporting small businesses to get the supports they need to reduce the cost of PPE that has impacted them; whether it was the Digital Main Street program, one of the largest investments in the province's history and the country's history to help businesses pivot digitally, to be able to operate in a digital environment; or whether it's been working with our federal partners to ensure that businesses can rely on up to 90% of rent relief or up to a 75% wage subsidy, we're going to do anything and everything possible to continue to support our businesses financially and also through regulatory measures like we have before the House today.

With that, I would like to introduce my parliamentary assistant, MPP Donna Skelly, who will take you through the rest of the legislation. Thank you very much.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The minister has indicated he's sharing his time, and I'll now recognize the member for Flamborough—Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you, and good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to speak to the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act. Firstly, I'm going to highlight proposed measures in the act that would reduce regulatory burdens on job creators. The proposed legislation zeroes in on regulatory and policy changes designed to remove regulatory roadblocks and to accelerate business growth.

1330

From day one, our government has been working to attract investment, to drive competitiveness and to create jobs. Complex and outdated rules that are difficult to understand are a burden for small businesses with limited resources. Modern and simplified regulations make it easier for everyone to comply. That saves businesses time, and it saves businesses money so that they can focus on creating jobs, which will accelerate our economic recovery.

The measures that our government is proposing would modernize regulations and cut red tape to make Ontario businesses more competitive and attractive to potential investors. These proposals will make a significant difference in many areas of economic activity, including

changes that would benefit businesses in mining, technology, real estate and beverage alcohol sales.

Let me begin with the mining industry. Our government has a bold vision for Ontario's critical minerals industry, one where Ontario can generate investment and increase its competitiveness in the global market. Our government has introduced a proposal that would support the Critical Minerals Strategy. Currently, claim holders who take a bulk sample for an unpatented claim must get the province's permission to sell the minerals from that sample and keep the proceeds. We are proposing to amend the Mining Act to eliminate this requirement, and although claim holders would still have to get permission to collect a bulk sample in the first place, this change would create greater certainty and improve timelines for proponents in the mining industry.

This would drive investment in Ontario's mining sector. It would reduce red tape. It would create jobs in Ontario's mining sector and other industries. It will help generate investment. It will increase Ontario's competitiveness in the global market. Companies using cutting-edge technologies are looking for critical minerals for products such as batteries and cellphones. Ontario is ready to capitalize on this growing market. Industries across Ontario and around the world need a steady supply of critical minerals to support new technologies and emerging industries, including electric vehicles. There is an abundance of critical minerals in northern Ontario.

Along with a competitive business climate, innovation and talent, Ontario is well positioned to become a leader in the future of electric vehicle and battery manufacturing. In fact, proposed investments of almost \$6 billion in Ontario's auto sector will make this province a global hub for electric vehicle manufacturing. Our Critical Minerals Strategy will help drive economic recovery. It will make us stronger and more resilient. Critical minerals are used in new technologies and high-growth sectors, including information and communications technology, electronics, energy, aerospace, defence, health and life sciences and transportation. It will also support Ontario's transition to a low-carbon economy at home and abroad.

Our government also proposes to establish a public record for licences of occupation administered under the Mining Act. The new public record would be similar to the existing mining claims registry. It includes maps, records and information about mining claims and claim holders. Establishing a new registry for licences of occupation would improve transparency and efficiency. It would allow people to look up this information for themselves, rather than having to request it from the government.

Our government also wants to make it easier for employers to pay wages by direct deposit. Currently, the act requires an employer to get signed consent from their employees to pay their wages by direct deposit if the financial institution isn't within a reasonable distance of their usual workplace. This condition has become irrelevant. Online banking, debit and credit cards have made the need for physical banking less important. Why should the proximity of an employee's bank to their workplace require signed consent to receive direct

deposit? Paying by direct deposit saves substantial administrative time and costs, so why not remove an unnecessary requirement?

Our government wants to improve the Ontario immigration nominee program. We are proposing to tighten controls by amending the Ontario Immigration Act to improve the program's ability to detect fraud and misrepresentation. Immigration programs typically are a target for unscrupulous people looking to take advantage of people who desperately want to immigrate to Ontario, and there are a number of immigration scams currently online. One such scheme involves a fake OINP website that collects data from immigration candidates. Another involves people sending phishing emails to unsuspecting immigration applicants asking for fees. These scammers then send the victims a false certificate using a legitimate-looking government logo. These unsuspecting victims are being duped by scam artists, their money is being stolen and they are no further ahead in the immigration process. Our government wants to put a stop to these crimes.

The Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program attracts skilled and experienced workers, and these workers help reduce the province's skilled labour shortage. The applicants meet regional labour needs and support even faster growth in our booming tech sector. The program's administrators have received numerous complaints from the public about compliance issues and about con artists undermining the integrity of the program. That is why our government wants to tighten controls to more readily detect fraud and misrepresentation. These proposed changes would accelerate internal reviews. As well, they would align with imminent changes to federal legislation so the program can continue to regulate immigration consultants.

The next action would amend the Modernizing Ontario for People and Businesses Act. Currently, the act includes what's known as an "offsetting requirement." This means that whenever a new regulation, policy or form is approved that would create or increase administrative costs to businesses, these costs must be offset by other measures. Currently, the government is required to offset every \$1 of business administrative costs by \$1.25 in savings. A review of this existing offsetting requirement is under way to further reduce undue burdens on business. We are proposing amendments to enhance the offsetting requirements. That would strengthen our ongoing efforts to reduce unnecessary regulatory burdens.

As part of Ontario's regulatory modernization efforts, our government is committed to reducing unnecessary red tape and regulatory burdens while also ensuring the public interest is protected. We are also committed to supporting business needs and ensuring that interactions with government are efficient and straightforward. This offset requirement is meant to, over time, ensure that the burden of regulatory compliance does not increase. We are guided by the principle that proposed regulations would not impose additional costs on Ontario businesses.

Our government is dedicated to creating a regulatory environment that considers both costs and benefits as part

of the evidence, utilizes recognized standards, considers the unique needs of small business, provides digital options and recognizes businesses with excellent compliance records. We believe recognized industry standards or international best practices should be adopted. We believe less onerous compliance requirements should apply to small business rather than larger companies.

I'm reminded of a small business in my riding of Flamborough-Glanbrook that wanted to construct a second building on their property. Before they could begin construction, the regulations required that they pay for a costly—and I mean costly—left-turn lane. They needed to begin construction as soon as possible; they appealed to my office for help. As a result, the left-turn lane regulations were significantly relaxed. They were revisited, at least until the building was completed. The members of this family business were simply trying to serve the needs of their community, but were faced with punishing government regulations.

1340

The next action I'd like to highlight is proposed amendments in the Planning Act related to subdivision control. The Planning Act sets out how land is divided into new parcels and how these parcels can be sold. The amendments proposed would address a number of long-standing issues. These technical and policy changes would reduce red tape, simplify subdivision control, and save owners and applicants time and money while ensuring land use planning objectives of the act are upheld.

The government reviews and approves new lots before they are sold in an effort to prevent haphazard development and to protect provincial interests. We are proposing highly technical changes in this bill to clarify and simplify administrative and procedural matters and to eliminate red tape in the procedures of consenting authorities. Real estate lawyers across Ontario have been urging the government to simplify these rules. The public, lawyers, planners and municipalities should all benefit from these practical and logical amendments to the Planning Act. Municipalities will be able to focus on planning and not be hampered by procedural issues, and the public will have a more user-friendly and discretionary consent process to work with.

A draft set of amendments to fix some of the anomalies in the act gathered dust for more than 20 years, but our government is looking at them again and our proposed revisions make the act more consumer- and user-friendly.

Madam Speaker, now I'm going to speak about an action that would encourage greater compliance with Ontario employment standards by employers who currently miss the mark. Employment standards officers sometimes require employers to audit their own records. The employers then report back on whether they are complying with employment standards in areas such as minimum wage, overtime pay, rest periods, and hours of work. We are proposing to allow officers to require self-audits more extensively but only if the officers already know that a specific employer is not complying with the act.

Very often, the violations are oversights and unintentional. Employers may not even be aware of the

requirements. Self-audits would educate non-compliant employers about their responsibilities under the act and give them a chance to correct violations. This aligns with modern regulatory principles by giving officers more power to apply a proportional approach to encourage compliance.

Our government is always looking for ways to make the system more inclusive. We are proposing to allow paralegals to serve on the Justices of the Peace Review Council. That is the body that receives and investigates complaints from members of the public about the conduct of justices of the peace. The review council is made up of judges, justices of the peace, a lawyer, and four community representatives. Currently, the Law Society of Ontario submits a short list to the Attorney General to appoint one of the council's 13 members, but the nominees must be lawyers. Paralegals are legal professionals. Paralegals represent clients before boards and tribunals, in Small Claims Court, in court on provincial offences, and elsewhere where permitted by law. The justice of the peace bench is primarily made up of laypersons. Most of the JP appointments are not lawyers.

This proposal would make the Justices of the Peace Review Council more inclusive by eliminating a rule in the Justices of the Peace Act that prevents the law society from including paralegals on its short list.

Our next proposal would support the efficient and effective regulation of lawyers and paralegals. Our government is proposing changes to the Law Society Act which would allow the law society to revoke the licence of a lawyer or paralegal if they have been suspended for over two years. This amendment would help protect the integrity of legal representation. Currently, lawyers or paralegals who have had their licences suspended have remained as such indefinitely or until they have remedied their outstanding requirements that led to their suspension.

Our government wants to make Ontario's courts more efficient but clearing out a backlog of dormant class action cases. Minor changes to the Class Proceedings Act would clarify when courts are permitted to dismiss dormant class action proceedings due to delay.

Prior to entering politics, I had been a journalist for many years, and I'm acutely aware of how slow the court process can be. This change would help to ensure that cases proceed much quicker.

As part of Ontario's regulatory modernization efforts, our government is committed to reducing unnecessary red tape and regulatory burdens while also ensuring the public interest is protected. Madam Speaker, we are also committed to supporting business needs and ensuring that interactions with government are efficient and straightforward.

Digital services that are accessible to stakeholders should be provided. We believe a business that is required for any reason to submit documents to a ministry of the government in order to comply with the rules should have the option of submitting documents electronically.

Regulated entities that demonstrate excellent compliance should be recognized. Unnecessary reporting should

be reduced. Communication to the user should be clear, providing reasonable timelines and a single point of contact. I have heard complaints from countless constituents who operate small businesses that are buried under mountains of duplicative and unnecessary paperwork.

Our government has already taken steps to help bars and restaurants during the pandemic by eliminating regulatory barriers. We are allowing restaurants and bars to extend outdoor patios. We are making the sale of beer and wine with food takeout and delivery orders permanent, and we have capped delivery fees charged to restaurants. Our government also permanently allowed 24/7 deliveries to retail stores, restaurants, hotels and distribution facilities.

Our government's next proposal would pave the way for our launch of a modernized and streamlined legal framework for beverage alcohol. Ontario's current framework for the sale, service and delivery of alcohol is complex and difficult to comprehend. The Liquor Licence and Control Act sets out a new framework that, once it is proclaimed, will make the law much easier for businesses and consumers to understand. The changes will reduce burdens and increase flexibility for businesses.

Our government is moving forward to fulfill its commitment to increase choice and convenience for alcohol consumers and to provide more opportunity to businesses to expand and to grow.

In December 2019, our government made changes to modernize the legal framework for the sale, service and delivery of alcohol. Our government is now proposing necessary technical amendments before the legislation can be brought into force. If passed, these technical amendments would make the legislation more flexible and remove outdated provisions.

Some changes are also being proposed to more closely align alcohol regulation with cannabis and gaming. We would streamline and strengthen the powers of the registrar of the Alcohol and Gaming Alcohol Commission of Ontario regarding the suspension of a liquor licence. We would align the suspension rules with cannabis and gaming. The changes would clarify that permit holders must comply with the act and the regulations in order for a permit to be issued.

Currently, a person convicted of being intoxicated in public could spend up to 90 days in jail. We want to remove that outdated provision. We believe people convicted of public intoxication may be better served through an addictions program.

We want to continue to apply the public interest test included in the Liquor Licence Act at various points, including the renewal, suspension and revocation of a liquor licence. Currently, this test is limited to the first application for a liquor licence. We want to clarify when and how the two-year limit on further licence applications on the same premises applies. We want to make additional minor technical or consequential amendments as necessary.

Our government has made several changes in response to the unique circumstances and economic hardships being

faced by bars and restaurants and the alcohol beverage industry as a direct result of COVID-19. Once proclaimed into force, the new legal framework will reduce the burden and increase flexibility for businesses, and it will make it easier for both businesses and consumers to understand the rules.

Madam Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the need for our government to modernize regulations and reduce regulatory roadblocks. Our spring 2021 red tape reduction package lays the foundation for a strong economic recovery. It is critical that our government act now to eliminate outdated regulations and minimize needless burdens on businesses and consumers.

1350

The steps that we are taking will create the conditions for investment and prosperity over the long term. Modernized and simplified regulations will allow people and businesses to focus on what is important right now: recovering, rebuilding and re-emerging from this crisis stronger than ever before.

I would now like to share the remainder of my time with the member from Peterborough—Kawartha.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I recognize the member for Peterborough—Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you very much for this time.

I'm going to touch on a couple of things that have already been talked about because I'm the parliamentary assistant to Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines, so it makes sense for me to touch on some of those.

One, in particular, is that both the minister and the member from Flamborough—Glanbrook talked about critical minerals, and I have to emphasize it. I'm sure that there are people who are riveted right now, sitting at home watching this on TV, and they think, "What are critical minerals?" Really, what are critical minerals? I'm going to name a few of them; some of them I'm sure you have heard of: cobalt, chromium, lithium, graphite and, my personal favourite, molybdenum. It's spelled M-O-L-Y-B-D-E-N-U-M. When I was first introduced to this in the ministry, I have to relay one of the stories of one of my kids, because he asked me if it was a new designer jeans—Molly B. Denims—that were coming out. He had no idea of what it was.

Most people really don't know what critical minerals are and what they're used for. The biggest thing they're used for right now is electric vehicles. Ontario has, with the Canadian Shield, a vast deposit of it. And it makes so much sense for Ontario to be the world leader in these critical minerals because we know that if you're using electric vehicles, if we're electrifying as much as we can, we're reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

If we've got one of the largest deposits of it in the world, then why aren't we emphasizing that? Why aren't we making it easier to use it?

I said to one of my assistants this morning when we were talking about this that, as I was going through all of the red tape reduction that we're doing, I was reminded of

a Dilbert comic. I came from the IT world before I got involved in politics, and Dilbert is really, really big in IT. In this case, as has been said a number of times, we're not against regulations. Regulations are good if they're done right. Regulations are good if they're protecting people. Regulations are good if they are making things safer.

But what I have found historically, when we look at previous governments and how they've done things, is that they've looked at regulations not necessarily as just a way that you can make things safer; they look at regulations as a way that you can prevent things from happening—hence my comment about Dilbert.

Mordac, the information preventer—those of you who read Dilbert will know exactly who he is. There's one that comes to mind whenever I think of regulations and red tape. Mordac came out with a new policy on passwords and how your password had to be. They had to be a minimum of 60 characters and must include upper case and lower case and special characters and numbers—and you had to stare at the sun for 30 minutes. That was his idea on how he could prevent people from using technology.

Another one was, he would go into someone's cubicle and he would remove their computer because it was non-standard. The worker, Alice, said, "Do you mean, by 'non-standard,' that it actually functions and does what it's supposed to?" And he said, "Yes," and walked out with it. A lot of times, that's what we find with a lot of these regulations. They come from a point where it's a great concept, but they've really missed the mark.

We've made a number of changes because of that. I'm going to touch on something from the electrical file. One of the things that was put in the Green Energy Act in 2009 was that there had to be a focus on renewable energy. What was interesting about it was that hydroelectric was not considered renewable energy. The focus was trying to be on solar and wind.

What we're changing now is, we're making it technology-neutral. It's not about the specific technology; it's about what's going to provide the reliability for the province. What's going to provide it in a way that can be distributed easily? How are we going to do it in a way that is going to make it less expensive for people in Ontario?

And I touch on the renewable energy side with hydro-powered electricity, because in my riding alone, we have a number of dams. We have a number of waterways. The Trent-Severn runs through it, and there are about 20 dams, but only a handful of them actually have hydroelectric plants on them. This is a resource that has not been tapped, and this is a renewable, green resource. Why would we prevent the ability to have a hydroelectric power plant and instead put up wind turbines?

Now, there are people who are going to say, "Well, it's the same, isn't it?" A turbine is not a turbine. It's not all the same. When you've got a wind turbine, you have heat that gets generated that has to be dissipated. You have a changing flow of air. Sometimes it's really windy, and you can't turn the wind turbine on because it's too fast. Sometimes there's not enough wind, so it's not as reliable.

But with a river, you know day in and day out how much water is going to come through there, and you can put in a power plant in a very, very safe, economical way that is reliable. Water power is a very wonderful way of doing it, and that is something that was excluded in that previous legislation. By making these changes, we can look at what's going to be the best technology.

We've talked a fair bit about businesses in this. It's not just businesses, though, that we're trying to keep safe during pandemics. I've said it a number of times: I used to be a member of the Kinsmen. I had to step down from the Kinsmen when I was elected, because of integrity and ethical issues. You could make a large donation to the Kinsmen that you couldn't make to me, and you might do that to ingratiate yourself to me. So I'm not officially a member of the Kinsmen anymore.

But the Kinsmen are doing something that I think is fantastic. All throughout the pandemic, they have been doing bingo on TV, because it's a television broadcast. And there has been a huge uptick in it. Prior to the pandemic, there were about 6,000 or 6,500 people who were playing on a weekly basis. Now, it's closer to 25,000 people who are playing. So they've seen a significant increase in the funds that come from it. And what do the Kinsmen do with it? Their motto is "Serving the Community's Greatest Need," so all of that money goes back into the community for things that they need.

A couple of examples in my own riding of Peterborough: The Kinsmen bought a refrigerated cube van for Kawartha Food Share so that they could get fresh produce, so that they could get fresh meat to take it to the other food banks. They supply about 30 different food banks all across eastern Ontario, and now they can do it with fresh produce and fresh meat as well, because the Kinsmen went out and bought a refrigerated van for them. They've given money to the March of Dimes. They've done things for people with disabilities. They have given back to the community.

Why do I bring this up? Because in this bill, we are changing it so that it allows them to meet digitally. As part of a not-for-profit and non-profit corporation, they weren't able to do that, so they've had one meeting this year. They have a fair bit of money in the bank account that they want to give back to the community as a result of the COVID bingo, but they haven't been able to get together to meet to decide how they're going to distribute those funds and how they are going to improve the lives of people in our community. This bill gives them the ability to do that.

I think that's a really good idea, because when you step back and think about it, when the legislation was first put in place, they were looking at what the world was like then, and it didn't consider how things would change. One of the things I have found most interesting about being in government is that we have a lot of really, really smart lawyers who are here who craft things, and they want to have the legislation say—or they want to interpret it as: If it doesn't specifically say you can do this, then you can't do that. Here's one of those cases where it just makes sense to make that change, because there are so many other not-

for-profits. There are so many other organizations that do great work in our community. The CCRC in Peterborough is another perfect example. This is something that's a welcome change for them so that their board can get together and actually do the things, legally, that they need to be able to do, because they're there supporting the average person.

Some of the other things that we're doing: the way that someone receives child or spousal support—we're making changes to that to make it easier.

1400

Imagine this: We're in 2021, and it's difficult to do a direct deposit. The way that the regulations are laid out, you basically have to run a cheque down to them. I have a couple of chequing accounts, I freely admit that. I have one that I set up, I think, in 1997, and I'm still on my first hundred cheques from it because we don't use them anymore. So why do we have a government regulation that says that this is the preferred way of doing it when the world doesn't operate that way?

Debit cards, credit cards, electronic transfers, email money transfers—that is the way that people are transferring money now, yet we still have regulations that say, "No, the preferred method: Write out a cheque, walk it down to wherever it's supposed to go and hand it to them. We'll take it, we'll take a look at it and make sure everything's okay on it, and then we'll run it down to the bank and hand it in." What a waste of time. We have the ability to do this electronically. Making these changes makes perfect sense, and it should be a welcome change.

A couple of other changes—I know my time is getting short. The Université de Hearst and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine is something that's being put in here. The Université de Hearst offers degree programs in French, has campuses in Hearst, obviously, in Timmins and Kapuskasing. They are getting the ability to give degrees in medicine with the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. It makes perfect sense for us to be doing something like that. We're in a pandemic where we have some challenges right now on the medical side, on the health care side. It makes perfect sense for us to be investing that way.

French-language long-term-care homes: If everybody is being trained in English, yet we have French-language long-term-care homes, how are we getting nurses, PSWs, physicians to be helping them if nobody is getting trained in their native language? Again, this is something that just makes absolutely perfect sense for us to do.

There are changes to the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997, to make fishing and the reporting on fishing that much easier. I'll leave that to my colleague from the Ministry of—

Mr. Mike Harris: Natural Resources and Forestry.

Mr. Dave Smith: Natural Resources and Forestry. I was going to call it by the other nickname and I had to stop myself from saying that.

What I'm coming to is that the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act is one that is going to do an

awful lot of small things, and those small things will add up to a lot of good things for the people in Ontario.

We have to be focusing, as we're making these red tape reduction bills, on how we affect, in a positive way, as many people as possible without creating burden. How do we make sure that the regulations that we put in place are there to protect people and make sure that everything is safe, but we don't go so far as Mordac, the information preventer, and say things like, "You have to stare at the sun for 30 minutes, and if you stare at the sun for 29 minutes and 59 seconds then that didn't pass, and if you stare at the sun for 30 minutes and one second, that also didn't pass and you have to start over again"?

A lot of times what we have with a lot of this red tape is great intentions, but the implementation of it is absolutely wrong.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction. I had listened intently to his presentation and was glad to hear the word that they're doing everything they can and listening to Ontario businesses, but I do, indeed, have a question for him about schedules 16 and 28. That's where they've got the Laurentian conversation in this bill.

I'd like to read some comments from the member for Sudbury, who says, "This is a distraction from the complete and utter mess that the Conservative government has made at Laurentian because the minister failed to protect Laurentian University from CCAA protection. They've messed up Laurentian so badly that the entire country is questioning their leadership ability." This is why they've dragged this legislation in at the eleventh hour, in the middle of a pandemic: because schedules 16 and 28, I think, would appear to be this government trying to save face with this abrupt decision. So I would like to ask the associate minister's input, if he can speak to that.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: To the member opposite: I appreciate her question, but our government, whether it's in this piece of legislation or other pieces of legislation, really are focused on protecting education and choice in education for students in northern Ontario. What you see here with this piece of legislation—the changes that have been made in this legislation are to really ensure that those in the north have continued access to high-quality education, whether that is the northern Ontario medical school, whether that is the Hearst institution. So we'll continue to do whatever we can to support academics, to support choice for students in the north, because we know that they need that certainty. That's what this bill is doing: It's providing that certainty for those institutions.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you, Minister, for your speech, and for my other colleagues as well. Some people who I've spoken with in my community really don't have a clear understanding of what red tape is. It comes up all the time, and I try to explain it, but I wondered if you could help us with this and why you really think it's important that we address overregulation to help our small businesses at this time. I think it's really important to Ontario's

economic recovery, but I know you can probably say why more clearly than I can, and then I can clip what you've said and send that to my constituents.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you very much to the member for that question. You know, she's right: Sometimes it's very difficult to understand. But business owners themselves, when you ask them, whether it's at a round table or a one-to-one discussion, will tell you that red tape is about eliminating the inefficiencies of operating their business.

Rather than spending hours and hours sifting through different pieces of regulations to figure out how to comply with a certain act or requirement—for example, in this piece of legislation we have the Occupational Health and Safety Act. If you need to report an incident right now, there are eight different regulations that you must follow and report to. What we're doing is consolidating that into one, so business owners have clarity, so you don't have to spend countless hours sifting through outdated regulations. This is how we think we can help support businesses reduce the time that they need to comply with regulation, so they can focus on what they do best, which is investing in their business.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to have the opportunity again to ask the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction about something that he did mention in his remarks about the Ontario Small Business Support Grant. This is something that certainly was appreciated upon its announcement; many small businesses have applied and been successful in their application. However, Speaker, they have been successful in their application but not successful in getting the funds, and we're hearing this across communities. The government has acknowledged that they're hearing it, as well.

I wrote a letter to various ministers, asking when these small businesses across communities who are so desperately waiting for those funds that have been promised—they've been begging for direct aid. They've been told it's coming. That was mid-January. We're now mid-April, and they haven't gotten their money. I want to know when the money to honour the government's promises is going to flow. Businesses who have questions can't get a call back, can't get the courtesy of a response. What are they to do? When is the money coming?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I want to thank the member opposite for that question. Our government has been able to process over 100,000 applications and pay out over 100,000 applications. Over \$1.5 billion has already flowed to small businesses. But we recognize and understand that there are some businesses that are still waiting for that payment, and we have tripled our support staff on the back end, to ensure that those payments are made, and that they can get the support they need and that they can get the responses they need.

In some circumstances, there might be some clarification that is needed, but 100,000-plus businesses have received the funding of over \$1.5 billion, and they will also get an automatic renewal, an automatic payment of

another \$1.7 billion, into their accounts without having to reapply to the program. It's a \$3.4-billion investment to support those businesses.

1410

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the minister: The last thing business wants to hear about is a myriad of rules and regulations and red tape, the paperwork and the forms that have to be filled out, the i's that have to be dotted and the t's that have to be crossed. What can I tell people in my riding, as far as some specific examples of either some of the worst pieces of regulation you're getting rid of or some of the advantages of this legislation?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you to the member for the question. I think one of the important pieces of regulation change or modernizing here is really around the Occupational Health and Safety Act, where we need to ensure that employers and employees are kept safe. For example, right now, when you have an incident at your workplace, the employer is required to go through eight different pieces of legislation and regulations to make sure the reporting requirements are fulfilled.

Many times, businesses, especially small businesses, don't have the ability or don't understand the complexities of some of these regulations or legislation, and they're not able to do that in a manner that is sufficient. In order to protect not only the health of our employees but also to simplify processes, we're consolidating that into one regulation, so it's a one-stop place for business owners to be able to report on incidents. Not only are we protecting employees—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Question?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am glad to be able to have the opportunity to ask the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction as we're discussing Bill 276, which is the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act. I was glad to hear the minister suggest that what we need is smarter government, and I am of the same opinion.

Speaker, one of the things that has been called for across communities from the employer side, the employee side—just all across the community, people have been calling for paid sick days. The government has pushed back with directing to the federal program. However, that is restricted to COVID-19, and we're here talking about recovery beyond that. This is something that employers are needing to keep their employees safe.

If someone wakes up in the morning and they want to stay home, they cannot use the federal program. They actually have to be away for over 50% of their workweek. Is this indeed going to be a chance for smarter government? Will the government support paid sick days in Ontario and support Bill 239?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Well, once again, in terms of supporting businesses or the people of this province, our government remains committed to doing that. In terms of paid sick leave, the member opposite knows that the federal program currently exists. We have less than

\$300 million of that used up right now, and it's because of the misinformation that currently exists that employees can't get access to that program because they don't know it exists.

It is incumbent on all of us to ensure that employees who need to use that program, that benefit, have access to it. It's our duty, every single one of us in this House, to ensure that our constituents, our essential workers aren't being misled on this issue and that they have access to those very important supports.

We'll continue to work with everyone to ensure that that message continues to resonate and that that message continues to get out to the people who need it the most, our essential workers.

ROYAL ASSENT

SANCTION ROYALE

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

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

An Act to amend and repeal various statutes, to revoke various regulations and to enact the Ontario Land Tribunal Act, 2021 / Loi modifiant et abrogeant diverses lois, abrogeant divers règlements et édictant la Loi de 2021 sur le Tribunal ontarien de l'aménagement du territoire;

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

SUPPORTING RECOVERY AND COMPETITIVENESS ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LE SOUTIEN À LA RELANCE ET À LA COMPÉTITIVITÉ

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I rise today as the official opposition House leader to participate in the debate on the bill before us this afternoon, Bill 276, the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act. Now, Speaker, as you know, as members in the House know, normally the critic for the Ontario NDP would be rising in this place to lead off debate on a piece of legislation that affects their critic area. So, normally that would be, in our case, the member for Kingston and the Islands, who is the small business critic for the Ontario NDP and has done a very proactive job of outreach and engagement with the small business community in the province to understand what they need to support their recovery and ensure that they are able to get back on the road to competitiveness.

Normally, my colleague the MPP for Essex, who is the NDP critic for economic development and accountability, could have been one of the members who would rise in this place to lead off debate on this bill. He has obviously done a large amount of work over a long period of time, understanding the needs of regional labour markets, local economies and what kinds of government supports are necessary to ensure that businesses can get through this pandemic and continue to generate revenues to keep our economy functioning.

Normally, my colleague the member for Waterloo could have been standing here. She's the NDP critic for finance and had served for many years as our economic development critic. She represents a community that has a thriving high-tech economy and understands very deeply the kinds of challenges that are facing small businesses, small and medium-sized enterprises across the province.

But, Speaker, as you know, these are not normal times. It is not a normal occurrence that I am here with a very small cohort of my colleagues. It is not normal that I am speaking for an hour with a mask on my face, but these are the measures that we have had to take in the face of the most catastrophic crisis that has ever gripped our province.

We saw on Friday a failure of colossal proportions when this government stood up and announced that their response to the crisis of COVID-19, the very real possibility of our health care system collapsing—the response to that is to close playgrounds and give police more enforcement powers. That is not the way to support recovery in this province. That is not going to help our small business sector get back on its feet and continue to generate those jobs that we know most Ontarians are employed in.

Most Ontarians have jobs in the small business sector. These are anchors in our communities—family-owned businesses, small businesses. They employ our friends and neighbours. They keep our local communities vibrant and strong and thriving. And they are hanging by a thread. They cannot take any more of this cases rising, lockdown; cases rising, lockdown; cases rising, lockdown. They are at the end of their rope, Speaker. I would suggest that the 28 schedules that are set out in this bill do absolutely nothing to address the real challenges that they are facing and the real measures that need to be put in place to actually support recovery. And that is right there in the title of this bill.

1420

Speaker, I think it's important to read into the record some of the commentary that has been received from health care experts, from the independent scientists and others who volunteer their time to sit on the government's science advisory table. That table was created to do an analysis of the data and apply the best research and evidence to recommend evidence-informed policies that would enable the government to lead Ontarians through this crisis. And have they seen that leadership? Absolutely not, Speaker. We have seen a complete failure from this government to actually take the advice that has been given by those health care experts and implement it, so that we can get through this pandemic and get our economy going

again. That's the way that we are going to ensure competitiveness in Ontario.

I'd like to quote from some of these physicians. Dr. Andrew Boozary from University Health Network called the government's response an "abomination of public health policy." He said, "This is ... the most damning policy response I have ever seen in my career." He says it punishes people living in poverty, marginalized communities that have borne the brunt of COVID-19 throughout the pandemic. He says there was "no semblance of evidence in how to address and ... clamp down on COVID-19, which is now at its all-time high." He says the measures that were proposed were "cruel beyond measure." A police response is not an appropriate way to deal with a public health crisis. He says the collection of measures that were announced by this government on Friday are only "going to make things worse."

Speaker, we know the evidence. We read with fear in our hearts, with heartbreak, for the families who are going to be affected by what's going to unfold over the next three weeks, because, as Dr. Stein Brown said on Friday when he revealed the new modelling projections, the numbers are baked in. The numbers are the result of actions that were not taken by this government when they had an opportunity to shift the course of this pandemic and support recovery and enable competitiveness. But this government chose not to take the actions that had been recommended by the experts.

Dr. Boozary goes on to say the "devastating part is that it is so clear that corporate interest is taking precedence over people's lives."

The government's failure to actually take a strong approach to closing non-essential workplaces—they have left a gap that allows all kinds of workplaces that many of us would never consider to be essential. And yet these—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I recognize the government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'm just searching for the specific relevance on the bill that's before the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I believe the member is on topic. I'm just going to remind all members to ensure that everyone in the House knows how you're tying your remarks back into the bill.

Back to the member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to draw the attention of this House to the title of the bill. It is called the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act. Speaker, I think that it is important that we understand what medical experts, what scientists have been telling this government about what is necessary to support recovery.

I'm also sharing some of what I have heard from businesses in my community, that they can't continue the path that this government has taken them on with this constant cycle of lockdown and investing in measures to reopen. We know from the data that the government reopened too early when the case counts had not been low enough to prevent a third wave. I heard from many busi-

nesses in my community who made significant investments in reopening restaurants and patios and other commercial activities, and yet they faced another lockdown that was kind of a bit here, and then a bit there, and then another piece there; just a series of haphazard half-measures that have got us to the place that we are today.

I have to say, after the events of Friday, after watching Dr. Brown's modelling projections, after watching the Premier's response to Dr. Brown's modelling projections, after watching the government walk back some of the measures that were announced around playgrounds and around the new powers for police to stop people and ask for their address—after all of that, I think that Ontarians would have expected their voices, their representatives to return to Queen's Park and start to look at how we are going to deal with this mess.

How are we going to put measures in place that are actually going to get us through this pandemic with a death count that is maybe only several thousand instead of tens of thousands? Because that is what we're looking at right now, Speaker, as our ICUs reach capacity, as physicians are put into this impossible, unthinkable predicament of having to apply a triage protocol that makes them responsible for deciding who's going to get treatment and who is not, who is going to live and who is going to die. You can imagine—the one doctor, Dr. Barrett, talked about the moral distress that health care providers are going to experience as a result of having to be in that position, because that is not something that any health care provider in this province ever signed up for.

But I do think it's important to share some of the other ideas from health care providers about what kinds of measures would actually have supported recovery in this province and why this government has fallen so far short on what actually needed to happen. Dr. Brooks Fallis says that the government has "done nothing to meaningfully protect" the people who are actually getting sick from COVID-19 and actually dying. He says, "Today"—talking about Friday—"they prioritized allowing those people who can stay at home to have non-essential goods made and delivered to them by people who end up in the ICU. It just felt like today was sending a whole lot of people to their death when they didn't have to.

"And when the whole system starts to collapse and we run out of patient transfers and the emerg backs up into the parking lot, that's when people will start to die who didn't even need to die with the virus."

Dr. Peter Jüni—many of us heard him on the media talking about the government's response being "one of the darkest days" in his professional career. Of course, Dr. Peter Jüni is the director of the science advisory table. He said he was in tears as he watched the government's response. He said, "It's wrong. It's just wrong."

1430

Speaker, there are so many others. Dr. Michael Warner says, "I do feel defeated. I'm kind of past anger, and on to defeat. I guess I'm just resigned to our shared destiny. I cannot see any circumstance where I can now protect my patients from being forced to be palliated because of the lack of beds."

Dr. Andrew Morris says, "We're screwed." He says, "If you're an essential worker right now, do you know what your life is like now? It's miserable. You're going to get stopped by cops, you're going to have a high likelihood that you or one of your loved ones will get sick and be on a ventilator."

In the midst of this nightmare that we are living through, we are now in this chamber debating a bill entitled the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act, which does absolutely nothing to respond to these immense challenges. There are lifetime-defining challenges before us. This bill does nothing to deal with those issues.

I am going to talk about several of the schedules in the bill, because there are implications that deserve to be highlighted and to be thought through as this bill proceeds through the legislative process. But honestly, Speaker, it's impossible to begin that analysis of this bill without situating it within this historical moment that we are living through in the province of Ontario.

I made a reference just a couple of minutes ago to some of the announcements that we heard on the weekend of the government walking back some of the initial measures that were proposed on Friday. I do want to give a shout-out to London police: both the London Police Services Board and the London Police Association, the London chief of police and London Mayor Ed Holder. The London Police Services Board immediately issued a response saying that they have serious concerns regarding the potential adverse effect and constitutionality of the provincial government's expansion of police enforcement of the emergency stay-at-home order: "We cannot enforce our way out of the pandemic and would encourage the provincial government to shift their focus to stabilizing the health system, ensuring equitable access to vaccines and following the advice of health experts. They go on to say, "The chief has been clear that LPS will not be randomly stopping people and will remain steadfast in their commitment to an equitable and unbiased approach to their work."

The London Police Association issued a statement saying that they were "neither consulted nor given advanced notice that" their "members would be put in this position." They say, "Once again, we find ourselves unwittingly thrust into the middle of the debate centred on a public health crisis and the police. We commend the statement released by" the chief "and fully endorse the decision not to randomly stop individuals." Then, of course, there was also a statement from the city of London, from the mayor of London, Ed Holder: "There will not be random stops of individuals."

So this government's signature initiative to support recovery and get the province through these very, very dark times was absolutely rejected by the people of this province. We saw the immediate response from police services across the province, and I have to say that the walk back, the revised regulations that were later issued have not addressed many of the concerns that were initially expressed, especially by the racialized, Indigenous and immigrant populations who have been so

disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and who have very legitimate fears, given our history of policing in this province, about being stopped. We know now police can only stop someone if they suspect they're on their way to an illegal gathering. But how in the world one determines where someone is on their way to is a whole other question.

With that, Speaker, I want to turn to the schedules in this bill. The bill has 28 schedules and it is what we are now all very familiar with: It is an omnibus bill, which is kind of a grab bag of schedules. We heard from the government House leader—in fact, before we returned to this House in February we had heard that a red tape reduction bill was going to be debated in this chamber, so here we are in April and we are now debating it.

The interesting thing about that is that obviously they've been working on this bill for quite a period of time, which would have allowed additional schedules to perhaps be introduced, maybe some schedules taken out and replaced with legislative changes that were perhaps more relevant to the challenges we are facing now. But regardless, the government has now, with the debate on this bill, delivered on that announcement that they made back in February that the Legislature was going to be looking at red tape reduction when we return.

Mostly this bill makes pretty minor, mostly technical changes that kind of reflect the course that this government was on prior to the pandemic. It also includes schedule 21, which I'll get to, which is a schedule that advances the government's agenda on an initiative to privatize Ontario Works. Speaker, I hope that you, when you're out of the chair, have an opportunity to speak to this bill, because I'm sure that you will have some very insightful things to say about schedule 21.

Schedule 1 is the Class Proceedings Act. It just says that a proceeding won't be automatically dismissed after a year. It's very straightforward—no real concern.

Schedule 2, the Corporations Act: again, routine house-keeping, minor, no concerns.

Schedule 3, the Education Act: same thing, minor, technical, no concerns.

Schedule 4, the Election Act: minor, technical, no concerns.

Then we get to schedule 5. Jumping ahead, I think it's interesting to consider schedule 5 in combination with schedule 19, because they both have to do with energy policy in this province.

Schedule 5 repeals sections of the Electricity Act that provide priority electricity grid access to renewable generation projects. It also eliminates requirements that information regarding a distribution or transmission system's ability to accommodate renewable generation be made available. Essentially, Speaker, this completes or is another missing piece in the government's process of winding down the Green Energy Act, and another attack on renewable energy from this government.

1440

Is anybody surprised to see that in this bill? I don't think so, Speaker, because of what we have seen from this

government. Not only will it go down in history for its abysmal handling of the pandemic, it will also go down in history as the most anti-environmental government ever in Ontario. We saw that one of the first things that they did was to fire the Environmental Commissioner. We have seen in the budget bill in December the attack on conservation authorities. We saw in the bill on broadband—it was supposed to be on broadband, but it included the poison pill about fast-tracking ministerial zoning orders so that wetlands and other protected parts of this province can be paved over.

Schedule 5, this attack on renewable energy, is quite in line with some of the previous actions that we have seen this government take. It's also in line with a later schedule in this bill, schedule 19, which makes amendments to the Ontario Energy Board Act. What the Ontario Energy Board Act currently requires is that there be consideration to the use of renewable energy sources as to whether they are in the public interest, as to whether promoting the use of renewable energy sources in constructing, expanding or reinforcing electricity transmission and distribution lines is in the public interest. This amendment, brought in in schedule 19, removes that. It removes the consideration of whether the public interest is served by promoting the use of renewable energy sources. It takes it right out of the Ontario Energy Board Act.

Speaker, it's unbelievable. I think people have a hard time understanding how any government could consider promoting the use of renewable energy sources as not being in the public interest. One would think that in the midst of—we have two major crises in this province and in the world right now: We have the COVID-19 pandemic and we have the crisis of climate change. Our climate is rapidly warming, and if we don't do something serious, if we don't take strong measures, we are going to see climate devastation like we've never seen before: drought, wild-fires, flooding, all of these kinds of natural disasters that are triggered by climate change. We're going to see climate immigration on a scale never before contemplated, as whole regions of people are forced to leave because of the impact of climate change.

One of the important things that legislatures can do to deal with climate change is to promote renewable energy, reduce reliance on fossil fuels, look to renewable energy sources. This schedule takes that right out of the Ontario Energy Board Act, which I think is shocking, Speaker. It's incomprehensible why the government would have thought that that was a good idea.

Excuse me, Speaker. I haven't done a long speech with the mask before, so it takes a bit of getting used to.

But the next schedule that I wanted to talk about in this bill is schedule 6, which makes some amendments to the Employment Standards Act. Now, the reason that I want to spend some time talking about schedule 6 is not because of the amendments that are made to the Employment Standards Act, which are very minor and don't raise any real red flags, but the missed opportunity, Speaker. When you have the Employment Standards Act included in your bill, it's a golden opportunity to amend the Employment

Standards Act around infectious disease emergency leave. I don't know how many times we've heard the Minister of Labour talk about how this government amended the Employment Standards Act to provide unpaid infectious disease emergency leave, so that workers who had to stay home because they were sick or to deal with caregiving responsibilities didn't have to fear losing their job.

But the thing that this government just does not understand is that unpaid leave does nothing for workers who are living paycheque to paycheque. It does nothing for low-wage, immigrant, racialized workers who rely on—they can't take an unpaid leave of absence. They have to go into work every day, and that is what the third wave has just opened everybody's eyes to. There's no longer any question about whether enabling an essential worker in a factory or a warehouse or a grocery store to stay home if they have COVID, so they don't have to worry about whether they're going to be able to pay the rent or buy the groceries, is of benefit for all of us, because people understand that if all of us are not safe, none of us will be safe. We have to ensure that every worker who does not have access to paid sick days from their job is able to get their wages covered when they are sick.

And I go back, Speaker, to the private member's bill that I had introduced back in December, when all we were looking at was the second wave, which seemed very concerning. We were looking at the data then and understanding the importance of paid sick leave to deal with the second wave, but now, as we look at the reality of the third wave, you'd think that this government would have learned. You'd think that this government would recognize that amending the Employment Standards Act to provide paid leave in an infectious disease emergency—I mean, my bill, of course, recommends that there be paid leave available to workers on a permanent basis, because there are lots of studies about how flu spreads in a workplace, studies about how gastroenteritis spreads from food handlers who have stomach flu and are serving customers, and then whole restaurants of customers have come down with stomach flu as a result.

1450

So there's lots of medical evidence to show that paid sick leave is good health policy, good public policy on an ongoing basis, but when we are in the midst of this crisis of unimaginable proportions, paid sick leave takes on a whole new urgency in dealing with the third wave. To go back to some of those physicians who were so devastated and angry when they saw the government's response, universally they talked about that the glaring omission was the lack of any kind of support for workers who have symptoms to be able to stay home without fearing the loss of their paycheque.

It was in January that Peel released a study of workers who revealed they had COVID symptoms—8,000 workers participated in that study, and 2,000 of those workers went to work sick. They went to work with COVID symptoms; 80 of them actually had COVID and went to work. Did they do that because they wanted to put their co-workers at risk? The people they were travelling

with on the buses on their way to work, did they want to put those people at risk? Did they want to put their family members at risk? No, Speaker, that's not why they went to work. They went to work because they didn't have a choice. They had to collect that paycheque because the federal program is not working for those workers.

The government likes to say that the official opposition should be doing more to promote the federal program, but listen, it's not because we're not promoting the federal program that workers aren't applying to it. Workers are not in a situation where they can apply to it. It requires people to not just call their employer and say they can't come in today because they're unwell. They have to take unpaid leave from their job. They have to have access to technology, they have to go online, they have to apply for the federal program. They have to find out if they qualify, and they have to wait to see if they qualify. They can only apply if they've missed already 50% or more of their workweek, and if they haven't, they have to wait till the next week before they can apply, and then they have to keep their fingers crossed that the cheque will arrive at some point over the next couple of weeks. And, the cheque that arrives, Speaker, is that going to replace the wages that they'll be giving up when they're staying home? Unlikely. The federal benefit pays less than minimum wage, and every worker in this province, even the lowest-wage, should be working at minimum wage. So even for the lowest-wage workers, the federal benefit doesn't cover the salary they have given up.

We know the reality is that there are a lot of people in this province who live paycheque to paycheque, who have to juggle several jobs just to make ends meet—the cost of housing, all of these financial pressures that people have faced and that are exacerbated by the pandemic.

The reality is, the federal program's not working. This would have been an opportunity to support workers and support businesses, Speaker, when I brought my bill forward for debate. I engaged with many business organizations, individual businesses, prior to bringing that bill forward. Unfortunately, when this government was first elected and they announced that they were going to be eliminating the two paid sick days that had been in the Employment Standards Act, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce was one of those organizations that was on board with that. They supported the government doing that. But they have since recognized, as everybody else has during the pandemic, that paid sick days are important. That they are important to keep workers safe and healthy, to keep customers safe and healthy, and to employers themselves safe and healthy. So the Ontario Chamber of Commerce issued a statement about my bill, because my bill had said that small businesses are struggling and small businesses need support from the government to deliver this critical, critical public health measure at a time of crisis in our province.

An interesting thing: Last week, Unifor held a press conference. They had commissioned a survey of public attitudes to paid sick leave in Ontario. The survey was released on April 16, just late last week. The survey was

conducted by Ecos Research. The margin of error for this survey is 2.8 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, so pretty solid research here. This survey, the researchers were in the field April 7 to 12 polling Ontarians on did they support paid sick days. The poll found, by a margin of more than 4 to 1, that Ontarians support the implementation of paid sick days for Ontario workers; 70% supported five days of paid sick leave, two thirds supported 10 days of paid sick days.

One of the interesting findings of this survey is that respondents were asked about their political affiliation, and the survey found there is a strong partisan divide, with Progressive Conservative supporters more divided on the issue and all other party supporters overwhelmingly in favour. To think that this government's ideological partisan positioning—knowing that Progressive Conservative voters are less likely to be supporting paid sick days, that this government is letting that get in the way of implementing the one policy measure that almost all public health experts—I don't even think it's almost all; all public health experts—agree is critical to support recovery in this province. It is despicable that this government is digging in on its ideological position about paid sick days and refusing to do what all 34 public health units, boards of health, medical officers of health—all 34 of them wrote in support of a provincial program of paid sick days for Ontario workers.

I had multiple boards of health write letters of support, in particular, for my bill. All of these physicians I have quoted earlier on support paid sick days. Dr. Steini Brown said on Friday afternoon—just hours before the government released their package of measures, Dr. Steini Brown highlighted the need to provide support for workers. So it's really disappointing—I guess not surprising—deeply disappointing to see that a schedule in this bill that amends the Employment Standards Act doesn't actually make the amendments that would help workers in Ontario.

1500

Wow, the time goes fast here, Speaker. I'm now going to jump over several of the schedules and take us to schedule 15. The reason that I want to highlight schedule 15 is because I think it's instructive. I think that the government should take a look at why on earth they're having to amend a bill that they enacted just last year. They rushed through legislation last year. They rushed through Bill 197, the Modernizing Ontario for People and Businesses Act, and now, just months later, they're in the position of having to amend that bill that they rushed through.

I suspect, Speaker, that we're going to see a lot more of that in the one year and a month or so that this government has left before a new government is elected in Ontario. But I'm sure that they will be busy tweaking all of the legislation that they pushed through without the proper due diligence, without the proper consultation and engagement with the public, without the opportunity to consider amendments and all of those challenges that happen when you don't allow time for public input, when you don't allow time for adequate consultation and debate. But

anyway, that schedule deals with the cost to business of regulation. And, as I said, it is being amended, even though it was a provision that is less than a year old.

I'm going to talk a bit about two schedules. I'll talk about them jointly: schedule 16 and schedule 28. Schedule 16 is the Northern Ontario School of Medicine University Act, and schedule 28 is called the Université de Hearst Act. These two schedules—the reason they're in this legislation is, as we know, because of the government's just complete abandonment of Laurentian University in Sudbury.

Laurentian University has been an anchor of the Sudbury community. It's estimated that the loss of Laurentian would mean a hit to the local economy of \$100 million or more, because of the loss of wages, spending and student enrolment. The government allowed Laurentian University to end up in a situation where it applied for creditor protection under the CCAA. In response to the financial pressures that the university was facing, 110 academic positions and almost 70 degree programs, including Canada's only bilingual midwifery program, were eliminated.

Why did Laurentian end up in this situation? It's quite straightforward. It doesn't take a lot of analysis to understand what happened to Laurentian and the threat to post-secondary institutions across Ontario. For years—for years—Ontario has provided the lowest per-student funding in the post-secondary sector of any province in Canada. They have really withdrawn from their responsibility to support the sector. They did not step in and assist Laurentian when Laurentian was going through these difficulties. We've had three years in a row, Speaker—or three Conservative budgets in a row—that have included a reduction in funding for the post-secondary sector. So we're already the lowest in Canada in terms of per-student funding, and it just keeps getting lower and lower. Our post-secondary sector, as Laurentian's experience shows, is very much at risk.

I just wanted to talk about some of the implications of that. And this does refer back to this bill, where it says, "Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act." One of the professors from—actually not Laurentian, from Lakehead. An economics professor at Lakehead commented that, "For years places like Sudbury and Thunder Bay had to deal with mine closures and mill closures and then spent a decade or two diversifying into the knowledge economy and a lot of that involved expanding university programming and recruiting students to go there."

"It's really interesting that, all of a sudden, you have the same kind of thing happening to a university."

Our competitiveness as a province relies very much on a strong and flourishing post-secondary sector, particularly in terms of the knowledge-based economy and having institutions like Laurentian available for people who live in that region of the province. The research that comes out of the institution, the work-integrated learning opportunities for students to be engaged in the community, to work with employers in employer-directed research projects, all of this contributes to local economies.

Speaker, I'm not sure if legislation could have been used to deal with the Laurentian situation, but the Northern Ontario School of Medicine and the university of Hearst are kind of casualties of what has been happening at Laurentian, and the schedules in this bill are necessary because of the crisis that Laurentian is going through.

I wanted to now talk a little bit about schedule 21. Schedule 21 is the Ontario Works Act. This schedule enables the regulatory framework for the changes to Ontario Works that were announced by this government back in March 2019. Those changes proposed setting up new regional service areas, a very broad geographic scale, and third-party service providers were brought in for pilot projects for this new, privatized model of social assistance delivery. The ministry is designated as the delivery agent for a certain area, and a delivery partner is designated in areas where the ministry is the delivery agent.

Speaker, you will be very familiar with this pilot. You will be very familiar with one of the firms that was brought in as a delivery agent, called Fedcap. This is a US-based multinational with just an appalling track record in terms of the support—or the lack of support—that they provided for persons with disabilities who were on social assistance for legitimate reasons, went for support with training and employment opportunities, and were pushed into the labour market when they shouldn't have been. We know that similar social services in the UK found that the recipients of social assistance in these kinds of models end up just deeper in poverty, and in some cases end up in suicide.

1510

Speaker, I have to say, in this pandemic, one of the hardest things to hear from people that we represent is from people who have disabilities themselves or are parents of people with disabilities. People with disabilities have been affected more, I think, by this pandemic than anyone else in terms of the financial hardship that they have faced and the total lack of support that they have received from this government. They have been ignored. They have been completely ignored in any kind of support programs that the government has set up.

I've heard too often people with disabilities talking about considering medical assistance in dying because they simply can't live like this anymore. We all remember with a gasp, I think, when at one point we heard the minister across the way talk about how the best social program for someone with a disability is a job. We know, Speaker, that many, many people with disabilities can't participate in the workforce. Our obligation as a society is to ensure that all of us—all of us, whether we have a disability or are differently abled; regardless of age, income, any other demographic indicator—are able to live with dignity, to participate in our communities, and deserve to be supported by government.

When you think about competitiveness, Speaker, which is what this bill is supposed to be about, there are huge social costs to poverty. There is an estimated 5.5% of GDP that is lost productivity because of the circumstances of people living in poverty, which is people on social

assistance in this province who have not seen any increase to social assistance rates in years. So that is a schedule that we have concerns about, and we will certainly be interested in hearing what comes before the committee.

The final schedule I wanted to just touch on in my minute and a half left is schedule 27. What that schedule does is prohibit the use of recording, video recordings, in proceedings to which the act applies. That would mean the Human Rights Tribunal, the Landlord and Tenant Board and others. This has been identified as a concern in particular with the Landlord and Tenant Board, because tenants have experienced extreme abuse by process, actually, during these proceedings, because they're rushed through these processes. Often tenants have little understanding of what's going on. They may have limited ability to speak English, low literacy. They're facing a number of different challenges, and they are rushed through these proceedings. By capturing this on video, it has actually exposed some of the unscrupulousness that can happen during these proceedings. So, to disallow videos in those proceedings is a concern.

With that, I conclude my remarks. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Jim McDonell: My question across the aisle—we hear often the other side talking about this paid sick leave. We've done a little looking around, and I'd like to know just what the member opposite has done to promote the federal program that was put in place for all the provinces back in August.

A quick check of most of the websites across the aisle here—nobody refers to this sick plan that's there, and by harping on the fact there is none, most of our residents don't know it's out there. It was interesting to note that Premier Ford just last week thanked the Prime Minister for acknowledging that they had created this sick day plan, which you would think that—when we pass legislation, we like to brag about it and talk about filling a need—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm just wondering, what have you done to make sure your people are aware of it, and if there are shortcomings, have you talked to your local MP about fixing it, because it is their program?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am surprised to hear that the Premier was congratulating the Prime Minister about the program because we know that when the program was first announced, this Premier was steadfastly opposed to it, and it was only because it was made a condition of receiving federal dollars that the Ontario government finally bought in.

Speaker, the reason we need to have a provincial program of paid sick days is because provinces are responsible for employers, and paid sick days have to be delivered by employers so that they can be seamlessly accessed by workers without causing workers to have to take several days to apply online and wait a week or more before they finally get the benefits. We need the program to be seamless and uninterrupted delivery by employers.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Michael Mantha: This morning in the House, during debate, I was pleasantly surprised when I heard the House leader, along with the Minister of Labour, acknowledge that there were issues with the federal program. It is now almost 20 after 3, and their comments this morning were in the hopes that the federal budget that was coming out this afternoon would address some of those shortfalls that are there. I was just so happy when I actually saw where they recognized that it's not working, that there are challenges there for Ontarians and that we can do better.

My question to the member is, what needs to happen here in the Legislature to make those paid sick days more accessible and easier for Ontarians?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I appreciate the question from my colleague. Ideally, we need to see an amendment to the Employment Standards Act. This bill includes an amendment to the Employment Standards Act, but it is absolutely not the amendment we need to see.

The Employment Standards Act right now provides three unpaid sick days for workers. It also provides unpaid infectious disease emergency leave. We need those sections of the Employment Standards Act to be amended so that sick days are paid and employers are supported during a pandemic to deliver those benefits to their workers.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Mike Harris: It's always a pleasure to rise here in the House. There's something that I wanted to cover off here, and this is a really burdensome piece of red tape that's left over as part of the Liberal legacy. I certainly invite them to get up here in the House this afternoon and be part of debate and talk about some of the things that they've done over the years.

1520

It's a really great piece that I'm going to talk about a little bit later on this afternoon in debate. I think that the member opposite will certainly understand. Obviously, there's a lot of congestion on the 401. We both travel that highway to get to and from Queen's Park on a weekly basis. I just wanted to hear some of her thoughts on what she thinks about opening up a little bit more of the hours that people can work on some of our 400-series highways, especially during the pandemic, during the stay-at-home order, when there are not as many people on the roads.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to go back to where I started in my remarks today, and that was with some of the feedback that this government received from many, many people in the public health community, the medical community, the science community, who talked about the measures that had been taken. One of the big gaps that this government ignored was to really clamp down on essential workplaces. We know that construction sites are often—workers are very vulnerable to COVID transmission because of the nature of the work. There are no washrooms. Hand sanitization is a problem. PPE is a problem. Working in close proximity is a problem. This government did not take the kind of focused approach to reducing the number of non-essential workplaces that—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Question?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm pleased to ask a question of the member from London West as we're discussing ways for the province to hopefully recover. I wanted to thank her for her tireless—I would say dogged—work on Bill 239, the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act, which the government voted against, Speaker. I think this week will be the third opposition day motion—you can correct me if I'm wrong—where we've asked this House for paid sick days.

But I'd like to know if she can straighten out some of the spin and outline why staying home while you are sick would help Ontario eventually recover—and actually, right now, would help Ontarians to survive. I'd like her to explain clearly, because there's so much misunderstanding out in the world: Does every worker who wakes up and feels sick or is told to stay home as a precaution qualify for the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit, those sick leave benefits? Do they all qualify when they feel sick?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I appreciate the question from my colleague. To address the last part of her question first, not every worker in Ontario will qualify for the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit. It's only available if you have earned over \$5,000 in the previous year, and you have to have a SIN number in order to access that leave. But the big issue, Speaker, is that that leave is provided in weekly periods rather than daily. So if a worker wakes up sick or wakes up—maybe they've lost their sense of taste or smell. We know that's a COVID symptom. Maybe they've woken up with a cough or a runny nose, and they're desperately trying to convince themselves it's just seasonal allergies because they don't want to take the risk of having to stay home from work and losing their pay, and they have no idea whether they will actually get the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit if they apply.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to get a couple of comments on the record. It's my understanding that over 300,000 people in Ontario have qualified for the federal program. You're only the second person—I heard a doctor one day on TV say it wouldn't be available if you didn't have a SIN number, a social insurance number. That is always a question to me: Who's working in this province? Are they working underground? Are they illegal? Why would someone not have a SIN number in this province and be able to qualify for the program? Maybe it's a simple answer, but I'd like to know it.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, I think what we have to keep in mind when we're talking about paid sick leave as a public health measure is that until all workers are safe, until all workers are able to stay home from their workplace if they are ill so that they don't have to go into work and potentially infect coworkers, customers, or others—until that happens, all of us are at risk. We've seen that. We've seen that in some of the data from Peel, where one quarter of workers with COVID symptoms continued to go into work. We see that at Amazon. There have been, I

think, over 920 cases since the beginning of this pandemic reported at Amazon warehouses because workers go in and they infect others in their workplace.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Mantha: It is with great pleasure that I take my place on behalf of the good people of Algoma-Manitoulin to speak to Bill 276, the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act.

I guess I wanted to start off where my colleague had started off with her debate. It was an explanation as to some of the individuals who would normally be here under these circumstances, like the critics for these particular files and these particular issues, and the fact that we've recognized that there are challenges across this province when it comes to making sure that we're protecting ourselves and the province. Myself, being in the front row right here, I choose to wear a mask to protect the Clerks who are sitting there and yourself, Speaker. Although we are six feet away from each other, I just choose to protect myself and protect yourself as well. There are many individuals who would be here this week, particularly when it comes to this bill.

I'll just skim through a couple of these issues. When you look at the schedules, one that is very, very important is schedule 16, the Northern Ontario School of Medicine University Act, along with schedule 28, the Université de Hearst Act.

There are reasons why we're seeing this particular legislation being talked about right now. A lot of it is being addressed by a couple of our members as well, the member from Kiiwetinoong, and also our member from Thunder Bay, who has been a champion working in the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, where there are some discussions right now that are—actually, I shouldn't say discussions. They're decisions that are being made at this present time which are not including either the actual school itself, the Indigenous communities or the neighbouring communities that have institutions that are tied in to the Northern Ontario School of Medicine.

A lot of the work has already been done by some of our members, particularly the member from Thunder Bay, along with the member from Nickel Belt. They were both here last week talking about L'Université Laurentienne, in Sudbury, along with the member from Sudbury. A lot of work has been done by these members and because we're having our cohorts, this week, we're going to be using a lot of the work that they have prepared. We, as their colleagues, will be using some of that information.

I have to echo what the previous member has said. I've only been speaking for less than five minutes already and it's somewhat difficult at times to speak with a mask on. You'll have to excuse me, Speaker; I need a drink.

The situation here in Ontario has never been worse. Cases continue to surge. We see more and more people going into the hospitals and our ICU units, and right now—we've all seen what happened last week. We've all seen the media reports. We've all seen the very strong messages that came out from the health care professionals.

Their passion, their anger is what came out last week, and it's something that we can no longer ignore.

1530

There are certain things that you would have thought would have been part of the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act, but this was a golden opportunity for this government to bring in specific changes that we had been anticipating and that the province had been calling for. One of the major issues, and the major needs and major asks—I alluded to that in my comments this morning—was actually paid sick days, something that is not in here. I said earlier in some of my previous questions that I had to the member from London that I was encouraged, actually—it is now 3:30—by the House leader and also the Minister of Labour, who stood in their places this morning and actually finally—at least I thought it was something quite revealing—acknowledged that there are some shortfalls with the federal program for sick days, because it's really not sick days; it's a period.

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Actually, yes, really. I was as surprised as you are when they actually acknowledged that there were shortfalls, with them indicating that they were hopeful that they were going to see, by 4 o'clock, when the budget comes down today, the possibility of it being addressed within the context of the federal budget. My question to the government is: What if it's not? Does that mean that then the province will finally step up? We should have stepped up a long time ago. Anyway, this is a responsibility that we have.

Again, what we saw last week was a lot of questions and an elevated amount of frustration from everyone across this province. Why is the Premier refusing help when help is being offered, particularly from the Red Cross? Why are they setting out rules and regulations and new protocols when the next day they just turncoat and flip-flop and remove those restrictions, again elevating everyone's anger across this province, with health care workers and parents? My office was inundated with calls from concerned parents who are wondering, "Okay, Michael, tell us: What do we have to do now? Can I go out to the playground with my child or can't I? Yesterday they told me no; today I can, but the barriers are still there. So can we go? Can we not go?" Again, it's raising the frustration.

A lot of people were frustrated with the response from this government, and also with the fact that—why is this government not taking any accountability upon them for the choices that they've made? They're just passing the buck, blaming others for their actions or their inaction with what should have been done.

Some people were asking, "Why aren't you at the Legislature setting the example? Why are you not doing a modified version of what they're doing at the federal government by having a virtual Parliament? Why aren't you setting the example?" These were some of the comments that were expressed to me from constituents across my riding.

Again, the questions in regard to construction: Can we do construction? What is essential? What is non-essential?

Who is going to be affected? We know where those high-infection areas are in the large manufacturing areas. Those are the areas that we want to make sure are being targeted, but this is not contained within this particular bill.

I'm just looking at schedule 5 right now, and again, we see a world that is going towards renewables. We see a world that is going towards making green technology changes and advancing those. And what we continuously see from this government is them cutting away and pushing away and throwing away everything that has been developed which is getting us to those new technologies, that new engineering, those new jobs that we will have, those new opportunities for companies to come and invest in Ontario. This government keeps walking away from those.

Just on the energy file, one of the largest promises that this particular government made during the last campaign—I remember knocking on those doors—was a reduction in hydro rates.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It never happened.

Mr. Michael Mantha: You're right; it never happened. There has been no reduction. The only thing that we have seen is an actual increase in a homeowner's rates. That's what we've seen. There was a promise that was made by this government for, I believe it was, 12% to 14% electrical rates for homeowners. We have not seen that—not even close. We've actually seen an increase. So, Speaker, there are a lot of questions and these, again, are opportunities that this government has failed to act upon.

One of the biggest things—and I know myself and the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane have talked about this in the House; he's brought in a private member's bill in order to address it, and the member from Sudbury and the member from Nickel Belt, along with the member from Kiiwetinoong, the member from Thunder Bay and most of my colleagues have also talked this—is where are we going and how are we going to be addressing the issue of broadband in this province? These are the realities and the frustrations as far as when people are contacting my office, because we know the dollars are being announced by this government but they're not being spent. They're not going towards actual projects on the ground. In the previous budget—not just this last one, but the previous one—there was over \$30 million, \$30.2 million, that was announced by this government to go towards broadband. Not a single penny of those dollars was put to any projects.

We know that the big carriers, once they determine how they're going to be spending and where they're going to be providing their services, are building and are counting on projects that are being developed in a variety of locations across rural and northern Ontario, but only a small number of them will actually come to fruition. So there are false expectations that are being provided to small communities. I mentioned this a couple of weeks ago when I was in the House. How many of these large carriers know where Red River Road is, or Lee Valley Road or Colonial Road? Where are these small roads? The reason why is because there are probably about five to eight houses on these entire streets. These are areas that

are going to be left out. So when we're talking about supporting recovery and competitiveness, those are the kind of families that I'm looking at. The Maltais family out of Goulais River is a perfect example. I've talked about them numerous times inside this House, where their children have to get up and walk down to the school, which is two kilometres away, in order to get WiFi out in the parking lot.

Speaker, I, again, proposed a motion earlier in March calling on the government to develop a strategy to alleviate the cost of Internet for those families without proper broadband. The government, again, for whatever reason, voted against it. But I still believe working on such a strategy to alleviate the costs, to help, would develop a strategy. Going back to the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane, his private member's bill is to report to this House where the money is actually being spent and when and how much so we can build on that strategy.

When we look at some of this, when we're recovering—we have our kids that just started school again from home this morning. Again, this is an opportunity that this government could have looked at for capping class sizes in order to provide that safe environment for the kids to go into our schools and a safer environment for our teachers. So why haven't we passed a strategy to cap schools at 15 per classroom? Why are we not vaccinating all teachers, education workers, daycare workers and school staff? Why aren't we prioritizing and making sure that essential workers do get the vaccine when they need it? Why are we not talking about providing asymptomatic testing for all schools? Why are we not making sure that all classrooms can be well ventilated?

1540

I got a call from Laura Courtemanche. She works in Massey. She has this small restaurant/yarn shop. She does classes there for community members and it's a place where they gather and have a bowl of soup once in a while. She's just hanging on. Luckily enough, she was successful in qualifying for the Small Business Support Grant, and she finally received it after a very, very long, long delay. Right now, she has received her hydro bill, and she contacted my office. She says, "When is the next one coming?", because, thankfully, with the lobbying that a lot of the organizations and the small business and tourism sector have done in lobbying towards this budget, there was a further grant that was provided for those who will automatically qualify. There are also those within the tourism sector—some of them are going to qualify as well. We did ask this government to expand on the qualification and eligibility. That's still hopefully something that this government will look at doing. But she's waiting for that second \$10,000 to come in so that she can pay her hydro bill. She says if she doesn't receive it soon, she's going to be forced to shut down. These are just a few of the questions that are coming in.

On Manitoulin Island, a small sawmill—this is nothing new: over \$3,000 in hydro bills a month. The Taylor Sawmill is located in M'chigeeng. I spoke about this issue many times last year while we were in the House as we

were leading into the discussions on the budget. Unfortunately, there has been no relief whatsoever that has come for those families.

There are so many opportunities for the recovery in this province, particularly on the energy file, and that's where I want to finish my comments. A couple of weeks ago, I actually brought in a private member's bill to start talking about hydroelectric dams and the potential that we have in this province. This is nothing new; I've been a huge advocate for those projects. I have many of those projects in my riding, large and small.

In Pic Mobert First Nation, we were actually very successful in bringing in roughly about an \$80-million project along with their private partner, which was regional. They both worked together to bring in that project and this community is going to be seeing the benefits of having that project within their community, but it took a considerable amount of time to get that done. There are many more small hydroelectric projects throughout northern Ontario, which is much cheaper. It is an option available to this government, but I don't see any of those contained within this particular bill, and I did want to bring it to the floor.

The other main issue that I have been hearing from constituents that I don't see in this Bill 276 is coming from forestry trucks, it's coming from hospitals, it's coming from taxicab drivers, it's coming from forestry companies and it's coming from the tourism sector. It's coming from everyone. It's the insurance gouging. That is an absolutely huge problem we have that needs to be addressed. This, again, is an opportunity where I would have thought that the government would have been very more proactive and included something in regards to what we're seeing. Many of these companies are seeing a 300%-plus increase in their insurance coverages. Some are being denied, are being completely excluded, are not being provided the coverage that they had. Family-run businesses, farming businesses, are no longer able to get coverage for their family members. But still, this is not part of your Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act.

There were a lot of opportunities for the government to move on—and I haven't even touched on the concerns that I have on schedule 7 for the family responsibility act that you've included in here, the fact that you're looking at privatizing ODSP and OW. That is frightening, what you're looking at doing. People are struggling out there. And if there's a vulnerable group of individuals who are out there who need our help, it is the most vulnerable who are on Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program because, I would say, 20% to 40% of the case work in my office is trying to help those individuals.

But the government is trying to get rid of it by privatizing it, and we all know what happens with privatization. The prices go up. We just witnessed what the Liberal government just did with Hydro One. We've seen all of our hydro bills go sky high, through the roof.

I look at this bill, and I say it's a very big lost opportunity for this government.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member from Algoma-Manitoulin for his speech on the bill. I didn't hear him talking that much about the bill in his speech. He covered lots of other things, but one of the aspects this bill deals with is Ontario's plan to develop its first-ever Critical Minerals Strategy to help generate investment, increase the province's competitiveness in the global market and create jobs and opportunities in the mining sector. Of course, this is to support Ontario's transition to a low-carbon economy. So I'm just wondering if the member supports mining and supports this Critical Minerals Strategy that's part of this bill.

Mr. Michael Mantha: The member will know that in my previous role as critic for northern development and mines, I have always been a strong, supporting member for the mine sector. I have some of the most advanced mines in my riding of Algoma-Manitoulin. If you go into Chapleau, there is Newmont Goldcorp now, where they have developed the greenest mine. There are no carbon emissions. Most of their vehicles as they're going down are charging in order to bring the ore up with the charge on the way out.

There's a lot that we need to do with the mining sector. One of the major issues that we need to do that I hear time and time again from the mining sector is, "Give us a timeline. Let us build a business plan. You tell us that if you need six months in order to make a decision, give us that six months and we'll give you what you need. Don't tell us at the end of six months that you have to have another six months." A fair timeline is what they've always been consistently asking for, and a proper way of engaging with them.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much to the member from Algoma-Manitoulin. I want to tell you that your speech today brought some reality to this debate. We're sitting here, in the province of Ontario, on this day, when we have something like 755 people in ICU struggling for their lives. And now, here we are, debating a bill that does nothing to address that.

What do you have to say to your constituents who see you here but can't believe this is what you're doing right now, rather than addressing the life and death circumstances that we're faced with here in Ontario?

Mr. Michael Mantha: As the member would know, every time I stand in this House, I always say it's a pleasure to be here and speak the good words on behalf of the good people of Algoma-Manitoulin. I always try to bring a perspective of what's going on from my riding back home, and I always try to relate the pieces of legislation that we talk about to them at home.

They are frustrated because there is really little in here that will actually help them. There is little in here that will actually get their kids in a safer environment in the school. There is little in here that will expedite the vaccines, to get them into their community. There is little in here that will actually move the stakes forward in order to make sure that our individuals in long-term-care homes are cared for. There is little in here that can actually relate to them at this

present time, and that's what's frustrating. If there's something that I will relate to them it's that the frustration level continues to mount for people across this province.

1550

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you, Speaker, and through you, I appreciate the speech from the member from Algoma-Manitoulin. I don't like to put him on the spot, because my question actually relates more to the speech from the member from London West.

Recently, there have been incidents of individuals disrupting and publishing recordings of tribunal hearings, and these incidents have become more common and difficult to manage as tribunals have largely moved to virtual hearings since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. This bill provides tribunals and tribunal users with the same protection against unauthorized recordings of tribunal hearings, whether in person or virtual, and that applies to court proceedings. Are the opposition against protecting the integrity of tribunal hearings and the privacy of hearing participants?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Again, when you have a process and people are confident in the process that is put in front of them, there is no reason to hide anything. There is more opportunity to be open and transparent. If things are being done and followed in a process which everybody is aware of, which everybody follows, which everybody participates in and there is no hidden agenda, it really doesn't matter if it's recorded or not. We need a process that is open and transparent. And yes, sometimes we need to participate in very diligent and strong discussions that we need to have. Recording those, having the opportunity to listen and review—unfortunately, sometimes it's needed.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I really enjoy listening to my good friend from Algoma-Manitoulin. I can think of few others in this House who are so highly regarded within their communities. He's at every function, every event that's going on. He has probably been to every Legion hall, as well. I say that with all due respect.

But he knows what's going on, and at the end of his speech, he raised so many good issues. The end of the speech, he talked about insurance rates. I have a landscaper in my community, and he also plows snow in the wintertime. His insurance rates have gone through the roof. He has never had an accident, never had a claim. He hopes the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka, who had a private member's bill on this—he wishes him well. But why wouldn't the government do something, when they know insurance rates are going through the roof, to look after the common people, the everyday people in Ontario?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Well, like everything that happens with the decisions that the government is making, it's what they do or they don't do. I've always been one to look at the reasons. If it's a good idea—because we all have stakeholders who come and talk to us. If it's a good idea, why hasn't it happened? Why hasn't the government brought in those changes? And if it's going to be helpful to the small guy who has that landscaping business or the

individual who has the one truck that he goes out in the bush with and gets his load and brings it down to the mill, and can't afford the insurance rates that are there are for his truck, you have to ask yourself, where's the resistance? Why are they not implementing those changes if it's going to be beneficial to the small guy? I can only come up with the reason that maybe the big guy, which is the insurance companies, has a lot to say in regard to how this government makes their decisions.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Mike Harris: I'm sure that the member from Algoma-Manitoulin will agree with me when we say that the former Liberal government absolutely decimated the forestry industry here in Ontario. I know that there are a lot of very important jobs in his riding that rely on that. Again, I invite the members from the Liberal Party to go ahead and take part in the debate today to refute some of these statements that a lot of the members on both sides of the House, quite frankly, have made over the last few weeks here when we look back on the legacy that they've left with this province.

But there's an important piece of legislation in this bill that will remove fees and burdensome red tape when it comes to wood storage lots on crown land. The forestry industry contributes about \$16 billion a year to the GDP here in the province of Ontario. I would love to get some of his thoughts on what forestry jobs mean to his riding and his constituents he's always fighting so hard for.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Let me share a personal story with you. The reason why I'm standing here is because of the failure of the decisions that previous governments have made in regard to the forestry sector. I'm one of those statistics that came out of the layoffs. I used to have gainful employment and enjoyed working at a sawmill. I used to be a proud—I still am a proud USW representative, representing forestry workers in northern Ontario. But, unfortunately, when the decisions were made by the then-government in 2006-07, we saw a dramatic cut in forestry jobs. My local went down from roughly about 3,200 members to 800. Obviously, I was one on the low totem pole.

I found myself in a new career then. I was working out of a resource action centre through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, which led me down this path to finding me here, again working for the forest industry—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Mike Harris: I'm very excited to be part of the debate here in the House today, especially to talk about a good-news bill, the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act, this afternoon. This bill was put forward by my good friend the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction. It comes at an unpredictable time for business, the health care system and really, quite frankly, all Ontarians here in this province.

Over the last year, real GDP in Ontario has declined by nearly 6%, and we are facing extremely high unemployment rates and declines in business operations and

investment. What that means is that the number of families across the province without steady income is growing. It means that a generation of students who are preparing to enter the workforce are dealing with a very uncertain job market, that entrepreneurs and business owners are facing the toughest economic challenges we've seen in a generation.

This is a public health emergency at the core of it, which is why our most recent budget prioritized health care spending, which has gone into creating 3,100 hospital beds, protecting front-line workers with PPE and increased testing and contact tracing. We're spending \$16.3 billion in this budget to protect people's health. That includes \$1 billion that we've allocated for the distribution of vaccines. Vaccines are the best way out of this, Madam Speaker, and hope is on the horizon as more Ontarians are becoming eligible to get their shot.

We will emerge from COVID-19, and when we do, we need our job creators and employers to be there. Without them, we risk an inability to recover economically. So while it's a public health emergency, we cannot—I repeat, cannot—neglect our businesses. We've provided them with \$3.4 billion through the Ontario Small Business Support Grant, rebates for property taxes and energy costs and, of course, the main street recovery grant. In total, \$23.3 billion in direct support—I say it again: in direct support—has been provided to families and small businesses.

But there is more that we can do to get Ontario ready to kick-start its economic engines once it's safe to do so. This bill, along with the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, the Main Street Recovery Act and the Better for People, Smarter for Business Act, is a great start to getting there. Acting now and reducing unnecessary burdens on consumers and businesses will lay the foundation for a strong recovery.

We came into office with a mandate to cut red tape, and that is a commitment that we have upheld. The cost of complying with government regulations has been reduced since we have taken office by \$331 million since June 2018—\$331 million that's been saved through modernization, removing outdated regulations and simplifying processes.

The Liberals added so many regulations, so much bureaucratic red tape that it cost the average company \$33,000—\$33,000, colleagues—just to comply with them. That's a good chunk of money that could have been used to create jobs, rather than filling out paperwork. But the previous government couldn't see that, and rather than focus on creating jobs, they made it so that companies would look elsewhere to invest. If we had kept following that path, imagine the dire economic situation we'd be in. Unnecessary, duplicative regulations slow down innovation, stop businesses from growing and make Ontario uncompetitive on a global stage.

1600

Just look at manufacturing, Speaker: 300,000 lost jobs—300,000 lost jobs, colleagues—under the previous Liberal government. That's what happens when you overburden employers and make the cost of doing business

unaffordable. Believe it or not, we've actually seen an increase in manufacturing jobs during the pandemic. In fact, there are 25,000 more men and women working in the sector now than there were pre-COVID.

Now, there's still a long way to go to undo the damage done by 15 years of the Liberal government's mismanagement. Again, I welcome them to defend their policies here this afternoon, and I am hoping they'll get an opportunity to do so today, once I wrap up my comments here in debate, when they can have an opportunity to participate in questions and comments.

But the steps we are proposing today and actions we have taken over the past three years are going to benefit families, individuals and businesses. This is about laying the bricks to build a foundation for investment and prosperity. That is how we are going to overcome the tough economic challenges we're facing today.

There are five principles that are guiding us forward. First, and importantly, is protecting health, safety and the environment. None of these measures that we're talking about here today will jeopardize this principle.

Second is prioritizing the important issues even when they are tough. We've got to carefully assess which regulations cost people and businesses the most time and money while also looking to be more innovative and look to more modern ways, to make sure they are effective and efficient.

Third is harmonizing the rules with Ottawa and other provinces. There is no reason why businesses need to jump through the same hoop twice. Duplication doesn't protect the environment or make people safer. It just wastes the valuable time of our job creators, especially if Ontario is the only province in all of Canada with said duplication. If it is good enough for BC and good enough for Newfoundland, why can't it be good enough for Ontario?

Our fourth principle extends beyond our work to cut red tape. We are listening to the people of Ontario. Businesses know best when it comes to what they need from us. They know what regulations just simply aren't working and are getting in the way.

Finally, we are taking a whole-of-government approach. The Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction is working closely with his cabinet colleagues to make sure everyone is on the same page when it comes to reducing red tape. Every ministry, every branch of this government needs to get on board for this to work.

For too long, ministries and bureaucrats have worked in silos. How are we supposed to make government work better for Ontarians when we can't even get it to work well within itself? Those days are over, Speaker.

Just look at our previous red tape bills. We have included meaningful changes for soup kitchens so that they can continue to feed the most vulnerable members of our community without having to jump over hurdles.

We've made changes to help bring more lower-cost, generic medications to people who need them here in this province. This is especially beneficial for our seniors and their families and will also protect against drug shortages.

Sectors like mining and forestry have benefited from our changes to streamlining processes. These industries are critical to Ontario's economy. As I mentioned before, Speaker, forestry, for example, generates over \$16 billion in revenue and supports over 155,000 jobs here in the province. As someone with roots in northern Ontario, I know first-hand, as the member from Algoma-Manitoulin was mentioning earlier, just how important these jobs are, and I am pleased to be able to support them in my role as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

I want to touch on some of the changes that the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry has put forward through this bill. As many of you know, I am an avid outdoorsman, and like most anglers and hunters that I know, I have a real appreciation for conservation of our fish and wildlife resources. The only way to continue the time-honoured traditions of hunting and fishing is through responsible resource management. This is something, Mr. Speaker, in my role, that I take great pride in, and I am proud of the work that I am doing today that means that my sons and daughter will be able to fish the same lakes I did with their children when they grow up.

One of the ways that the ministry makes decisions when it comes to wildlife management is through the reports that tag holders submit after their hunts. Some of these are mandatory, but as it stands now the only resource for non-compliance is prosecution and restrictions from future hunting. But you know what seems like a common-sense solution, and something that we could move forward with, Mr. Speaker? A financial penalty, rather than all of this bureaucratic red tape that surrounds having to actually follow through with a court case against someone for not reporting on mandatory reports.

A fine would not only promote compliance, but it would provide an alternative tool to enforcement, like I said, that is low-cost and logical. This isn't an additional burden on hunters. It is simply just asking them to continue doing what most of them have been doing for their entire hunting lives, Mr. Speaker, because like I said, hunting and fishing is something that I want to see passed on for generations to come, and the only way to do that is through sound management.

As members of this House will recall, our government passed the Modernizing Ontario for People and Businesses Act last year. This burden reduction legislation included obligations for all ministries to follow when creating new legislation, regulations and policies. The act before us includes measures that, if passed, will further entrench these burden reduction standards across all ministries, Speaker. Creating an environment for business to thrive and positioning our province to attract greater investment is what will guide us out of the economic challenges that we are facing across the province here today.

Again, despite what members of the opposition have said in the past, these meaningful changes we are making to reduce red tape are going to maintain and even enhance health, safety and environmental protections. What better way to make sure a business is complying with the rules

than to make monitoring them easier and more straightforward, Mr. Speaker? This includes ensuring businesses are complying with health and safety regulations for their workers.

When Ontarians are at work, the most important thing is that they return home safely to their families each and every day. That is the priority of our Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development, who I am proud to call my friend, Mr. Speaker. During this pandemic, his ministry has done inspection after inspection to ensure compliance with COVID-19 safety protocols. Of course, health and safety in the workplace are not just priorities during a public health crisis. His commitment to workers of this province extends far beyond when COVID-19 ends.

One of the tools his ministry has to monitor workplaces and employers is the use of self-audits under the Employment Standards Act. The bill before us looks to expand the ability of an employment standards officer to use, at their discretion, a requirement for a business owner to complete self-audits. This is an opportunity to educate employers on particular areas of concern that they have been found to be non-compliant in the past.

While these are self-audits, our hard-working employment standards officers would be carefully monitoring them to ensure they are done correctly and that employers are staying within the compliance of the framework. Every other tool that is currently available to hold employers putting their workers at risk would still be there, regardless of what is contained in this legislation. This is just an opportunity for a business owner who may have been unclear of their obligations to bring themselves into compliance without having to go through an extensive, costly audit process.

This bill isn't just about streamlining things for employers. One logical and common-sense move we are putting forward is for students. It's been a while since any of us have been in high school, admittedly, Mr. Speaker, and I hate to age myself, but I am sure we are all aware that 40 hours of community service are required to graduate. It is a great way for kids to get involved in the community, and also for charities and non-profits to find some new young blood, if you will, to get out there and volunteer for a lot of these great causes.

Would you believe it, though, in a day and age where students are doing most of their work on Chromebooks and submitting assignments online for their teachers, that we are still requiring hard copies of volunteer hours? This might seem small, but think about what it represents. We inherited a government that was slow to change and embrace the online world. It's been 21 years since we entered the 21st century and it's time that the province start acting like it.

1610

I became closely familiar with outdated government processes when I introduced my first private member's bill, the Cutting Red Tape for Motor Vehicle Dealers Act. Although I'm sure we all remember back to early fall in 2018—it seems like it was not all that long ago—I will

quickly recap for you, Madam Speaker, some of the changes that I was looking to make.

When you buy a car, the dealer who has sold it to you cannot deliver it right away. They physically have to go to a ServiceOntario office with paperwork and pick up licence plates and registration tags. That's right: Dealers are paying someone—to the member for Sarnia—Lambton—literally paying someone to stand in line at a ServiceOntario office.

My bill—which has been adopted into government policy, thanks to our Minister of Transportation and Minister of Government and Consumer Services, and, of course with the hard work of the parliamentary assistant to that ministry and the President of the Treasury Board—would allow dealers to do this electronically and be able to license vehicles in-house. The digital dealership pilot project is under way, and with work resuming this spring, I am hopeful to see it get off the ground in very short order.

The auto sales industry hasn't been modernized in decades. This lack of modernization really came to light at the beginning of the pandemic. Even when dealers were open, some ServiceOntario locations were closed, making it impossible to seal the deal on a number of the limited sales that they were making. Then, to top it off, the Motor Vehicle Dealers Act required that they get a physical signature in the location where the sale was taking place. This meant they could not operate remotely and had to physically have customers come into the showroom, in a day and age when you can buy a home using an e-signature.

The Minister of Government and Consumer Services has committed to consulting with industry on amendments to this vital piece of legislation. I know that stakeholders are really looking forward to the opportunity to participate and speak with the minister's team.

I want to close out by touching on the important changes that the Ministry of Transportation is proposing within this bill, changes that I know are going to benefit the people of Waterloo region as a growing community within the 401 corridor.

There is an old saying that Ontario really only has two seasons: winter and construction. As someone who takes the 401 regularly to get here to Queen's Park, I can't say that I entirely disagree with that statement. Highway expansion projects are important for commuters and businesses in my community, but they do pose a hassle when they are ongoing.

As most commuters have appreciated over the past year, with most people working from home there has been a lot less traffic on our major highways. But the work-hour limits are still in place, so construction companies can't take advantage of this and get more road work done with less vehicles on the road. Even adding two extra hours to this could mean finishing jobs weeks ahead of schedule. That is something that I would certainly appreciate and I know that my constituents and many of our constituents here today would gladly support.

Coming from a community that is both a hub of the trucking sector and has grassroots in agriculture, I am also

fully supportive of the introduction of online sticker renewal for heavy commercial vehicle licence plates. This will save these crucial businesses time and money and will also keep owners and employers safer by allowing them to register at home.

While the clock winds down here this afternoon, I'm going to wrap up by repeating what I said in the beginning. We do know that this is a public health emergency, and that is the core of what we're doing here today in the House. But we are also facing one of the greatest economic challenges in this province's history, and without a government that is willing to create an environment for growth, prosperity and investment, we risk jeopardizing our recovery here in the province of Ontario.

Before COVID-19, we had more jobs than people to fill them. I am fully confident, with our Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction, along with our Minister of Economic Development and of course with the Premier at the helm, we will get back to that.

Despite what the opposition does or says, the people of this province can have confidence that it's our number one priority to protect their health and safety, but their livelihoods are also at the top of our minds. Business owners need to focus on what really matters, and that's getting people back to work and rebuilding their businesses. There has never been a better time to introduce legislation that reduces regulatory burden and roadblocks to growth, and I hope the members of the opposite side of the House here today will support us in seeing this bill through.

Thank you very much for the time this afternoon, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Chris Glover: I've got a two-part question for the member. The first one is, when you're walking into Queen's Park, have you seen the homeless tent encampments that are spread out throughout the downtown core of Toronto?

And my second question is: One of the schedules in this bill is actually going to privatize Ontario Works. It's going to open it up to the private sector. We know that when you privatize services, and we all saw this with Ontario Hydro, you end up paying more and you get less.

And so, I look at this homelessness crisis: This government is fuelling it by freezing Ontario Works at \$635 a month. You've got an eviction blitz going on at the Landlord and Tenant Board. You cut legal aid so people don't have access to legal services. My question is, why aren't you actually addressing this homelessness crisis that is part of this pandemic?

So, first part, have you seen the tents? And will this government take some action to stop fuelling the homelessness crisis?

Mr. Mike Harris: There is a lot to unpack there. Absolutely, I've seen the homelessness epidemic that we're having here in Toronto. I'm lucky enough to have a place here that I'm able to stay at, rather than commute back and forth, and it's actually right across the street from Moss Park. I am very familiar with a lot of the issues that are going on in some of the more troubled areas here in

Toronto, and that certainly extends to other areas of the province as well. Back home in Waterloo region, we also see these types of issues.

But when you're talking about some of the things that lead up to this and often what causes people to become homeless in the first place, our government has been addressing them since day one here. When we talk about mental health and addiction supports, for the first time ever in the province's history, we actually have a ministry dedicated to mental health and addiction. And when you talk about higher hydro rates and evictions, there's a moratorium right now on evictions—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Question?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the member for Kitchener-Conestoga for his remarks today. It's really interesting sitting here listening to Conservatives talking about and bragging about spending billions and billions of dollars and giving free money to businesses—except it isn't free, because it's actually their taxpayer dollars. Ontario is not really open for business; it's kind of closed.

My question is: Yes, you want to talk about reducing red tape; how about just letting them get back to work? Why not just open up? I've talked to many businesses in Cambridge—in the region, for that matter, not just Cambridge—and they just want to get back to work. They don't want grants. They don't want PPE grants. They don't want money and loans. They want to feed their families. They want to go back to work. So, why not?

Mr. Mike Harris: I'm glad to see my Waterloo region colleague in the House here today. Listen, we talk to a lot of the same people, but we talk to a lot of different people as well. To be quite frank, there are a lot of people in Waterloo region who are very concerned about what's happening with the pandemic. We've seen, I think, almost 4,500 cases just today alone here in the province. ICU cases are up to, I think, around 750 or 740 cases. I know, in Waterloo region alone, we have 22 people today in ICUs. That is the extent of what we have for ICU beds in Waterloo region.

The member will know very well that we are now moving people out of our hospitals into different sites within the region to be able to take care of these people but still be able to take care of people that are coming into our hospitals who have a heart attack or a stroke. It's very important that we try and do everything we can to mitigate what is going on with the virus and that we support our businesses so that they're able to open up and be strong once again here in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I want to support the comments on deregulation. I'm old enough here in the House, maybe older than most people here, other than maybe one person—anyway, I remember going with my father, who was a small business person, and I used to go to the old licence bureau back home to get a PCV, which was a provincial commercial vehicle licence, for a number of vehicles they had. As soon as I got a driver's licence, I was

able to go and do those errands. But when you talk about deregulation, I was sitting there thinking the old fellow who filled out the things had an old typewriter, and he typed away like this. Of course, everybody visited, because you stood in line. It was at the funeral home, as well. They conducted funerals. Well, it was a different time and a different era. But could you speak a little more about deregulation? We've come a long way.

1620

Mr. Mike Harris: There was a lot to unpack in that comment, too. The member from Spadina–Fort York is not alone today. I don't know if maybe the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development wrote that question for him, for those who were here in the House last week.

But, listen, there are a lot of great things when it comes to regulatory red tape that we're looking to remove here. There are a lot of great things when it comes to modernization and what is now the CVOR, when we talk about registering commercial vehicles—that's that little yellow sticker that you see in the driver's side window. Being able to actually do that online rather than having to go down to a government office to do that, it's a no-brainer. It's a no-brainer to the member. It's a no-brainer to you, Madam Speaker, I'm sure. I'm really hopeful that the members opposite see value in that and will pass this bill through the Legislature as quickly as we can.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to the member from Kitchener–Conestoga. My question is: Schedule 21 facilitates changes made by this government to social service delivery, privatizing OW and ODSP service delivery. In Brant, Hamilton and Niagara region, where I'm from, a company called Fedcap has been awarded that contract. They have a proven record in the UK and the US of throwing people off social assistance, and punitive measures and cost-cutting layoffs, and recipients and employees are extremely anxious. Why in a pandemic would this government choose to hurt those living in poverty and the hard-working staff who deliver those services on behalf of the people of Ontario, and how is that helping Ontario to recover?

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you very much to the member from Niagara Centre. Listen, there are a lot of things that this government has done right from the beginning to try to find better outcomes for people in this province. One of the things—again, we talk about the leftover Liberal legacies, and again, I invite them to get up and talk about all of the things and try to defend what they've done in the past.

Going back to the member from Spadina–Fort York's comments, he was talking about why energy rates were so high. Well, that's one of the reasons that I got involved in politics, Madam Speaker, because I was sick and tired of the government of the day going out and mortgaging our children's futures for the sake of artificially lowering hydro rates. It doesn't make sense to do that. When you look at scandal after scandal and just the gas plants and the \$2 billion that was spent on that, imagine if that could have

been put back into the electricity system and what that would do for the people of this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Just for the record, when I would pick up my commercial plates or farm plates, I'd go to the shoe store. I still enjoy going to those services in our small towns. They have the computers. They do everything for you. I don't have to do it.

Let's go back to the legislation. I really appreciated that speech. I would ask just if you could expand a bit more on what else this legislation can do to eliminate the myriad of rules and regulations, and red tape and bureaucracy, and forms to fill out and t's to cross and i's to dot.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you very much to the member from Haldimand–Norfolk. Certainly, he'll remember back to the governments of the late 1990s and early 2000s where they also had a mandate to do this as well. It was really great they got the ball—

Mr. Toby Barrett: They had a commission.

Mr. Mike Harris: Exactly; they had a commission to do this, and they got the ball rolling on doing this. But unfortunately, when the Liberals came into power, they undid a lot of the good things that that previous Conservative government had done.

I think when you look at this bill and you look at all of the things that we've done over the past three years now, or pretty close to it, to help business, that we've done—again, I'll touch on my private member's bill for a minute. Just being able to modernize: Instead of having to go down and pick up your farm plates, being able to get plates from the dealership that you might purchase that used F151 from, for example. Being able to, again, do the CVOR registration online is a huge burden reduction for a lot of businesses here in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my pleasure to rise to address Bill 276, the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act, 2021. I had an opportunity to listen to the Associate Minister of Small Business earlier today when he spoke about this bill, and he talked at length about how this bill will help small business. I found his comments quite ironic, particularly given his government's recent actions opening up restaurants and opening up restaurant patios against the warnings of public health experts who knew and told us all that COVID was surging and that they shouldn't be opened. They were opened nonetheless, and that badly hurt restaurants across this province.

Within weeks, the Premier, who had ignored the experts, had to go back and shut down those very patios, those very restaurants, and that badly hurt those restaurants. Restaurants Canada has come out and said the cost of reopening prematurely and then having to shut down shortly afterwards cost restaurants in Ontario \$100 million. Exactly what they said: "Last week's abrupt move to shut down all restaurant dining so soon after easing restrictions has cost Ontario's restaurant industry more than \$100 million in reopening and closing costs alone." That's a lot of money.

Amongst other things, Restaurants Canada was saying that restaurants are asking for funds to reimburse them for the costs of reopening and closing down again in the circumstances. In my riding, there are a number of business improvement associations, but the restaurants in the Broadview Danforth BIA reported to me that many of them lost in the range of \$10,000 from that one session of premature reopening and then having to close, when the information that had been given to the Premier, which had been ignored, turned out to be entirely accurate.

One restaurant wrote to me, "We lost \$12,000—this is for the cost of getting open—product, cleaning, labour and other necessary supplies, then being stuck with a lot of inventory after being closed. It should be noted bringing everybody back only to have to lay them off again in a few weeks, and subsequently cover payroll without having any funds coming in was a major expense. The government needs to understand that the cost of opening and closing (especially closing) is far more expensive than just being closed. It takes probably two months to recuperate the money it costs to get open, never mind how much it costs to close again and be stuck with thousands of dollars of inventory it's impossible to sell."

"Effectively, all this reopening did was leave us with a bunch of bills, and just enough sales to reduce the amount of subsidies we qualify for."

The minister can bring in all the bills he wants and make all the nice speeches he wants, but as long as the government does not have a coherent and effective response to the pandemic, as long as they ignore the science and go with the Premier's gut, small businesses will keep bleeding money and closing for good.

Speaker, the government got into deep trouble for the new COVID restrictions they brought in on Friday. They didn't please anybody. You had criticism coming from all corners. There were legal challenges looming, and you had a weekend where the government was backpedalling, saying first, "Yes, that was real overreach on playgrounds, and then we made a big mistake on policing, so we're going to back off."

It was quite extraordinary to me, Speaker, because you can't actually have a functioning economy if you don't have a healthy population. If people are fighting disease all over the place, if you've got packed hospitals, if you've got a situation where people don't have confidence that they can go out in public and be safe, you are undermining your economy, and this government does not understand that. It has not made keeping Ontario safe its highest priority. Defending its special interests, that's another matter. That priority is very clear, but actually looking after people is not there.

1630

I asked the Solicitor General—well, I asked the Premier this morning, and the Solicitor General answered—about who on earth thought it was a good idea to randomly check people on the street to see whether or not they were on their way to work, on their way to a pharmacy or a grocery store. What I got back from the Solicitor General was not an answer to my question; it was a deflection. She said, "If

people are assembling unlawfully, then we need to have the police powers to intervene.” Well, I don’t think that’s the issue, frankly, and the indication from the Solicitor General that she had to deflect said to me everything I needed to know. This was an indefensible policy, and they figured it out finally.

Speaker, as you’re well aware, police departments across Ontario said, “You’ve got to be kidding. This is a poisoned chalice. We don’t want it.” So not only did they completely miss out, not only did they anger people all over Ontario, but then the police departments wisely said, “We don’t want anything to do with this—nothing to do with it.”

In any event, we have a Premier who says, “It’s up to me to make the tough choices.” Well, the tough choice, Speaker, is to actually follow what the scientists and public health experts recommend and drive through a program that will actually protect Ontarians, and that is not what has been happening. If you really care about keeping Ontario open, if you care about protecting people in this province, then you need to have paid sick days.

The provincial level is the level that has responsibility for employment standards. We’re the jurisdiction, the level that can make those laws. We’re a jurisdiction that can put money forward. If you don’t have a sentiment that supports requiring employment standards and paid sick leave, then put money into a bank that employers can draw on. But you have to have paid sick leave so that people will stay home and not go to work if they’re ill. That is one of the key things that’s needed to drive down the incidence of disease, and this government has ignored that continuously.

It was a complete shock to people in the medical community, including members of the government’s own science table, that it did not, in fact, carry forward the recommendations that had been made. We’re looking at a situation where COVID cases and hospitalizations are going to be continuing to climb. We’re looking at, what, up to 30,000 new cases per day by June if what we have are weak public health measures and 100,000 vaccine doses administered daily. We can’t vaccinate our way out of this. You have to have really comprehensive and viable public health measures. That’s what you have to have if you want to protect businesses. But that’s not what this government has been doing. It’s just not where they’re at. It’s not their focus.

Speaker, if we’re going to have more bills like this, we all have to recognize that having these bills, even if they’re embossed, even if they have monks who are illuminating each section with pictures of happy peasants plowing fields, is not going to actually stop the pandemic and set up the conditions for a thriving economy. And that is really critical.

There are a lot of things to take on in this bill, and I’m going to focus in most of the time remaining on the government’s doubling down on attacking climate action. But before I go there, I want to talk about the section that provides non-profit organizations the power to hold remote or virtual board meetings to carry on their business,

and that is in the really wonderful schedule 17, the Not-for-Profit Corporations Act, 2010. It sets out that “certain provisions of the act are temporarily suspended,” that there are temporary replacement provisions, and those “provisions address, among other things, the holding of meetings of members and directors by telephonic or electronic means and voting at meetings by alternate means”—i.e., they’re going to be allowed to meet virtually, just as the Parliament of Canada meets virtually, just as the council of the city of Toronto meets virtually, just as I’m sure many other councils meet virtually across this province. Why? Well, we’re in a pandemic. It’s a good idea to keep people at a distance where it’s technically possible to do that.

You are well aware, Speaker, that we in the NDP have been pushing hard for a virtual Legislature because we want to reduce the transmission of disease. We want to get the pandemic behind us. It makes tons of sense to make this available to non-profits—tons and tons of sense. I’m glad it’s in here. But if we’re going to do it there, why on earth are we not doing it here in the Legislature? Is the government so scared of question period that they would rather shut down the House than actually have a virtual Legislature?

Some will say to me, “Well, it’s an emergency,” and it is true, but I will point out that Winston Churchill actually attended and answered question period at the height of the Blitz in World War II. I will point out that we have had Legislatures sit through World War I, which was, without a doubt, an emergency. So I think that, if our great-grandmothers, our grandmothers, our grandparents were able to hold Legislatures in the midst of war, we can figure out how to do it in the midst of a pandemic. I call on the government to, in fact, do what it can to reduce the interaction of people by making this a virtual Legislature.

In the time remaining, I want to talk about the parts of this bill that support the government’s rollback of climate action. You know this is a government that doesn’t want to act on climate. It’s no mystery. It’s not something that’s hidden. It’s not a government that embraces science. We’ve seen that with the pandemic. We know that climate damage costs Ontario about \$5 billion a year currently, and we know the projection is that we’re going to hit about \$40 billion a year within the next 30 years. We’re consistently going to see more and more damage from extreme weather, from fire, from drought. It’s going to hurt our economy. It’s going to hurt our standard of living. It’s going to hurt people. We need to act.

Today, I heard members of the government speak glowingly about the potential for mineral development for electric cars. I’m glad people remember that. It was only within the last few hours. This is a government that took a meat axe to electric charging points for cars in GO parking lots. This is the government that changed the building code so that new homes don’t have to have electric vehicle charging points. This is a government that cancelled the subsidies so that middle-class, middle-income people could buy non-luxury electric cars so that we could grow the market.

Finally, the government has figured out, “Oh, jeez, there is a whole new wave of technology coming at us. The global auto industry is moving to electric. Oh, maybe we should get on board.” Well, two years ago, you should have recognized that we needed to build the market for these vehicles here. We needed to build them here so that we have work. When you consistently miss what’s going on in the world economy because of ideological blinders, you undermine this province. You undermine this province.

So, you’ve done your best to undermine electric cars. Now, you could do some things right now. This bill could have restoration of those electric vehicle charging points in GO stations. You could bring back a requirement that new homes have electric vehicle charging points built into them. You could bring in subsidies for people to buy new electric cars. You could make the market grow in Ontario so that investors who want to make electric vehicles see this as a place where they will be sold or will be purchased.

And do you know what? I’ll just throw in: You can put in electric vehicle charging points in government parking lots, where people come and park their cars when they’re coming to work or where you have a government fleet. You can do that as well. If you’re actually interested in catching the wave of what’s happening in the world with new technology production, you could act. So far, the only thing you have done is take a position that the horse and buggy were good, we need to go back there and that that really is the way to go.

1640

The mistake they made regarding electric cars is totally representative of the negative approach on climate action, and this act further reinforces that. I’ll talk a bit about the government’s record. It allocated \$30 million to fight carbon pricing. Well, you blew that. The Supreme Court kicked you out of the room. Let’s face it: When I was at the press conference when the minister, at the time, was asked, “Do you think you can win in court on this?” she would not answer that question. Oh, man, someone was waving cobras in her face as she was backing off because she knew she was going to lose. She could figure it out. She’s had some history as a lawyer.

Anyway, so this is a government that’s willing to wave around a lot of bucks to show the ideological flag: “We hate action on climate change.” They spent 100,000 bucks to hire a climate-denying Trump consultant to advise them on their not-so-sticky gas pump decal case in court. This was a guy who is so wacky that he attacked the Republican caucus in Congress for saying climate change might be real. Man, where do you find these people? Why do you go looking for them, and then how do you find them?

Mr. Chris Glover: And why do you pay them?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It’s crazy. And then, yes, why do you pay them?

Most recently, last week, Environment Canada had to report to the United Nations on emissions in Canada. We have to do that as part of our commitments under international treaties. Well, I want to tell you, in order to take on climate change, every year the emissions have to

go down. By the end of 2019, the climate plan that was brought forward by the Conservatives had been in place for about a year and a half. Emissions didn’t go down. They stayed the same as they had the year before. That is a failure, and that’s the reality.

The Auditor General talked at the end of 2020 in her report about the government’s failing climate plan. What she had to say—I’ll read what she had to say so you get the words straight from her—is that the government’s climate plan is understood to be a joke by all the ministries and is ignored. I guess I shouldn’t be surprised. The headline on her media release was, “Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions Not Yet an Ontario Cross-Government Priority: Auditor General.” Sometimes Auditor Generals are just too discrete. They could have said this climate plan is still at the back of the filing cabinet, and no one ever looks at it. That would have been a more straightforward headline. But “not yet a priority” is about as gentle as you can get.

What did she have to say? “The Ontario government and its agencies”—man, I don’t know; I don’t know—“will have to do more to tackle greenhouse gas emissions from homes and other buildings across the province if it plans on hitting its climate change target.” Well, when you look at the numbers, it’s not in the ballpark to hit that target. Like, the pitch is coming and their batter is up in the bleachers. They ain’t going to hit this sucker.

She wrote, “Our audit found the province risks missing its 2030 emission-reduction target, in part because climate change and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is not yet a cross-government priority,” said Lysyk.”

My apologies, Speaker. I’m just have to have a sip of water. My colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin is right: It gets pretty dry.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Even when you’re really good.

The report found that “neither the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines, nor the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing assesses or enforces compliance with its building energy efficiency programs, despite risks of non-compliance.”

What they found was that those ministries just are not doing anything. Her words were more gentle. The ministries “do not yet focus on climate change or reducing greenhouse gas emissions in their decision-making.” Well, they’re essential to actually meeting the government’s targets, but as I said, they understand that this is no priority. No one is going to get ahead as a minister actually doing something on this file; no one is going to get ahead as a bureaucrat actually doing something on this file, so they happily and totally ignore it. “The energy and mines ministry does not have an integrated long-term energy plan that aligns natural gas and electricity use in buildings with Ontario’s 2030 emission-reduction target.” They don’t even have a plan.

Now, the government’s environment plan has many elements that, as the Auditor General said, are not based on evidence. I think that’s a gentle way of saying they spit-balled it: “Hey, do you think this would be credible in a

sentence?" "Yeah, I think it would be credible in a sentence. Let's just put it in there."

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Questions?

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate the opportunity to interact a little bit with the member from Toronto—Danforth. I guess I would like to try to bring him back a little bit to the question of the bill.

Now, here in this House, we take very seriously—I guess it's a parliamentary privilege, that we're not recorded unwittingly. I've heard from the member from London West, confirmed by the member from Algoma—Manitoulin, that they support people doing unauthorized recordings during tribunal hearings, which we're trying to put a stop to, because people have a right to expect a certain amount of privacy during their hearing.

So I was wondering if the member from Toronto—Danforth also supported unauthorized recording when people have an expectation of privacy during a tribunal hearing.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the question from the member. I have to say, I listened to the member from Algoma—Manitoulin. I don't think I would characterize his response that way, frankly. The difficulty we have and that you have, member, is that right now we have the Landlord and Tenant Board engaged in practices that are frankly reprehensible. I have talked to people who have sat in virtually on those hearings, where people with low language skills, perhaps low business literacy, are simply being pushed out of their homes. Some people have recorded those hearings and pointed out how outrageous they are.

I am concerned about privacy. I think those hearings should be open. I think there should be a monitoring and, frankly, there needs to be a clearing-out. Because if people are being pushed out of their homes in the middle of a pandemic with hearings that bounce around like a kangaroo, then I think that those who expose those outrageous hearings are right to expose them.

Whether they should be recorded—that's a discussion we'll have when we get into committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I can't say how much I always enjoy listening to you. Today, it was Churchill. So thank you for that. I really appreciate that.

But I want to say that you said that this weekend was extraordinary. I've never seen anything like this. The Premier made disastrous announcements on Friday and, in fact, we haven't seen the Premier make a public statement since. He just left chaos to reign over the province. Although we do know he's having a fundraiser on Thursday with the Minister of Government and Consumer Services, a \$1,000-a-plate fundraiser, so maybe he might have something to say about this chaos he's created in the province then.

But actually, my question is about this bill. Really, how in goodness' name can we have an economic recovery in this province when you don't have public trust in this government? My question to you is, do you think that

given the flip-flops, the chaos, the unclear guidelines, there is public trust in this government right now?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, I appreciate the question, and I always have to say that when the Premier goes into witness protection, it's an indication that things aren't going well. I think you're quite correct that there is a lack of confidence. I talked to some of my colleagues who live in areas that have a much larger Conservative voting base, and that is a base that is very unhappy, as far as I can tell right now. They don't think things are being handled well.

I think on this past weekend—Speaker, you can appreciate this as well—for a large part of the population in this province that is Black, Indigenous, people of colour, they saw this escalation of police powers as a huge threat to their security, their safety, and it undermined their confidence in the government. A large part of the population, including them, said, "Hey, this is what the science table was saying: paid sick leave, sharp definition of 'essential work' so that fewer people are working," and what we got was playgrounds and cops—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Question?

1650

Mr. Mike Harris: Something that I'm really proud of, that our ministry, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, has put forward in this bill—and I'm sure the member opposite, with vast experience when it comes to environmental issues here in the province, can certainly get on board with—is erosion protection, especially when we talk about what's happening with historically high water levels that we've seen in the Great Lakes over the last couple of years.

This bill would actually allow people to make some improvements to their property in a much more expedient manner, waiving some of the permitting process timeline—I think it's 10 days—so they would be able to improve their property. Granted, this would be low-risk stuff like improving a breakwall or looking at some other ways of planting, maybe, particular vegetation to help reduce some of that shoreline erosion. Does he support those types of measures we're doing here in this bill?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: First of all, I want to thank the member for the question. I appreciate that.

I actually am going to have to read that in more detail before I say yea or nay, but I think erosion protection is an important matter, something that should be addressed. I have to say that one of the things I'll watch out for, when you're talking about getting rid of permitting, is the potential that there will be people who will fill in wetlands. Frankly, if you're going to protect peoples' homes from erosion, from flooding, filling in wetlands is bad news.

So I need to see all the particulars. In case there's a devil dwelling in the details, I want to understand that before I vote on it. But I appreciate you raising the question because I think protection against environmental damage, particularly from climate change, is something that we need to address.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Many of my comments were made today based on what I've been experiencing in Algoma-Manitoulin. I do want to talk to the member about his area and how the sentiment is felt across this province.

I talked a little bit earlier about the levels of frustration for individuals across this province. Whether you're a single mom at home, you share a home as parents, you're grandparents, you're a doctor, you're a taxi cab driver, you're a teacher, people are just frustrated with certain decisions that have been made by this government, particularly with what happened last week.

Within the context of Bill 276, Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act, there are 28 schedules that are in here. Which one of these 28 schedules is going to start addressing and bringing back that confidence that the people are looking for in the leadership out of this government? Which one of these is going to be addressing those levels of concerns for people across this province?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Man, that is the toughest question. I'd expect that question to come from the other side rather than from a friend and colleague on this side.

But anyway, I'd say your concern here is more about which items are going to more profoundly undermine confidence, because I think the privatization of delivery of social services is one that's deeply worrisome. We've seen what happened with long-term care: Privatization of the system kills people. I'm very worried that we'll see similar disasters with privatization of social services. The rollback of commitment to renewable energy in this province I think is a disaster. I think it's going to be far more difficult for this government to do anything near what needs to be done to meet its climate targets. Those are the ones that come to my mind first, frankly. The rest, I'm sure, will come out in committee as we have people come and speak to it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question? We've got time for one more.

Mr. Mike Harris: One of the other things that our ministry is really proud to put forward in this—I alluded to it a little bit in my remarks earlier, and we can go into it, maybe, in a bit more detail here today—is actually streamlining some of the regulatory burden on the forestry industry.

It was really great to hear the comments from the member from Algoma-Manitoulin on what the forestry industry means to him and the roughly 155,000 other people in this province who rely on the forestry industry every day to make a living. As I stated, the impact to the province's GDP is \$16 billion.

One of the things we're looking to do here in this bill is to allow a lot of these forestry operators and harvesters who, granted, I'll say, only harvest one half of 1% of the allowable wood harvesting that we have here in the province—it would allow them to actually go ahead and use crown land to store some of those logs that are harvested—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. The member for Toronto-Danforth has less than 30 seconds.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Sorry, you said “allow people to use crown lands for storage of harvested timber”? I'd have to look at it. For me, if you're using crown lands, you should be paying for the use of it, just as you would pay for rent of any other facility that was publicly owned. But you've made it something I should pay attention to. I appreciate that, and I'll look at it more closely.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: To begin my discussion this afternoon on Bill 276, as introduced by the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction, I have to get something off my chest. It has to do with red tape. It's a real horror story—and you guys can calm down, because it's about the federal government's red tape. When it comes to red tape, the federal Liberals have miles of it, and they have miles and miles to go before they sleep on it and wake up and smell the roses and start cutting that heap of red tape.

When the pandemic hit, many companies, including BASF and Hiram Walker in Windsor, saw the need for hand sanitizer and acquired a licence to start making it. They partnered with Highbury Canco in Leamington for the little bottles. The city of Windsor provided the staff to help out, to decant the sanitizer from 20-gallon pails into the smaller bottles, about this size. Laser Transport volunteered to truck the product wherever it was needed. The city staff made and stuck labels on the bottles. It was a true community effort. The bottles were given away free, first to the hospitals in Windsor, Chatham-Kent and Sarnia, and then to the non-profits, and finally to the general public. People lined up for it. I went to the WFCU Centre in my car, waited in line, and got a couple of bottles. Hand sanitizer was hard to come by back in those early days, and when you could get it, it was overpriced in many cases.

Well, at the end of this February, almost a year later, a regional regulatory compliance officer with Health Canada got wind of it. He wrote my mayor, saying the city didn't have a licence to manufacture, package, test or even stick labels on the bottles. Health Canada considers hand sanitizer a natural health product, and a cease-and-desist order was issued not to sell, import, manufacture, package, label, distribute or have anything else to do with offering free hand sanitizer.

More than 28,000 litres were given away free to more than 300 community organizations, hospitals, shelters, essential workers, first responders, small businesses, educational institutions, sports clubs, restaurants. There were no adverse effects reported.

After Health Canada came under heavy criticism for this bureaucratic overreach, they tried to cover their butts a few days later by saying the product contained an unacceptable ingredient, ethyl acetate—which it did, for the very first test batch, so people wouldn't drink it. The hospitals caught it right away, and the formula was changed. Health Canada says ethyl acetate can cause dry skin conditions; well, so can cold winter weather. None of the sanitizer offered free to the public had it in there.

Speaker, shame on Health Canada for attacking those at the local level who stepped up and provided safe hand

sanitizer for free while the federal government was buying its hand sanitizer from foreign sources. What a bottle of—look, with all of the problems coming up with the supply and distribution of vaccines, federal bureaucrats are suddenly fixated on the city of Windsor not having done the paperwork to get a licence to give away free, licensed hand sanitizer provided by reputable sources such as Hiram Walker. It makes you wonder what's in the drinking water in those water fountains up there in the hallways at Parliament Hill, Speaker.

1700

Look, this Bill 276 is about recovering from the pandemic and restoring competitiveness in the marketplace. Schedule 13 talks about the Liquor Licence and Control Act. Now, I've heard from the people who distill spirits in Ontario. As you know, my riding is home to the largest distillery in Ontario, if not all of Canada: the Hiram Walker complex in Olde Walkerville right on the Detroit River across the street from the Via Rail station on Walker Road. That distillery has won more awards than you can count year after year. Just a couple of weeks ago, Speaker, as you know, we learned that Hiram Walker manufactured a whisky, Lot No.40 Dark Oak, which became the first Canadian whisky to earn the honour of the World Whiskies Awards's best rye whisky. Unheard of, Speaker: A world title in the rye category is extremely hard to come by. Hiram Walker master blender Don Livermore says, "For a Canadian whisky to win it, it really opens up the eyes globally to the quality being produced in this facility."

Our Hiram Walker facility in Windsor has been manufacturing good-quality whisky for 163 years. Recently, the Canadian Whisky Awards named the plant as the nation's best distillery for the fourth year in a row. Canadian Club 43 is Canada's Whisky of the Year. And for the fourth straight year, as I say, Hiram Walker has been named Canada's distiller of the year. J.P. Wiser's Triple Barrel Rye won a Sippin' Whisky of the Year honour. That Lot No.40 Dark Oak claimed the Best New Whisky award in Canada, and J.P. Wiser's 22-year-old Port Cask Finished came out on top in the Cask Strength Whisky of the Year category.

Speaker, hats off to Ontario's grain farmers: 97% of the grain going into Hiram Walker's award-winning whiskies comes from the fields of Essex and Kent counties. Wiser's master blender, Don Livermore, says that this year, there were more competitors than ever before at the Canadian awards—the craft distilling industry is really taking off in Canada—and the competition was fierce, with 130 entries.

Windsor is so proud of our Distillery District in Olde Walkerville. We've been making whisky there since the 1850s. We know a thing or two about making whisky and, Speaker, the awards just keep on coming. I've been fighting, as you know, for a long time to get the doors reopened at the Canadian Club Brand Heritage Centre in Windsor.

Now, our local farmers are very proud of making the grain, raising the grain, growing the grain that goes into these whiskies, and Hiram Walker is a major employer in

my area. Bill 276, however, does fall short for these distillers. The problem is, now that Ontario has opened the doors to allow beer and wine to be sold in 450 grocery stores, those who manufacture whisky, rum, gin and vodka have been shut out of the grocery market.

We have the example in Quebec, if we just go back to the 1980s, when the government there allowed beer and wine in the grocery stores. At the time, spirits held a 40% share of the alcohol market. Seven years after that, that 40% market share had collapsed to 14%, and it's held there pretty well ever since. That's led to layoffs and job losses in Quebec, and the fear is the same could happen here in Ontario.

The Ontario spirits industry employs about 6,000 people, full-time workers earning a good wage. Government tax on the sale of spirits is more than beer, wine and cider, and allowing the sale of spirits in grocery stores could boost the provincial treasury upward by half a billion dollars. It would allow made-in-Ontario products, made from Ontario grains by Ontario workers, to compete more fairly with the beer and wines from Germany, Australia, France and the United States, just to name a few of the competitors.

It's so easy now to grab a bottle of wine or a six-pack of beer while picking up your pasta or your steak and potatoes to prepare for dinner. This is a substitute for an added trip to the LCBO on your way home.

Making it easy for consumers is great, but we're not making it as easy for the spirits industry. We're putting them at a disadvantage to foreign competitors. If we're seriously looking for ways to recover the economy, we need to seriously consider all the options. Allowing the Ontario spirits industry an even playing field is low-hanging fruit to bolster the economic recovery.

The industry has polled consumers, Speaker. The information is available to the government, and 74% of the consumers polled support the inclusion of spirits being available for sale in the same grocery stores as foreign beer and wine. And Speaker, besides 70% of the consumers who support this, so do the Retail Council of Canada, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the Grain Farmers of Ontario, the Consumer Choice Center, as well as dozens of municipalities across Ontario whose communities and economies are supported by the manufacturing of spirits and the Ontario grain grown to make them.

Speaker, the title of Bill 276 is the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act. Schedule 3 changes the Education Act. Elementary teachers down my way have a real problem with a government plan that seeks to see us recover from this pandemic by allowing TVO and its French counterpart, TFO, to compete with trained and professional educators for remote learning courses.

My friend Mario Spagnuolo is an exceptional teacher who serves as the local president of the Greater Essex Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, ETFO. He wrote to me at the first of the month, and with your permission, Speaker, I wish to put his correspondence on the record today. Mario writes:

“Educators and families have been doing everything they can to keep students learning during the pandemic.

“The provincial government should have been focused on making our schools safer, but they failed to invest in smaller classes and refused to provide the necessary leadership during this very difficult year.

“Surveillance testing has been inadequately and erratically implemented across the province. Like many elements of the pandemic response, it has been downloaded to the local level without adequate support and resources.

“Instead of responding to the ongoing third wave of this pandemic, the government has instead chosen to take advantage of the crisis to introduce sweeping changes to the nature of public education. The government is planning to make remote learning permanent so a student could go from kindergarten to grade 12 without ever setting foot inside a school.

“Under Premier Ford’s plan, a significant portion of remote learning would be run by TVO and TFO, where they could hire their own staff and outsource education delivery to for-profit companies.”

Speaker, Mario Spagnuolo is concerned, as the local ETFO president, that “this government is trying to open the floodgates of privatization in Ontario by siphoning money away from an already underfunded public school system.” He says, “There will be no school board or elected trustee oversight and that means that the government is setting up an entire parallel system of education in Ontario that will not be accountable.”

This plan will also inevitably lead to school closures as the government pushes more students online, creating a snowball effect of fewer opportunities in schools, forcing more and more families to opt for remote learning.

Mr. Spagnuolo states—and I hope my friends across the aisle are listening—“This is a very real threat in smaller, rural and remote communities.” He goes on to say, “The government has provided no academic research or analysis to support its underlying claim of the benefits of full-time, synchronous remote learning in the elementary grades.”

This permanent change is being undertaken without educational expertise and without considering any data about Ontario’s richly diverse student population, the process of learning, or the realities of schools and the communities they serve. Speaker, this plan, according to the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario, is an experiment in remote learning and one that will continue to deepen the digital and academic divide exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic in Ontario.

Mr. Spagnuolo says that this past year has highlighted the importance of schools to our communities and the focus should be on supporting consistency and stability for students and educators going forward.

Speaker, although I’m only one of the three MPPs in Windsor and Essex county, I’m sure I speak for all three of us when I thank Mario Spagnuolo for this insight into the perceived dangers of turning remote learning over to TVO and TFO, and that we hope that instead the government would engage with our school communities to seek better ways to support students and their families.

1710

From day one, we in the official opposition have been calling for smaller classrooms so students could remain socially distanced. That hasn’t happened at the elementary level.

Some of our schools in Windsor are amongst the oldest in Ontario. The circulation of the air that students and education workers breathe in is not always and consistently the very best. Yes, the government has made a sum of money available to improve that in some cases, but it’s not nearly enough. To be honest, much of that problem predates this government. The previous Liberal government was mired in so many scandals and their priority, their focus was not on keeping up with the badly needed repairs and renovations to Ontario schools. They left us with \$16 billion in needed repairs, and that’s something that they’ll pay the price for for many years to come.

I want to get on to something else. I’ve heard from a public support worker. Kim Gilbert wrote to me. She is a member of the Canadian Union of Public Employees. She’s also a parent with a five-year-old enrolled in an after-school program. Kim wrote: “I am writing to you as a parent and as an RECE. For years I put off having children because the cost of parent fees just seemed unbearable to cope with.

“This past year has been very hard on our family with watching child care centres close across the province and not knowing how secure my job is.

“To having our child care after-school spot taken away because of government regulations—forcing us to uproot our son—only then to uproot him again to return to his original spot when it opened.

“The province has shown no respect to parents and RECEs for the work they do.

“Regulations are made at a higher level without consulting the ones that do the job, and the parents who are affected.

“Changes are announced to the public, who had no knowledge of what was coming, causing child care workers and parents to scramble and adapt to the changes with no opportunity to plan ahead.”

Speaker, Kim went on to say, “After reading the recent budget release I am extremely disappointed that the province continues to depend only on the federal government to flow new funding.

“The province continues to not add one extra dollar to support the crisis happening in child care.

“The province continues to throw money at the child benefit and care benefit instead of fixing a system that is broken.

“For years the child care system has been broken and we have tried to survive, now it’s crumbling apart.

“The economy needs child care. I fear my job will be gone. I fear my son’s spot will vanish.

“What’s the point of receiving money in tax credits when my income is gone?

“How do I support my family?

“When is enough enough?

"Over 100 child care centres have closed this year, isn't that enough?"

Kim Gilbert concludes her letter with this plea: "Please, finally commit to a publicly funded universal and accessible system and send care ... reliable daycare ... and we need to do everything we can to vaccinate and protect the women and men who work in daycare centres in Ontario."

Speaker, we can do more to assist in the economic recovery as outlined in Bill 276, and better daycare is a key component of that recovery.

I don't have a lot of time left, but I want to get on the record the recovery plan for the optometrists in Ontario, who wish to remain competitive in Ontario. As you know, the optometrists have been waging a paper battle with the government for quite a while now. The eye doctors are asking for a larger share of the cost of OHIP-subsidized eye examinations. For years, OHIP only covers 55% of an eye exam. COVID-19 has worsened the situation for optometrists and slashed into their income by as much as 75%. After 30 years of what they say is underfunding, the eye specialists say the system is no longer sustainable. They're going to withdraw their OHIP services starting this September. Unless the government gets to a bargaining table before that and increases the amount optometrists are paid to offer OHIP-insured eye exams, they won't be offering the service next fall. They took a vote: 96% of the membership said enough was enough. They're tired of waiting.

Speaker, as you know, many of us have been reading petitions in the House since last fall. In fact, my House leader just read one this afternoon, as well as others. I know the parliamentary assistant, the member for Oakville North-Burlington, read one just a couple of weeks ago. They claim optometrists are subsidizing the delivery of OHIP-covered eye care by \$173 million a year. They warn more than two million eye exams are in jeopardy.

Dr. Sheldon Salaba, the president of the Ontario Association of Optometrists, says, "Government neglect has jeopardized access to eye care for those who need it most, undervaluing the eye health of Ontarians." Optometrists are being fair. They've given the government notice. For some reason, under OHIP, unlike other health care provides, optometrists have never been given a formal negotiation process with the government.

I'm out of time. I know my friend the optometrist from Brantford-Brant will have the first question.

Mr. Will Bouma: I can't wait.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I'm just going to say to the member for Windsor-Tecumseh before we move to questions, perhaps post-politics, you could be a quality control inspector for Hiram Walker. I think that job would suit you.

Questions? The member for Brantford-Brant.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Through you: If I see any advertisements for quality control inspectors for Health Canada, I'll send them your way.

But a quick question, if I could: Just your opinion, not that of your party, but what do you think would be an

acceptable solution from an opposition point of view for the optometrists' problem that you just spoke of? Is it to make it fair, double what we spend on that from \$170 million to \$340 million? Is it to deregulate optometric services in some way? Or would you say that it would be more honest to take an outside-government, third-party entity to actually evaluate the true cost of an eye exam and vow to reimburse at that level, which would probably still about double it? I'm just wondering what your thoughts were on that.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Back in my reporting days, I was heavily involved with my union. I was on several national bargaining committees at the CBC. We know when you go into negotiations, you ask up here and, quite often, you'll compromise down here. I would hope the government would get to the bargaining table and finally sit down with the optometrists and have it out. State your case, they'll state their case, and maybe somewhere in the middle, there's a compromise. But if you don't do it before September, there's going to be a heck of a lot of people who won't be having their eyes examined, and that becomes very dangerous—as you know, very, very dangerous indeed. Thank you for the question.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to my friend from Windsor-Tecumseh for his speech. You started off mentioning distilleries and farms and all the great businesses in Windsor-Tecumseh, and I share a lot of farms in Niagara. We have the same issues with migrant workers and other essential workplaces.

I was just wondering: This is an opportunity to address health and safety in workplaces. We've heard a lot about the vaccine rollout and not getting to essential workplaces—and non-essential workplaces, but essential workplaces especially—where we really have to attack the virus. What are things like, playing out in Windsor with respect to getting into those workplaces with vaccine and with the health and safety conditions we've heard so much about on the news?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you to my friend from Niagara Centre, a wine-growing industry, as we are down in Essex county as well. Migrant workers come from various parts of the world. They come here to keep our food supply safe, and we can't do it without them. We have to protect them. We are getting more co-operation this year and earlier co-operation to get into the fields and the greenhouses to start a vaccination program.

The problem in the past has been this intergovernmental jurisdictional dispute: "It's a federal responsibility." "No, it's a provincial responsibility." "No, the municipality should be involved." We have to come together and we have to coordinate a plan of vaccination, safer housing, and we have to do it sooner rather than later.

Thank you so much for that question.

1720

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member from Windsor-Tecumseh for his comments. He did a good job talking about the spirits industry. I know he represents a

lot of the companies in his riding. He was very convincing in talking about all the jobs that are created and the grains that are grown in Ontario to support that.

I know that when I was over visiting Scotland, in the very northwest part of Scotland, visiting our daughter who is over there, I was very surprised to go into a tiny little village, a tiny store—I think it was scotch that you could buy there amongst your groceries etc. Personally, I didn't see a problem with that.

You've done an excellent job of selling me, but I'm just wondering whether your colleagues—if the government does bring forward another red tape bill and makes that change, will your colleagues also support it, or are they going to attack the government?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Well, a day without a grievance is a day without sunshine, as you know. Thank you for the question.

When you're in the official opposition, you have to take a lot of factors into account. You have to look at what the government is putting on the table and you have to say, "Is that good enough, or can it be improved upon? Can we make it better?" We have not caucused this at all, but I would hope my caucus colleagues would say, "What is the value to Ontario if this happens?" versus, "Are there problems that might be associated with it?"

If we look around—I go to Florida some weeks in the winter. I go into the grocery store. If I want to buy hard liquor, it's there. If I want to buy wine, if I want to buy beer, it's there. If I go to Quebec, in a corner store, you can buy wine or liquor.

I came to Ontario when there were ladies', escorts' and men's entrances to taverns. Times change. Economies change. We have to look at what is best for Ontario. I think putting spirits in grocery stores, personally, is a great idea.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I have a double-barreled question for you. How's that? One is, what are the chances you have a bottle of this award-winning whiskey in your office? That I'd like to know. But my question is really about what you're talking about: ways that we can support innovation and businesses in the province.

I would say that most of the small businesses in my riding have been disappointed by the supports from this government. They're on the ropes in my riding. Can you talk about what you thought, perhaps, should have been in here that would have provided immediate relief to the people who are running small businesses in your riding?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you very much for that double-barrelled question. You know, whiskey comes in barrels—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: That's why I said it.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: —and we have barrels and barrels of it. Some we put away for 40 years; some comes off the line rather quicker.

Look, as we all do, pretty well—we all get our hair cut. I go to Shelley's on Seminole Street in Windsor. Carrie cuts my hair. I was talking to Shelley, the owner, and she's applied for a small business grant. She hasn't heard tickity-boo, hasn't heard a word; it's been crickets. She

contacted my office and we're trying to get the ball rolling. What's wrong with this picture, when the government says, "We are helping small business," and yet this small business in my community can't get a word back from government?

If you're going to help small business, you have to be more quick on the button. You've got to be more reactive. You've got to let them know: Either they're in or out. I know you're doubling up on some, but there are a lot of people out there still looking for some grant information. Thank you for the question.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Mike Harris: I think the member from Windsor-Tecumseh and I can both agree that spirits in grocery stores is a good thing. Let's see if we agree on something else.

For many, many years, there has been a lot of construction on the Highway 401-Highway 3 corridor through Windsor and on the E.C. Row Expressway that runs into your riding. I'm just interested to see what your thoughts are with being able to expand the hours that construction can take place on some of our larger major highways—obviously safely, of course, and following all COVID-19 protocols, which we would expect that everybody is doing here in the province. I just want to get your thoughts on that and whether we agree that that is a good thing.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Speaker, as you know, I was on city council for seven years before I came here. We had major construction projects, including the Herb Gray Parkway and the beginning of the new international border crossing in your riding, Speaker. As a city councillor, we were asked to allow for construction to continue on a lot of projects beyond the regular working hours and so on. As the city council, we said yes, and we asked the community, "Would you support it?" They said, "As long as it doesn't become too much of a distraction." I can think of no one who stepped up and said, "Shut it down at 5 o'clock."

We know we have to keep moving. We know there are a lot of jobs involved. If you're building on the 401, there are not necessarily a lot of homes nearby. You can do it safely in the dark. You have to slow down. If we all slow down going through a construction zone, then that's the way to do it. And I know my colleague from Essex worked highway construction for years, and he is very secure on the health and safety that can take place on that.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): There's not enough time for another question. Further debate?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Just for context, I think it's important, Madam Speaker, that we say what day this is: This is April 19, 2021, and we are at the height of the third wave of a pandemic. Today is the sixth day of more than 4,000 new cases. We are setting a record of how many new cases we have. Today, there were 4,500 new cases. There are 2,200 people in hospital, and 755—that was as of this morning—are struggling for their lives in ICU. I think it's important that we understand the context in which this debate is happening.

While we are here talking about this bill that essentially seems to be about red tape reduction, which is what the government seems to be concerned with, this is a dreadful crisis. It's a terrible time right now. There are ICU doctors in this province who have a way more serious discussion than we're having here about red tape. They're trying to sort out a triage protocol for ICUs that are overwhelmed. They literally have to decide as a triage protocol who will get treatment, who will live and who will not. This is the kind of thing that we should be debating in this House.

I would like to believe that, given the performance we saw from the Premier on Friday—the fact that people have been asking for paid sick days, have been asking for essential vaccines going into hot spots. Their own science table was demanding this on Friday, and yet, what did we hear the Premier do? Blame the people of the province of Ontario, blame the federal government, and his response to a collapse of the health care system was to close playgrounds and give more enforcement powers to police. I would like to add, Madam Speaker, that it's a power that the police services across the province, including in Hamilton, didn't ask for and had no intention of enforcing.

The kind of destabilizing environment that the Premier created, you would think, would be something that the Premier would want to address. While our health care workers are struggling every minute to save the lives of people, the Premier puts out a statement that creates nothing but chaos in our communities, and we haven't had a public statement from this Premier about this since that happened. It is completely a breach of public trust on the part of this Premier, and we should be in the House debating that. But instead, Madam Speaker, we're talking about a Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act that does nothing to address the humanitarian crisis that we are facing in this very moment.

We should be in this House discussing how we are going to get more vaccines to hot spots. We should be talking about the paid sick days for workers that everybody is asking for. Your own science table has asked for this. Dr. Williams has asked for it. Everyone is asking for paid sick days except for this government. Instead, you play jurisdictional Ping-Pong and confuse people who need paid sick days to save lives.

Do you know what I would like to see from this government? A discussion on how we're going to make sure people can get time off to go get their vaccines. There's no provision with this government to ensure that people can take time away from work to get vaccinated.

1730

And sure, would it be nice to hear from the Premier—it would be nice to hear something or anything from the Premier, actually. But what would be really nice to hear from the Premier is that he has checked his ego and his pride and has decided that he will accept help from the federal government. We need the Red Cross, we need the military and we need help from health care workers across the province. That's what we should be discussing in this House today. But no, we have this bill, which we will address.

I mean, it's just an obvious, obvious—it should be obvious. I guess it's not that obvious, unfortunately, that there is going to be no economic recovery when we have no health recovery in this province. We are in the middle of people dying, and we don't know how much worse it's going to get. I just heard today from the member from the Danforth that one of the predictions is that we'll be seeing 30,000 cases a day with weak public health measures. What I see from this government, in my humble opinion, is nothing but weak public health measures. These are staggering numbers.

The particulars of this bill really don't even come close to addressing the magnitude of the problem that we're facing, and they quite clearly show that this government doesn't understand or doesn't genuinely care to put in place the things that will help us get out of this problem. Small businesses in my riding are at the end of their ropes, and there's nothing in here to help small businesses.

A huge component of an economic recovery is education. We should all know that. I don't know that that's the case across the way, but we should all know that education is a cornerstone of a healthy economy. We have been advocating for a safe return to schools. We asked for a cap on classroom size of 15. We asked for proper ventilation. We asked for measures to be put in place to keep kids, teachers and education workers safe, but that didn't happen. We didn't have a safe classroom, and now schools are closed in the province, kids are back to online learning and parents, again, are struggling to sort out how they can continue to go to work and make sure that their kids aren't just on their iPads all day, that they're actually learning properly. It's a struggle for parents, and this government just seems oblivious to that; oblivious to the warnings that if you didn't put in the measures to keep schools safe, they would be closed again.

You know, we asked again and again for you to do this, and the measures that this government chooses not to take have made this pandemic so much worse. You just walked us into this third wave by not listening to your experts. The people of this province have had enough of hearing from the Premier saying, "We're listening to the science experts," because we know they are not. The doctors themselves are saying, "We recommended paid sick days." And when asked very directly a number of times—the government House leader was asked; other members have asked—who on the science table recommended special additional policing powers as a response to the pandemic—what member of the science table recommended that? It would be really interesting to know, in the spirit of openness and transparency. Did someone on your COVID-19 table recommend policing as a response? That's a pretty simple, straightforward question that really should have a simple answer, but clearly we're not going to get that.

So now we have schools closed across the province. We've been asking for essential workers to be vaccinated. We asked for vaccinations for teachers and education workers, to help keep the spread in schools down. That didn't happen. But I think what we need to know—a huge

component of the economy and our education system is child care. The member from Windsor–Tecumseh talked about that. It's a very important component that seems to have been overlooked through this entire pandemic. While schools are closed, it's important to know that child care centres across the province continue to operate. They're still open, and they're still operating. In fact, not only are they operating regular child care, they are also offering and operating emergency child care spaces. This was an opportunity in this bill for this government to address the fact that they've overlooked child care spaces and child care centres. But it's been missed in this bill.

I'd just like to read a letter from a fantastic organization in my community called Today's Family. They do remarkable work; in fact, they operate a community fridge in our riding, which a lot of people, low-income families, access. All kinds of people need access to good, nutritious food, and they've offered that service. They wrote to me to say this: "Today's Family provides early learning and child care, licensed home child care and licensed school-age programs for more than 4,000 children and families in Hamilton, Halton and Haldimand–Norfolk. There are more than 200 staff and more than 120 home care providers in our employ."

"We have provided and continue to provide emergency child care in addition to child care throughout the pandemic as an essential service for families. Now more than ever, it has become clear the importance of child care as an essential service and as an economic driver."

They make clear, in case the government doesn't understand what happens in child care centres, that they are "working in direct contact with children who are too young to wear masks, cannot maintain two-metre distances, and need to care for, cuddle and carry children," and they have remained working throughout the pandemic.

They go on to say, "We urge you to make child care educators in our community and across the province eligible immediately for the COVID-19 vaccine. We thank you for your attention."

This is the kind of attention that we should expect from this government. It should be a government that is paying attention to essential workers providing an essential service, looking after our kids. But child care centres and child care operators are having to plead with this government—plead with them—to put in measures to keep them safe. Never mind the extraordinary cost that these centres will have to have incurred to put PPE in place and to put in all the protection measures. This government seems somehow to have completely forgotten about the child care sector. I would suggest that if the government is really, really concerned with the economic recovery, child care is a critical component of an economic recovery, and you have overlooked that entirely in this bill.

What you haven't overlooked, of course, is people that are on Ontario Works, so people on ODSP and OW. Somehow, you never seem to forget this sector. You never seem to stop trying to find a way to make the lives of people on Ontario Works, OW, and ODSP even more

difficult than they already are. You're concerned with the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act, but it's quite clear that you are not in any way concerned with the recovery of folks, individuals and families who are living on social assistance in the middle of a pandemic.

It just happens to be, Madam Speaker, that this past week, I co-hosted a town hall, and the title of the town hall was Frozen in Time! Ontario's Social Assistance Rates. This was a town hall that was attended by about 150 people, and the purpose of this town hall was to highlight the fact that people living on social assistance have not had a rate increase in 40 years. In fact, it needs to be said that their rates aren't even indexed with inflation. And so the experts, the people with lived experience, came together to address the concern that costs for rent and food have soared in this province, but that the OW and ODSP rates remain stagnant.

The question that we all have to ask ourselves, and that the government should be asking itself, is, how do you expect people to keep themselves safe, to feed themselves, to pay the rent, when a single person on social assistance receives \$733 a month—\$733 a month. We had a question today—we've talked about the homeless camps right outside this building. I mean, with \$733 a month, there's not far to fall before you have absolutely, absolutely no place to live.

I want to thank the people that helped coordinate this town hall. I co-hosted it with Tom Cooper, who's the director for the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, and we had a lot of wonderful speakers that talked about not only their expertise as a professor of economics or as people who worked for the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton, but we had people with lived experience that came to tell us about what a struggle it is for them—not only the physical struggle and the worry, the constant worry of trying to pay the bills, but just the absolute bleakness of not ever seeing an end in sight or not seeing a government that seems to understand the plight that they're suffering right now. The event was organized by the Hamilton Social Work Action Committee, and I guess I would like to make sure that I take this opportunity to thank Sally Palmer, who's just tireless in her crusade to make sure that these folks aren't forgotten, because they seem to be completely forgotten by this government.

1740

The organizers of this very successful town hall did it on their own time because they understand that we can't just forget a whole sector of the population. If we're really, truly talking about supporting recovery, we can't leave people behind. We have to include everyone in this recovery. I just would like to say, it's been 36 years since an Ontario PC government last raised social assistance rates—36 years. Can you imagine? And, really, let's not forget that former Premier Mike Harris cut social assistance rates by 21%, almost 22%.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Shame.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Exactly. It is a shame. It's a terrible shame.

And then, in 15 years of Liberal administration, there were no increases and none of them were tied to inflation. And this government's first act—one of its first acts—in office was to cut in half a planned increase to social assistance rates. It was just too much for people living on social assistance to expect an increase, and even the increase that was planned didn't come close to addressing the index of inflation.

So now we have in this bill a schedule, schedule 21, that is looking to again privatize the delivery of social assistance. It's not looking to find out how—for example, a review of the social assistance rates to find out whether people could actually live on this amount. It's not looking in any way to understand what it's like for young children growing up in families on social assistance and what their education future will look like, a way to break the cycle of poverty. No, this government is looking to save a buck by privatizing the delivery of social assistance, to save money on the backs of the already vulnerable people in the province of Ontario.

And you're doing this in the middle of a pandemic. I can't think of anything more cruel-hearted than this. I mean, we've seen this organization that you're moving to the front, this Fedcap. We already had a pilot project, and the results were universally disastrous for the people that rely on this service. We know that this is an international company. My guess is that the only thing that they're concerned with is value for shareholders or saving the government a buck. My guess is that they're not concerned with the outcomes for the people who are living on social assistance.

This government also, I would like to remind you, cancelled the Basic Income Pilot. The Basic Income Pilot was an ongoing attempt to address and understand how people in poverty could be lifted up, but you've cancelled that without any qualms, and you've cut the social assistance rates in half—this meagre amount that they're going to get—and now your big step forward is to see how you can deliver this, a privatized delivery of this to save some money. It's terrible. It's so backwards. It's so cruel-hearted, I can't even imagine it.

I just want to also highlight that in the middle of a pandemic, this government also authorized a clawback of CERB benefits, so if there was anybody living in a household who was on social assistance of any type, ODSP included, and some other working member was receiving CERB, this government clawed it back dollar for dollar. So I really can't imagine how this government expects, or maybe they don't expect, the lowest-income people in this province, the most vulnerable people in this province—I don't know how you can expect that they're going to recover from this pandemic. My guess, I suppose, is that it's not even a preoccupation for you that they recover from this pandemic.

People who wear glasses will have empathy for me right now. I'm struggling. For those of you that wear glasses in the province, you feel my pain right now.

I think it's really important to understand that while we're not talking about people dying in ICUs, what we are

talking about are ways to save money on the backs of the poorest in this province. This goes hand in hand with schedule 27, which is really an attempt by this government to hide from public view the cruelty of these evictions that are happening in the province of Ontario in the middle of a pandemic.

I mean, how is it that this government put this in place? We have heard the stories about how terrible the tribunal is. We've heard stories about how people have not understood the rules, have been cut off, haven't had the ability to go online because they don't have the services, the Internet, the computer. We even heard from one of my colleagues that they watched one of their constituents get evicted on a pay phone, because that's how they had to participate. So it's no wonder this government has introduced schedule 27 to make sure that no one gets to see that, no one gets to understand how punitive and how regressive the access to justice is in this province.

I, like many people, am extremely disappointed with the performance of the Premier and what you've put forward here today while we are here in this House debating—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Questions?

Mr. Will Bouma: Madam Speaker, through you to the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas: Recently, there have been incidents of individuals—and starting just where you ended—disrupting, recording and publishing recordings of tribunal hearings. These incidents have become more common and difficult to manage as tribunals have largely moved to virtual hearings since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This bill provides tribunals and tribunal users with the same protection against unauthorized recordings of tribunal hearings, whether in person or virtual, that applies to court proceedings. Are the opposition against protecting the integrity of tribunal hearings and the privacy of hearing participants?

I ask that because I heard some ideas of how this could be enhanced, but I think you should come out against unauthorized recording of these hearings, if you could, please.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I just have to say that that's a rich question coming from that member across the way. What I would say we are against is the access to justice in this province being watered down by all of the changes that this government has made.

I mean, you cut access to legal aid, and now you have an online tribunal that I imagine in the middle of a pandemic made sense, but is this going to continue this way or are you going to take lessons from this and understand what a terrible way this is for people to try to get access to justice? It doesn't in any way serve the people of the province of Ontario. My question for you is, who is it you're trying to protect, really? I believe it's the government's inadequate, shoddy way of evicting people in the middle of a pandemic.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank my colleague for her remarks. She touched upon many of the issues that one would have expected to be included in a bill that is supposed to be addressing Ontario's competitiveness. Certainly one of the issues she raised was around child care, which is, as we all know, critical to a she-covery as we move forward out of this pandemic. I wondered if the member would comment on whether any of the 28 schedules in the bill actually help support a she-covery to assist women to get back into the labour force once we're through COVID-19.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much to the member for the question. The short answer is no, there's nothing in here that will help a she-covery—nothing. In fact, I would go as far as to say that there are actually things in here that will make it even more difficult for women to recover from this pandemic.

So many economic experts, chambers of commerce, all kinds of people are identifying that one size doesn't fit all and that you have to have a targeted economic strategy if you want to be successful. Instead, what we have is really what I would call a dog's breakfast of schedules that touch on everything and really do absolutely nothing concrete to support recovery. Certainly women in this province who are doing a lion's share of some of the work looking after their kids at home have been failed by this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question? 1750

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's interesting to hear the party opposite. It used to be that one week they'd say one thing and the next week it would be the next thing, and then it was one day and the next day, and now in the morning they say one thing and in the afternoon the message is different. In the morning, I heard how we could run this complex government virtually and not have to show up but you could never expect to run a tribunal virtually; it just wouldn't work. So what is it? Are we running things virtually or in person? Nothing ever seems to be right. There's never a solution. If you can't run this government virtually, how would you be able to do these other things?

I think we've learned a lot from this pandemic, and it's time to take a stand and do what needs to be done. It's so much more efficient when you eliminate the travel, eliminate the contact and provide more people with services much quicker.

Interjection.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Yes, exactly; there's lots to unpack in that question.

I would say, really, you're going to talk to us, the opposition, about flip-flops? Your Premier is the king of flip-flops. On Friday, he introduced a measure that there was going to be policing and that we're closing playgrounds and that nobody can golf in this province except maybe Mackenzie Hughes. And then what? All of a sudden—not from him, but somebody else had to be scurried out to say he changed his mind. So we cannot count—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Stop the clock, please.

Will you please let the member answer? I'm having a hard time hearing her. I need to be able to hear her. I'm going to ask the government side to come to order.

Back to the member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

What the people of Ontario would like to see is some leadership. They would like to see a Premier who tells us that he is listening to the science table and who shows evidence of it. We'd like to see a Premier say one thing and stick to it for 48 hours. People are losing trust in this Premier and losing trust in this government's ability to steer us through this unprecedented crisis.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to my friend from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas for her always very passionate words.

She started talking about the issue of transparency, and that's a real theme—especially lately, we've seen so much lack of transparency with this government. We had a vaccine shipment spirited away from Niagara. All the government had to do was respond and tell us why, and they refused to tell us.

The status of playgrounds over the weekend: The government House leader was asked point-blank and refused to answer where that recommendation came from.

How they chose hot spots, privatizing ODSP service delivery, closed-door meetings behind ministerial zoning orders—the list goes on and on and on with the lack of transparency with this government.

How important does she feel it is for our constituents to have confidence in this government if they're not transparent?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thanks to the MPP for Niagara Centre. I really appreciate your leadership on the issue of this government issuing MZOs to pave over wetlands across the province of Ontario. It just speaks to the fact that people have no confidence in this government, because they do everything behind closed doors.

The very fact that the hot spots, those postal codes—there's no clarity on how those were selected at all. They do not come out with a straight answer. They say one thing, that they're listening to the science table, and then the members of the science table say, "No, we didn't recommend that."

I think that this government can get back the trust of the people of the province of Ontario by—starting to be transparent would be one thing. Having a Premier publicly make a statement since Friday on that disastrous announcement would be another good start.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member for your comments.

You talked a little bit about ODSP and Ontario Works. We know programs such as those are critical to helping those people who have lost their jobs or who are unable to find work. We know the system itself has been facing

challenges for many years, and they limit the ability to help people get back on their feet, and the COVID-19 pandemic has just exacerbated that.

I'm proud to support the work that Minister Sarkaria is doing in the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act. If this legislation is passed, it will ensure that front-line workers have more time to focus on connecting clients, which supports things like job-readiness programs, housing, child care, skills training and mental health supports. So I'd hope that the member would support this bill in ensuring that those people who need these additional supports have access to those.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you to the member for the question, and my question back would be: Who asked for privatization of the delivery of social assistance? Where was this deal cut? Was this publicly tendered? Were the

people of Ontario allowed to weigh in on this, particularly people who are recipients of this service?

People who are recipients of ODSP and OW are preoccupied with putting food on the table and keeping their homes. They don't have time for gardening. They don't have time for sitting on committees. They expect this government to do the right thing by them, and privatizing social assistance will in no way help them out or improve their lives.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Unfortunately, we don't have time for another question.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1756.

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Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Natyshak, Taras (NDP) Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Essex Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC) Pang, Billy (PC) Park, Lindsey (PC) Parsa, Michael (PC) Pettapiece, Randy (PC) Phillips, Rod (PC) Piccini, David (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest Markham—Unionville Durham Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill Perth—Wellington Ajax Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud Humber River—Black Creek Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP) Rasheed, Kaleed (PC) Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie, du Développement du Nord et des Mines Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Roberts, Jeremy (PC) Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Sabawy, Sheref (PC) Sandhu, Amarjot (PC) Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associé délégué au dossier des Petites Entreprises et de la Réduction des formalités administratives Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Sattler, Peggy (NDP) Schreiner, Mike (GRN) Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC) Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest Guelph Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Simard, Amanda (LIB) Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC) Smith, Dave (PC) Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook Peterborough—Kawartha Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP) Stiles, Marit (NDP) Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	St. Catharines Davenport Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Associate Minister of Transportation (GTA) / Ministre associée des Transports (RGT) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Tabuns, Peter (NDP) Tangri, Nina (PC) Taylor, Monique (NDP) Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC) Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Toronto—Danforth Mississauga—Streetsville Hamilton Mountain Scarborough—Rouge Park Huron—Bruce	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC) Vanthof, John (NDP)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington Timiskaming—Cochrane	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Walker, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Associate Minister of Energy / Ministre associé de l'Énergie Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakabuski, 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 Bourguin, 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-présidente: 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, Gururat 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: Kaled 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
Kaled Rasheed, Donna Skelly
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

Chair / Président: Taras Natyshak
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Deepak Anand, Toby Barrett
Jessica Bell, Stephen Blais
Stephen Crawford, Rudy Cuzzetto
France Gélinas, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Taras Natyshak
Michael Parsa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

Chair / Président: Logan Kanapathi
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Fraser
Will Bouma, John Fraser
Logan Kanapathi, Vincent Ke
Laura Mae Lindo, Paul Miller
Billy Pang, Jeremy Roberts
Dave Smith, Daisy Wai
Jamie West
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de la politique sociale

Chair / Président: Deepak Anand
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Bhutila Karpache
Deepak Anand, Aris Babikian
Jeff Burch, Amy Fee
Michael Gravelle, Joel Harden
Mike Harris, Christine Hogarth
Belinda C. Karahalios, Bhutila Karpache
Natalia Kusendova
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tanzima Khan

Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight / Comité spécial de la surveillance de la gestion des situations d'urgence

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Tom Rakocevic
Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson
John Fraser, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Robin Martin
Sam Oosterhoff, Lindsey Park
Tom Rakocevic, Sara Singh
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell