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ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Wednesday 2 June 2021

Mercredi 2 juin 2021

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FRONT-LINE AND ESSENTIAL SERVICE
WORKER WEEK ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LA SEMAINE
DE RECONNAISSANCE DU PERSONNEL
DES SERVICES DE PREMIÈRE LIGNE
ET DES SERVICES ESSENTIELS

Mr. Rasheed moved third reading of the following bill:
Bill 230, An Act to proclaim Front-line and Essential Service Worker Week / Projet de loi 230, Loi proclamant la Semaine de reconnaissance du personnel des services de première ligne et des services essentiels.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll look to the member for Mississauga East–Cooksville to lead off the debate.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Good morning to all. Speaker, I'm honoured and so very thankful to rise this morning and speak in detail about Bill 230, the Front-line and Essential Service Worker Week Act. If passed, this proposed legislation will proclaim the third week of March of every year as Front-line and Essential Service Worker Week. The week will acknowledge the contributions of the various industries that make up Ontario's essential workforce.

At its heart, Bill 230 is all about gratitude. As we all know, on March 17, 2020, an emergency was declared in Ontario under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The second and third emergencies were declared on January 12, 2021, and April 7, 2021. Without question, Ontario's front-line and essential service workers played a vital role in maintaining the flow and delivery of goods and services throughout each state of emergency, and they continue to be a crucial part of the province's economic recovery.

Speaker, the last 15 months have been a roller coaster for everyone in this province. Everyone worked hard to stay home, stop the spread of COVID-19 and keep one another safe. But none of that would have been possible without the hard work, diligence and dedication of Ontario's front-line and essential service workers. Ontario is thankful, and I think it is very important to have legislation that puts in writing, for all time, that we appreciate

and celebrate our front-line and essential service workers in this great province, taking a week to acknowledge and celebrate all the individuals and industries that made surviving and recovering from this pandemic possible for all of us.

I want to thank Ontario's front-line and essential service workers, who have been performing above and beyond through the three waves of COVID-19. Whether at your local grocery store, your community pharmacy or hospital, these unwavering individuals have been dedicated to ensuring our province gets the health care and supplies we all need to survive in these difficult times.

Thank you to food service individuals, who pivoted their production to provide curbside and delivery meals, and all those in the restaurant industry who were able to provide meals to our front-line and essential workers as well as others in need.

Speaker, thank you also to those industries that were able to import or produce PPE to bolster our provincial supply. Your work has been incredible.

Thank you to the long-term-care staff and the Canadian Armed Forces, who undertook the critical task of supporting facilities that were struggling with outbreaks of COVID-19.

Thank you to all Ontarians who, with the use of PPE and social distancing, took part in peaceful protests against racism in Toronto this past weekend.

I want to thank our trucking and freight industry for all they do to keep goods moving around Ontario.

I want to also thank you, Speaker, and all our esteemed colleagues gathered here today, along with the OLA staff, security and everyone who worked so hard so that the gears of this government could remain in motion throughout the darkest days of this crisis.

Speaker, on the front lines of our health care system, our nursing professionals have been the backbone of delivering care to those in need. I also want to say a special thanks to my colleague from Mississauga Centre who has done an incredible job by not only coming to this Legislature but also working on the front lines. Thank you so much for all the great work. We appreciate that.

Speaker, Dana Cooper, the executive director of the Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario, had this to say about Bill 230: "The Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario is pleased to support Bill 230 sponsored by MPP Rasheed, that would recognize 'Front-line and Essential Service Worker Week.' Nurse Practitioners have been on the front lines of the pandemic across all corners of health care and have stepped up to ensure that the health care resources required by the people of Ontario are available.

NPAO salutes all of the front-line and essential workers that risked their, and their families', well-being to provide for the needs of Ontarians during this very challenging time. It is appropriate to recognize their efforts."

Speaker, our front-line responders in the pandemic were also glad to be acknowledged. Darryl Wilton, president of the Ontario Paramedic Association, said, "The Ontario Paramedic Association supports private member's Bill 230 to recognize front-line and essential workers. We know first-hand that many occupations have enabled paramedics to provide life-saving medical and trauma care to 1.75 million patients throughout Ontario each year. Paramedics are humbled by MPP Kaleed Rasheed's bill and appreciative of all the Ontarians who have come together to support our members on the front lines by providing us with the medications, equipment and services we also need. It has been magnificent to see so many essential workers come together so that paramedics can continue to provide high-quality care on 911 emergency calls and with our community paramedics stationed at COVID testing sites and in long-term-care facilities. Thank you Ontario for helping us help you."

0910

The pandemic provided new and unprecedented challenges to our police and fire services as well. Bruce Chapman, the president of the Police Association of Ontario says: The PAO, "on behalf of our 46 member associations and 18,000 ... civilian police personnel across the province, fully supports Bill 230, which seeks to proclaim the third week of March as Front-line and Essential Service Worker Week. Such an annual gesture will serve to thank, honour and support all front line and essential service workers—those in health and long-term care, emergency and first response, supply chain distribution and many other sectors—who have selflessly made, and continue to make, invaluable contributions to keep Ontarians healthy and safe during the worst global health crisis we've experienced in the past century."

Carmen Santoro, president of the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, also said, "Ontario's professional firefighters have responded to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic by doing what we always do, which is to work as safely and effectively as possible to keep our fellow citizens safe. On behalf of our 11,000 members on the front lines, I'm honoured to voice my support for Bill 230 and I thank MPP Rasheed for this recognition."

Speaker, before I close my remarks for this morning, I just want to share a very personal story here. As you all know, I became a father to Sofiya's and my fifth kid not too long ago; this was back in February. Right after our son Hamzah was born—and I think have shared this story here many times—we found out, two days later, that he was born with a heart condition. I think it's any parent's worst nightmare when you come to know that your newborn is born with a heart condition or any medical condition.

I remember reaching out to my colleague from Mississauga Centre right away. I asked her: "This is the situation. What can be done?" Sofiya and I really

appreciated her support and guidance throughout this process, but also, I want to thank the doctors and the entire team at Toronto's SickKids hospital, and also the Trillium Health Partners Mississauga site for being there for us and giving us comfort. Hamzah went through a surgery, and now he's recovering.

I just cannot thank them enough for the support they gave us, our incredible doctors and nurses in our health care system. They're not only doctors and nurses, but they are also human beings who understand what other human beings are going through. I really, really appreciate them, and on behalf of my family, I just want to say thank you. Thank you for helping us go through that time that I do not wish upon anyone. Thank you so much for that.

Speaker, the people on the front lines and essential service workers are proud of what they have accomplished, and their efforts and dedication are worthy and deserving of acknowledgement and celebration. I hope everyone in this House agrees with me that Bill 230 is not about politics. I just want to say that Bill 230 is not about politics; it is about saying thank you. Thank you so much. I really appreciate all the great work that our front-line and essential service workers are doing, not only during this pandemic, but pre-pandemic and post-pandemic. Thank you so much, on behalf of the government of Ontario and all my colleagues here. A big thank you to all.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd like to thank the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville.

Further debate?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It is my pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 230, the Front-line and Essential Service Worker Week Act. I think we could all agree that our front-line and essential workers have gone above and beyond during this pandemic. Many of them are burnt out and are needing a break and some support, so I don't think that any of us would oppose a bill that marks the accomplishments of and recognizes our front-line and essential workers.

I know the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville said that this bill was about gratitude, that it's not political, that it's about showing respect to these workers and showing gratitude to these workers. But, Speaker, it is political. For these workers, it is political.

We have front-line nurses who are leaving the field because they are burnt out, because they are working short-shifted every shift. They're not getting breaks; they don't get time to go to the bathroom. They don't get time to go to the bathroom. They don't have paid sick days. When they do need a break, or if they need to stay home with their kids who are sick, or if they themselves are sick, they don't have paid sick days. If we want to be showing gratitude, it has to go well beyond a week of saying, "Yay, you." There have to be concrete actions behind that.

The member from Mississauga East–Cooksville mentioned those within the long-term-care sector. I would say the same for them. Give those workers stable jobs. Ensure they have full-time hours that they can rely on, that they don't have to go from one workplace to another to another to cobble together just enough money to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table for their children. This is

what they've been asking for. These front-line essential workers have been saying, "If you want to show your gratitude for what we're doing and recognize us, then step up and do these things."

Because without actions, these words are empty and these days are empty. We can have a day where we're saying thank you to them and saying, "You're all fantastic," but they're out there doing the work and feeling like nobody cares because they don't have what they need. They don't have those full-time hours. They're continuing to work short-shifted. They're continuing to have to cobble together an income by working several jobs. I think it's a pretty simple ask from them to us to ensure that that happens.

On this side of the House, there have been numerous, numerous bills that have been introduced, legislation that would ensure we aren't just saying thank you to them and giving them a recognition week, but that there are those concrete actions in place that actually would show how appreciative all of us are.

My colleague from London West—and this bill has been tabled numerous times. I hear this rhetoric from the other side all the time, that we haven't done anything in years. This bill has been tabled numerous times over the last decade or so by my colleague from London—Fanshawe. Our leader of the official opposition has tabled this bill herself, and the member from Nickel Belt has tabled this bill numerous times through Liberal and Conservative governments: the Time to Care Act. That would actually show appreciation for those front-line workers in long-term care, because it would ensure that staffing levels are at a level where these workers aren't being run off their feet, where they're able to provide the care they need to and that they so desperately want to provide to individuals living in long-term care. But this government didn't support it and instead brought in something that is a stretch goal, really—something that the Liberals like to do.

The member from Sudbury brought in a bill that would ensure the wage floor for PSWs is raised and that those PSWs would have a permanent pay increase. This government didn't support that.

My colleague from Hamilton Mountain tabled a bill about presumptive WSIB to ensure that these front-line workers, who have gone through and seen terrible things—things that those of us in this House will never experience, and it's happened to them time and time and time again throughout this pandemic. That legislation would have made sure that when those front-line workers have to go see someone and get professional help for their PTSD or for their burnout, it would automatically be covered. This government has done nothing—nothing—with that.

0920

My colleague from Niagara Falls introduced a bill around presumptive WSIB as well, so that if a front-line or essential worker gets COVID-19, it would be presumed that it was on the job, so that they wouldn't have to fight WSIB. In many cases, as it is right now, at this moment,

those front-line workers are being denied coverage. They're saying, "Meh, you might have got it when you walked from your car into your house. Oh, wait a minute; you stopped at the store to buy milk on the way home. That's probably where you got it. We don't have to cover you." But this government has done nothing with that bill.

While I support recognition days and recognition weeks, I implore the government to actually take concrete action to show that you appreciate these workers, to support these workers, because words are absolutely nothing to these workers without the action that needs to be taken.

The government had an opportunity. These front-line, essential workers are saying, "We need paid sick days." It doesn't matter whether they're in health care or whether they're working in a factory or a grocery store. It doesn't matter what workplace they are in. If they are essential, front-line workers, they need paid sick days. This government didn't support it. My colleague from London West brought a bill forward, and the government voted against it, and then patted themselves on the back after they eliminated the only two paid sick days they had—this government eliminated that—and then patted themselves on the back after thousands of workers and workplaces across the province—look at what happened at Amazon workplaces. After thousands of workers got sick and some died, this government finally said, "Okay, we're going to act like we're heroes and pat ourselves on the back. We're going to give you three paid sick days." And they want to say it's more than that, but it's a federal program. They're taking credit for a federal program that also does not work for workers, and the workers are telling you that and they're telling the federal government that. That's a concrete action. Give them permanent paid sick days. That's a way to show you appreciate those workers.

I hear from the nurses. I hear from ICU nurses and critical care nurses all the time what they're going through right now. What they're saying they need, loud and clear—they just said it last Friday; there was a huge rally. I don't know if anybody from the government side tuned in to join that rally or listened to what they were saying. The message was very loud and clear: "We don't need empty words. We need your support."

With that, Speaker, again, I will implore this government to give these workers what it is they are asking for. The one final ask—and that's something they could do today, before this House rises for the summer on Thursday. Do it. The one message they sent loud and clear is to repeal Bill 124, because you cannot stand here and say that you support these workers and you appreciate these workers—the vast majority of them are women and racialized women—and then say, "But we're going to suppress your wages and we're going to trample on your collective bargaining rights." You can't do that. Those of us on this side of the House don't buy that narrative, and these front-line workers don't buy that narrative either. As they really importantly pointed out, the workers who are disproportionately impacted by that wage suppression bill are women. And yet in male-dominated professions, they

haven't been affected by this—not at all. In fact, they've seen their wages go up.

So, I want the government side to actually think about how to put action behind their words and to do it quickly, because we are losing these front-line workers. We are starting to see these front-line workers leaving their fields because they just can't do it anymore, without us behind them, putting that action behind our words.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I rise this morning to speak to the bill before us, Bill 230, Front-line and Essential Service Worker Week Act. Front-line and essential workers are retail workers, grocery staff, truck drivers, health care workers, transit drivers and educators, just to name a few. These are the folks that deserve so much thanks and praise for essentially keeping our province operating during the COVID pandemic. The Premier has called these workers champions and heroes, and they are—really, really, they are. Truly, they are. Do they deserve a week recognizing their selfless efforts and the personal risks they took to their own health along with their families' health? Absolutely, 100%. Of course front-line workers deserve recognition, and the official opposition has stood in this House for months and months asking for their recognition in the form of paid sick days, full-time work with benefits, WSIB coverage, proper wages and the ability to bargain without a Ford-government-imposed wage freeze.

We want to recognize essential workers by providing the PPE, safety and health concerns needed as they have put themselves at personal risk. This bill mentions none of those things. It does declare a week to acknowledge the work they continue to do, and I am all for that. But, Mr. Speaker, who would not support that kind of recognition for the very folks who have kept Ontario moving during the pandemic, who have contributed enormously to our economy in a difficult time?

Of course, I can stand and say, "Give them that recognition." However, gestures are all well and good, but this government has failed at every step in our COVID recovery strategy. They routinely reject our bills and motions calling for tangible methods to actually provide essential and front-line workers with the assistance they need. Mr. Speaker, this government seems to be badly out of touch with those champions, heroes they speak about and are apparently clueless on how their day-to-day lives really are.

Let me paint the picture for them of an average PSW essential worker, a front-line worker, in York South-Weston. This average worker works in long-term care as a PSW and earns around just over \$17. This is part-time employment with no benefits, and the person is often female, racialized and living in crowded conditions due to affordability of housing. They work two part-time jobs in two different workplaces to get close to full-time hours. Travelling to these workplaces on overcrowded buses and often having to make more than one connection is the reality of their very long day. Then they arrive for work in a for-profit long-term care that is drastically understaffed

and they do the very best they can. On average, the ratio is 30 residents per home and four PSWs to provide care.

They return to their families physically and emotionally exhausted, day after day after day. And in York South-Weston, a designated hot spot with a high risk of transmission, they have spent the past 15 months dealing with, initially, no permanent COVID testing facilities and now no permanent vaccine facilities. This is the essential worker's reality in our community of York South-Weston. So when I see a bill such as this declaring a week to tip our hat to them, I know full well we can do so much more.

Just this week, the government passed a bill regulating PSWs. The government stated time and again that this is what PSWs told them they needed. Well, Mr. Speaker, does the government in their heart really believe that the typical PSW whose life experience I described, when asked, is saying the biggest help they could get is to be regulated and to be given a week of recognition? Clearly not; they need real paid sick days. They need pandemic pay for every essential worker, retroactive to the beginning of the pandemic. An immediate \$5-an-hour raise is needed for PSWs, and full-time jobs instead of part-time with no benefits.

These essential workers had to fight for access to proper PPE during the pandemic. Mr. Speaker, this government can do so much more to honour and acknowledge the work of essential employees.

0930

Time and again, the government has fallen short. Their reaction to the pandemic has always been weeks behind, a day late and a dollar short. The pandemic has been a difficult struggle, and it has devastated communities. I believe history will not be kind to this government when they see the inaction and outright neglect in how it has dealt with and strategized on our COVID response.

This last week, as the government recesses for the summer, they leave not with a bang but with a whimper, as regulating PSWs and declaring essential worker week is the best they can offer to the decent, hard-working essential workers and front-line heroes and champions.

So much more could have been done, but the suggestions of the official opposition were dismissed, unions and community organizations were not listened to and the government's own science table was ignored. Families in Ontario see this, Mr. Speaker, and the government will have to live with the regrettable and unfortunate decisions they have made during this pandemic.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm proud to be able to stand to support this bill today, An Act to proclaim Front-line and Essential Service Worker Week. I think Bill 230 is a good bill. There's nothing wrong with this bill. We will definitely be supporting this bill.

As you know, the last few months of this session, or the last 15 months of this pandemic—forever—New Democrats have been supporting workers in this province, fighting for better rights for workers, trying to ensure that when a worker goes to work, they come home healthy.

These are the types of things that New Democrats do. This is what we've always done.

My problem with this bill is that there's no meat to it. It proclaims a week. It allows us to celebrate those essential workers. It allows them to give themselves a pat on the back and know that there is something for them. The problem, like I said, is that the meat part of it is, what are we doing to actually support these workers? What will this bill do to make the life of an essential worker better? When I look at this bill, I find nothing. There's nothing there. We're going to be able to send them some flowers, hang some balloons, put up a banner saying it's essential workers' week, but they still won't have the paid sick days they need. They won't have the mental health supports they need. They won't have the proper pay they need and deserve. They won't have the proper supports at work that they need to be able to do this hard work. None of that is included in this bill—none of it.

I mean, we have put forward so many ideas, which my colleague from Windsor West has talked about, to be able to ensure that workers have those paid sick days. I believe we voted on paid sick days probably 25 times in this House in the last couple of months, and each time the government voted it down. Then they came out with their own paid sick days that actually counteract the federal paid sick days. If a low-income worker needs to be able to access those three paid sick days, they are then not eligible for the federal government's week of paid sick days, so it counteracts.

That bill was written on the fly. It took over a year for the government to deal with these paid sick days. Everybody in the province was begging the government to provide paid sick days to front-line workers to ensure that we could keep COVID-19 out of the workplace, which we know has been one of the greatest spreaders throughout this pandemic. They threw together a bill at the last minute that counteracted the federal one. Instead of the three weeks they would have received through the federal, they'll now get three days of the provincial and lose those other two days of the federal because they won't qualify for that week now. These are the troubles that weren't taken into consideration when the government put forward the "best paid sick day program ever." The best paid sick day program left workers without two days of pay. It's not exactly what our essential workers, who we want to celebrate, deserve.

I put forward a bill, Bill 267, on access to mental health supports for essential workers. That bill came directly from my riding. Through the pandemic, Grace Villa, which is a long-term-care facility in my riding, had one of the worst outbreaks. We lost 44 people; 88 staff and 167 residents were sick. It was absolutely horrific. Those workers sent me letters—handwritten letters they sent me, delivered them to my door—talking about the war zone, talking about the inability to care for the people who they had been caring for and loved and become family with, walking into rooms with no sheets on the bed. There's no more clean linen left, with management telling them, "Yes, there is," and they're like, "No, there's not." They're

ripping up bed sheets to be able to dress wounds and to be able to provide some kind of cleaning for them. This is how we treat our seniors. This is how we treat workers who are taking care of our seniors. What those workers needed—and so many of them told me that they had PTSD, they had depression, they have anxiety and they don't know how they're going to manage to get through all of this and to continue to keep going and continue to provide that so desperately needed care for our seniors.

So we put forward a bill saying, "Okay, if you've got PTSD, if you have depression, through our presumptive legislation, through WSIB you can access mental health supports. We'll give you the help to take care of you for taking care of us, for taking care of our parents, for taking care of our grandparents." What does the government do? No. Vote it down. Vote it down. No mental health supports for front-line workers.

And it's not just our long-term-care workers. Think about our grocery store workers; think about our retail workers. We have young people working in our grocery stores, and I stop in—I go to several grocery stores in my riding and I'm always asking them how they're doing, how they're feeling, telling them about the bill that I tried to put forward for them, and they tell me, "That would have done so good for me. I could really use that support. I don't need a lot of time off work, but I need some support." And they can't access that. They can't access it. But what they will have is they'll have a week to celebrate them without giving them what they need. There's something wrong there.

The member talks about it not being about politics. Everything that happens in our province stems from politics—everything. Every decision comes from politics. Someone who says that it's not about politics who is actually a politician needs to step back and have a look at what exactly it is we're supposed to be doing in this House. We are sent here to serve the people of our communities and to ensure that the people of Ontario have the necessities they need to be able to go to work, to care for our seniors; that they have the ability to continue to stay in those grocery stores; that they have the ability to run a small business. But none of the measures that come from this government actually fulfill those needs, and then we talk about, "It's not politics."

It's politics when the government House leader says to me, "Private members' bills are free. My members are able to vote how they wish on private members' bills." Then I see the whip staff standing out in the hallway, taking notes, "Oh, no, don't vote here; you vote over there." That sounds like a whipped vote to me. That looks like whipped votes to me. The members don't have the ability to vote on private members' bills as they choose—

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Barrie—Innisfil on a point of order.

0940

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I think the member is imputing motive here as to whether people are voting their conscience or not—

Miss Monique Taylor: Oh, sit down. Sit down.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin:—so I just want to question that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I appreciate the point of order, and I will caution the member that we have the benefit of the doubt right now. But, again, please refrain from any other comments. I'll give you an opportunity to recall that comment if you wish. Thank you.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thanks, Speaker. It's unfortunate that I seem to have hit a nerve on the other side.

But what we're talking about is the people who make our province work. It is the people who go to work each and every day to allow us the ability to have safe, healthy communities. That is what we're sent here to do: to create safe, healthy communities. And when you cannot see past your own nose and your own political will to ensure that those same workers that don't have mental health supports, that don't have paid sick days, that don't have proper working environments, that are sent to job after job after job, not paid for travel time, not able to provide the care that they need to provide to our seniors because they're double-booked and because they're backed up—then we have a problem.

So it's just truly unfortunate that the government failed to provide so many bills that were put forward by New Democrats, private members' bills that they should have had free votes for and didn't, and that this is the bill that the essential workers will get at the end of the session of the Ontario Legislature for the spring session. This is what they get. They get a week, but they don't get the supports they need to be able to function and to have healthy lives.

I will be supporting this bill, and each third week of March every year, I will put up my banners, I will show my support and I will wrap myself around our essential workers, as I would any other day. But I will also remind them that we care about them and that we will push for better and that we will ensure they have the necessities that they need to be able to provide the job that we need.

With that, I thank you for the time and the opportunity to be able to put a few thoughts on record today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? Further debate? I recognize the member from Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I think I got in under the wire there, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate you for taking a few seconds to see this little guy over here.

I think it's so important to get up and talk on this issue. I listened to my colleague in front of me talk about supporting the bill and for the week when we're going to celebrate, when we're all going to go and thank our essential workers. Because for the last 15 months, on this side of the House, we've been doing everything we can to make sure that all essential workers know how valuable they are to the overall health of our economy.

Yet when you take a look at what the Conservatives have done over the last 15 months, they rolled back the minimum wage—one of the first things that they did. When our essential workers needed pandemic pay at Zehrs, some of these places that have some of the richest

corporations in the world, quite frankly—they stopped their pandemic pay.

We take a look at ONA: Just last week, on Friday, they had to have a Zoom meeting with thousands of people on it to talk about Bill 124 and the attack on collective bargaining. The one thing I don't understand, quite frankly, is that inflation is running at 2.2% right now, yet this government, under Bill 124, which should be repealed, is capping wages at 1%. Is that how you thank essential workers?

And then, if you move into the long-term-care and retirement homes, quite frankly, when they needed this government to make sure that they all had PPE, they didn't have it; when they needed to make sure that they had staffing to take care of our seniors in our long-term-care and retirement homes, it wasn't there for them. So to bring up a week and how much we care about essential workers, you have to take a look at what you've done. And, yes, we're going to celebrate them. I go up and thank essential workers every day, whether I go to my local corner store, I go to Shoppers, I go to the grocery store. I'm a lot like my colleague from Hamilton: I go to a number of grocery stores and talk to the workers there. They don't feel supported. They're overworked, they're understaffed and they're underpaid. None of that was taken care of over the last 15 months. When they had the opportunity to do it, they chose not to.

I take a look at those PSWs. We just had a bill that we debated for hours that, quite frankly, wasn't supported by the unions that represent those workers: Unifor, CUPE, ONA, SEIU. Do you know what those four unions have in common? Hopefully, my colleagues over there are listening. I see the minister is over there. Do you know what they all have in common? They're fighting for their workers. But every one of those unions had a member of their union die during COVID-19. They died because they didn't have proper PPE. They died because they didn't have enough staffing. And as hard as the union was fighting to get PPE for their members, as hard as they were fighting to get more staff in our long-term-care and our retirement homes, as hard as they were trying to make the government and the employers live up to their collective agreements, it never happened. And workers who were taking care of our loved ones died on the job with COVID-19. If we would have provided what they needed—the staffing, the PPE—those workers would be here with us today. Those families wouldn't be suffering. Their kids wouldn't be suffering. Their grandkids wouldn't be suffering. That's all we had to do.

My colleague again talked upon something that is very interesting to me. When you say you care about essential workers—and not just essential workers; I think we care for all our workers, quite frankly. She brought up about WSIB and presumptive language. We know, today, in our hospitals that 800 of our essential workers today are arguing with WSIB to get coverage, because they caught COVID-19 and they've got to argue to prove to WSIB—instead of supporting her bill, presumptive language. I've talked about WSIB here. Do you know how many people

are on WSIB who are now being deemed, who are essential workers, who are now going to be forced to live in poverty?

That's how you start thanking workers. That's how you start thanking essential workers. You pay them properly. You make sure they have proper PPE. You make sure that you show respect. You talk to organizations like ONA and repeal Bill 124. That's how you send a message of how much we care about them. None of that has been done by this government.

I had a question yesterday on deeming; they said no. My colleague had a question on presumptive language; they said no. Repeal Bill 124; they said no. They're saying no to all our essential workers, yet we want to have a week. It reminds me a little bit about—and I'll wrap this up because I only have five minutes. It reminds me a little bit about our health and safety week, when labour already had a day on April 28, our Day of Mourning, yet we have a week to celebrate health and safety, but we didn't take care, by supporting my deeming bill, of those same workers who were getting injured and killed on the job.

So I'll wrap up and say, yes, we're going to support the bill, as my colleague has said. We're going to continue to thank our essential workers—not just that week. We thank them every day. They've had it tough for the last 15 months. We're going to continue to thank them and support this bill, but this government can do a lot more. I gave you five or six quick examples that they said no to, and essential workers will never forget.

0950

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: It's an honour to speak to this bill on Front-line and Essential Service Worker Week. Speaker, essential workers week is something which is dear to me as the representative for Brampton North. My city is full of front-line workers and essential workers. I want to acknowledge these heroes who are putting themselves in harm's way to get us through this pandemic.

It's sad to see that these front-line essential workers aren't being treated like the heroes they are by this government. Our front-line workers still don't have an adequate paid sick days program. Our health care workers are still lacking the resources they need, and they aren't getting paid enough. We still don't have this government's commitment to another hospital in Brampton, and we had our local public health units pick up the slack of this government's vaccine distribution.

This was unacceptable for a hot spot like Brampton, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, we are full of essential workers who needed to be vaccinated to keep our health care system and economy running, and to ensure we all have access to the essential goods and services.

In Brampton, we have seen more than 100 workplace outbreaks during this pandemic. Our workforce in Brampton is full of these many essential workers and front-line workers who still don't have adequate paid sick days. I'm going to say this over and over again through this next five minutes: Three paid sick days are not

enough. The government knows that, we know that, as well as the doctors' association, the nurses' association—even businesses know that three days is not enough.

Our workers need and deserve at least 14 paid sick days. Otherwise, our workers—we've seen it in Brampton and across the Peel region—are still having to go to work with a snuffle or a cough, because they don't know if they have COVID or not and they know that they're not going to get paid. That's why they're going to work sick, Mr. Speaker.

On top of that, Mr. Speaker, front-line workers had to wait too long to get vaccinated despite living and working in a hot spot with postal codes which were deemed hot spot zones in Brampton. When they rolled out the early vaccines, Brampton was not in the early pilot program. It makes no sense. It made no sense.

Interjection.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: The member from Mississauga—I'm not sure what he is saying, but he's aware. He's a Peel region representative and he knows that we should have been in this original rollout.

We also know, Mr. Speaker, that BIPOC communities are being disproportionately affected, impacted and infected by this virus. These BIPOC communities make up a large part of essential workers in Brampton and across the Peel region. We can see those effects in Brampton. We saw the virus impact us disproportionately. We are one of the hardest-hit cities, with our positivity rate climbing over 20% sometimes in the last month. It's a horrifying statistic, especially when you listen to our medical officer of health, Dr. Lawrence Loh, who said one in five people in Brampton had COVID. So if you're going to the store, all you had to do is just assume that the person next to you may have COVID.

These are essential workers who were not getting vaccinated, Mr. Speaker. So, the government wants to talk about having an essential and front-line worker day, but they have to provide the services, they have to put the money forward to make sure that these workers are protected.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the fact that these illnesses in Brampton, the large numbers, could have been prevented if the government had invested in Brampton's health care system. Brampton Civic has seen overcapacity since day one. Since the day it opened, it was overcapacity. However, the answer to that by this government is to build another hospital—but we all know it's not an additional hospital; what it is, is an addition to Peel Memorial, and it doesn't take effect until some time in 2023, after the next election. So it's a promise which the people in Peel and Brampton know is a broken promise.

We need a third stand-alone hospital. We have over 600,000 people in Brampton, and our population is continuing to grow.

I'm hoping that this government will listen to our side and our stories and provide reliable, adequate health care, not just for Brampton but right across Ontario, if they are anywhere serious about dealing with this pandemic.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? Further debate?

Mr. Rasheed has moved third reading of Bill 230, An Act to proclaim Front-line and Essential Service Worker Week.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

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

Third reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Orders of the day? I recognize the member from Barrie–Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: No further business.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): There being no further business, this House stands recessed until 10:15.

The House recessed from 0956 to 1015.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SAÚL ARIAS LÓPEZ

Ms. Jill Andrew: Saúl Arias López died by suicide at the age of 16 this year. He was a child in my community. He loved his family, his friends, guitar, books, dinosaurs, science club at the ROM, and he loved music. He earned his second-degree black belt by the time he was 12. He was happy.

At-home learning wore Saúl down. He began to fall academically in classes that he loved, and when he was in school, none of his friends were in his cohort. Isolation, loneliness, anxiety, loss of routine, missed milestones and a growing sense of doom and gloom captured him.

Our local hospitals have seen unprecedented spikes during the pandemic in kids' mental health crises and attempts at self-harm. Sadly, some are successful. Government, listening to science, telling families the full story last year and delivering families a solid safe schools plan might have meant a different ending for Saúl this year.

I'm going to end with the lyrics from a song called Tears of a Clown, by Iron Maiden, one of Saúl's favourite bands. The song was dedicated to renowned actor Robin Williams, and Saúl's parents, Marcela and Saúl Sr., dedicated it to their son, their only child.

All looks well on the outside
Underneath the solemn truth
There's something that inside has died

Tomorrow comes, tomorrow goes
But the cloud remains the same
Wonder why he's feeling down
Tears of a clown

Marcela is watching this morning. Marcela, I'm very sorry for your loss.

MÉTIS NATION OF ONTARIO LEGACY PRESERVATION PROJECT PROJET DE PRÉSERVATION DE L'HÉRITAGE DE LA NATION MÉTISSE DE L'ONTARIO

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: I'm thrilled to share with this House news of a major Métis project in North Bay: the Métis Nation of Ontario legacy preservation project. This project will create the first-ever Métis time capsule, preserving the Métis culture, history and way of life for generations to come.

Monsieur le Président, nos coeurs sont brisés avec la découverte tragique de 215 enfants qui reposent à l'ancien pensionnat autochtone de Kamloops la semaine dernière. Alors, les initiatives comme celle-ci sont encore plus importantes pour protéger et favoriser les cultures et les histoires indigènes.

La Nation métisse de l'Ontario a été formée en 1993 par le militant des droits des Métis et président fondateur Tony Belcourt, avec la vision d'avoir un organisme autonome pour réaliser une meilleure autodétermination pour les Métis de l'Ontario. Au cours de sa présidence, il a milité sans relâche pour faire avancer la reconnaissance des peuples métis et de leurs droits.

In 2008, the MNO-Ontario Framework Agreement was signed, recognizing the unique history and way of life for Métis people in Ontario. Since then, MNO has continued to advance Métis rights with government, including the historic 2019 signing of the self-governance agreement between Canada and MNO.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony for the time capsule will be November 16 of this year, which commemorates the annual recognition of Louis Riel Day. This gives us all an opportunity to learn more about the Métis community, culture and citizens. Merci. Thank you. Si kwaarayk. Marsi.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Wayne Gates: I rise today to discuss an ongoing issue facing our community in Niagara: MRI wait times.

For several years, we've been waiting for this government to ensure Niagara receives adequate funding to ensure the people in our community can receive an MRI in a reasonable timeframe. Under the previous government, we were successful in passing a motion, ultimately securing funding to drastically reduce the wait times. Unfortunately, Niagara is facing the same problem again.

Right now, only 6% of Niagara residents, as compared to 46% of Ontario residents, have received their MRI within the provincial current benchmark of 28 days. The current wait time for MRIs in Niagara is 255 days; the provincial average is 141. There are currently 5,000 Niagara residents waiting for MRIs at Niagara Health. Fortunately, through the hard work of the Niagara Health Foundation and the generous support of Tom Rankin of Rankin Construction, Niagara Health was able to secure a new MRI machine. This is wonderful news for our community and a further example of the community-minded nature of many Niagara businesses like Rankin.

1020

While this is great news, we know that Niagara Health will need the necessary funding to ensure they can run 16 hours per day, seven days a week, to help ease the backlog of cases.

We are calling on this government to approve the request of annual funding, reduce our wait times and ensure that the people of Niagara have quality health care. No one in Niagara or anywhere in this province should be waiting 255 days for an MRI.

PRIDE MONTH

NATIONAL INDIGENOUS HISTORY
MONTH

Ms. Jane McKenna: Speaker, in June, the northern hemisphere celebrates the summer solstice, the day with the most hours of light. The summer solstice serves as a reminder that we all have infinite opportunities every day to bring light into the lives of those around us.

In celebrating Pride Month and the vital role of 2SLGBTQ+ communities in our province, we can also reflect on our continued commitment and responsibility to create a more inclusive environment. When we hear about symbols of pride being stolen, vandalized or not being displayed, we know that we still have a long way to go.

June is also National Indigenous History Month, a time to honour and celebrate the traditions, heritage and culture of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples across Ontario and Canada. This year, as we reflect on the strength and resiliency of Canada's Indigenous people, we also honour the 215 Indigenous children who lost their lives at the former residential school in Kamloops, BC.

Speaker, we can honour these children and their families by committing to the calls for action outlined in the 2015 report by the federal government's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. And as Ontario's Minister of Indigenous Affairs said earlier this week, we can also support the investigation of former residential school grounds here in Ontario.

June is a month of celebration and light and many opportunities to help make things so much better.

YORK SOUTH–WESTON
YOUTH COUNCIL

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I'm honoured today to rise and give voice to the York South–Weston youth council. These young leaders have been deeply engaged in amplifying the voices of youth in our community. The council has recently focused on education and mental health-related issues. The youth council is very concerned with youth unemployment and is calling on the renewal of the Canada Emergency Student Benefit. The council states:

“As summer inches closer and OSAP continues to primarily provide loans to students whose work opportunities continue to either be cancelled or are few in number due to lockdowns and public health measures.

“This lack of support has left many students having to choose between their education and their well-being.

“A renewal of the CESB program can support students during these extremely precarious times and could help prevent them from facing unstable housing, food insecurity and dropping out of education. The long-term costs related to these struggles will be much greater to our students, our community and to Canadian society.”

I thank the York South–Weston youth council for their continued hard work and input, and I encourage other members to form their own youth councils and help empower young people and amplify their voices.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Roman Baber: As we rise for the summer, I'd like to speak directly to Ontarians.

I know how hard it is for so many of you. With everyone's mental health in peril and businesses closed, towns and cities are dying. I hear from so many of you and I feel you so much, so I invite you to think and focus for a minute.

In the dark days of fall and winter, we didn't know what the world was going to look like. We couldn't speak or express skepticism about what the government was doing or what the experts were saying on TV. We had so much fear about the future of our democracy.

But now our voices are heard loud and clear, and we are pushing back. We will not allow for our freedoms to be eroded and will peacefully defend our children, our lives and livelihoods, because we're smarter and kinder.

The people who work in this chamber are afraid of you right now, because a year from now, if you choose so, you'll get to fire all of them.

But here's what's important right now: It's not just about coming out of lockdown; it's the terms by which we come out of lockdown and open Ontario. The only terms acceptable are a complete return to normal. If other countries and provinces can do it, then so can we. We will not negotiate. We must demand that our way of life is restored in full.

They're scrambling right now in this building because you already pushed them back. Now we must insist on how this ends. A full return to normal is non-negotiable, and so the future is bright because we'll accept nothing less.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: For months now, Ontario has been calling on the federal government to secure our borders against emerging variants of concern. Our requests have fallen on deaf ears as the Prime Minister and his caucus refuse to acknowledge this serious matter. Earlier this week, the St. Catharines Standard reported, “Province-wide in recent days, the B1617 variant has been found in 322 cases, up from 45 a few weeks ago.”

Speaker, the B1617 variant is the one currently ravaging India, with tens of thousands dead and a health care

system on the brink of collapse. Obviously, Speaker, these variants cannot swim, nor do they have wings to fly. The Prime Minister of Canada has failed this province and all Canadians by not securing our borders against these deadly variants of COVID-19. The last thing Ontario needs right now is a fourth wave to set back all the progress we all have made collectively this year. I encourage everyone to reach out to their federal representatives and call for securing our borders now, before it is too late.

EDUCATION

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: My child is in grade 1, but she essentially has missed grade 1, such an important year. The teachers have done an incredible job, and we as parents have done our best while juggling our own jobs, but it's not the same. For such a formative year, it's a huge loss with lasting impacts. So many parents feel the same way about their children. That's what this past school year has been.

Now that we are near the end of the school year, all I am thinking is we cannot repeat this mess. We must get it right next school year. So things need to start now: the planning, the consultations, the upgrades to ventilation systems. Everything needs to happen now so that, come September, schools can reopen safely.

For the past year, this government has made announcements that give people zero information or clarity, or said one thing one day and the complete opposite the next—like right now. First you say schools will reopen before the economy, and now it's reopen the economy before the schools, and yet we still don't know what's really on your mind.

This government seems to be unable to make decisions. Yes, decisions have consequences, but not making decisions also has consequences, and the consequences of your inability to lead and provide leadership have cost us not just in dollars, but in terms of people's present and future.

The Conservatives love to brand themselves as the business people, executives making decisions effectively, efficiently. Well, judging by what's going on right now, it's clearly a myth. You have time now—three months, an entire quarter—until the next school year. So come quarter-end, you'd better have something to show for it or you will have missed your quarter, and when you miss again and again, you get fired.

AMYOTROPHIC LATERAL SCLEROSIS

Mrs. Robin Martin: June is ALS Awareness Month in Canada. Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, is a terminal disease of progressive paralysis that eventually leads to the loss of the ability to move, speak and breathe. This disease can move with startling swiftness: Four out of five people die within two to five years of their diagnosis.

Over time, as the brain's connection with the muscles of the body breaks down, someone living with ALS will

lose the ability to walk, talk, eat, swallow and eventually breathe. There is no cure for ALS and few treatment options available for the 1,000 Ontarians living with this devastating disease.

1030

On June 20, supporters of the ALS Society of Canada will rally together for the virtual Walk to End ALS in communities across Ontario. The Walk to End ALS helps raise the funds that enable people living with ALS to access services that lessen the burden of the disease and that ensure a strong pipeline of funding for Canadian ALS research.

I want to extend my best wishes to the ALS community across Ontario participating in the June ALS Awareness Month and the Walk to End ALS. I encourage everyone to learn more about the disease and to sign up for the walk at www.als.ca or walktoendals.ca.

GAS THEFT

Mr. Deepak Anand: Last week, my heart ached at reading the newspaper headline: 66-year-old senselessly killed during gas-and-dash theft in Drumbo, near Woodstock. Stephen Madigan was a loving father, grandfather and an outstanding citizen.

Should this incident have happened in BC or Alberta, this manslaughter could have been avoided. These provinces have gone ahead and made the prepayment of gas mandatory and have since then seen practically zero cases of gas-and-dash thefts.

My Bill 231, passed with unanimous consent in the House, is advocating to make prepayment of gas mandatory so we can avoid similar tragedies going forward. We have received support letters from the police services, PAO, police services boards, Rabba Fine Foods, the Ontario Convenience Stores Association, Husky, Hasty Market, 7-Eleven and many more.

This incident unfortunately shows us that this is not an issue just in the urban areas. This is an issue that affects all Ontarians. So I want to say thank you to all of my colleagues for your support.

Let me repeat: The death of Stephen Madigan was completely avoidable. The time for action is now. I implore all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to keep working together to ensure we bring safety and security for fellow Ontarians. Let's make prepayment a reality and say goodbye to such headlines forever.

MEMBERS' EXPENDITURES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that we have laid upon the table the individual members' expenditures for the fiscal year 2020-21.

SIKH GENOCIDE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Brampton East has informed me that he has a point of order he wishes to raise, and I'm pleased to recognize him.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: I rise today to call for the unanimous consent of this House to observe a moment of silence to remember the countless Sikhs who were murdered by the Indian government in the June 1984 Sikh genocide. Lest we forget.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member from Brampton East is seeking the unanimous consent of the House for a moment's silence to observe and remember the victims of the Sikh genocide from 1984. Agreed? Agreed.

Members will please rise.

The House observed a moment's silence.

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

QUESTION PERIOD

EDUCATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, good morning. My first question this morning is for the Premier. It's been two weeks since this government announced opening plans and forgot to mention anything about schools. For over a year this government has ignored and dismissed the concerns about the necessity to get our schools safely open. It's clear, based on media reports, that this government had no plan—except for polling—and they have no plan now.

My question to the Premier is: Is it really the case that this Premier is making decisions about the mental, emotional and physical well-being of our children based on political polling instead of pediatric advice?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: We were concentrating on students and their educational success even before the pandemic started, but as the pandemic raged on through the province of Ontario through the first wave, we worked very hard to ensure that kids could return to school last September in a safe fashion. I'm quite proud of what our educators were able to accomplish, and not only just the educators—while I have the floor, I'll say a big thank you to Ms. Greco and to Ms. Shapiro, teachers for my two daughters—but the maintenance workers, the principals and the administrative staff, who have made our schools some of the safest schools in the province of Ontario through September.

Let's remember that it was the opposition who did not want our kids to return to in-person school in September, Mr. Speaker. We knew parents did. That's why we had the option for in-school as well as online. It's been very successful. We will continue to put the needs of students first.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: We all know that Ontario is the only province in Canada without kids in school, and there's a reason for that. It's not an accident. This government walked us right into the third wave, ignoring the

advice of experts. They attacked critics who were working so hard to demand safer schools for our kids. In fact, as we just found out the other day, they were claiming that there was no spread of COVID-19 in schools, even though all along they knew that wasn't the case.

Kids in the classroom were supposed to come first. That's what was supposed to be the priority. Does the Premier accept any responsibility whatsoever for the fact that children in Ontario are the only kids in the entire country who are not back in their classrooms?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The Leader of the Opposition did not want kids to return to school in-person at all. Mr. Speaker, you will recall last September the leader of the official opposition was not in favour of a return to in-person learning for our students. We knew that that had to happen, and that's why we made serious investments in ventilation. That's why we ensured that there was additional staffing and there were additional maintenance workers to ensure that the schools were safe. That was done remarkably well.

It's not a hallmark of the government. We put the resources in place, yes, but it is the hard-working teachers, it's the hard-working staff, it's the boards of education who worked very closely with us, worked with the Chief Medical Officer of Health of the province of Ontario, worked with the medical officers of health in the different 34 public health units and made sure that a return to school was safe. And it has gone very well.

Of course, the opposition did not want that. They're never ones to want to listen to what parents want, certainly never putting the needs of students first. We will continue to do that, not only because it's the right thing to do now, it's the right thing to do for the future of the province of Ontario.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This Premier has never actually done what was the right thing for the people of Ontario during COVID. He never had a plan for kids in the classroom. Clearly, two weeks ago, there was no plan. He announced a reopening and left families and kids and teachers hanging. There was no mention of schools. It was clear when he spent the last year claiming that schools are safe when, in fact, they knew that that wasn't the case. It was clear when the science table was literally screaming recommendations at the government about reopening too fast, which they just simply ignored and created this brutal third wave that we're now dealing with.

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All of the experts—experts from SickKids, experts from CHEO, from the Canadian Paediatric Society—say this: Kids “have suffered immeasurably over the course of the pandemic.... The benefits of a few weeks in the classroom cannot be overstated.” That's what the experts say.

Why doesn't the Premier care about the emotional, physical and mental well-being of the children of Ontario?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Is the Leader of the Opposition really, truly listening to herself when she asks these

questions? I'm a father of two kids who are both in school, who are both learning online. Is she really suggesting that I, as a father, and those of my colleagues here who are also parents who have kids in school somehow don't care about children? It is preposterous, Mr. Speaker.

What we have done since the beginning is ensure that the resources were in place to get our kids into school safely. We know it has been difficult—not only difficult for all Ontarians and difficult for our small, medium and large job creators but extremely difficult for our youngest Ontarians. They are the future of the province of Ontario. They are the ones who will be sitting in this place when we are long gone, paying for the decisions that we have made today. That's why we ensured that our schools are safe. That's why we ensured last September that they went in school, even though it was the Leader of the Opposition who suggested that they should stay home. When the Chief Medical Officer of Health was saying, "Send them to school," we said yes. They said no. We won't listen to them, Mr. Speaker.

EDUCATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is for the Premier, but I think it's pretty clear that actions speak louder than words in terms of this government's behaviour.

It has been clear for over a year what was needed in our schools, what was needed to be done to keep our classrooms safe: bring class sizes down to 15; get rid of the backlog of repairs that have been hanging over since the Liberals were in charge; vaccination of teachers and education workers and widespread testing in our schools; working with education workers.

And instead, what did we get? The Ford government cut the education budget. The Ford government attacked teachers and education workers. The Ford government failed to conduct any effective testing that would have given them information about the spread of COVID-19 in schools, and of course, they claimed that there was no spread even though they knew that wasn't the case.

So my question is, will this Premier answer my question? Will he admit that his failures have led to the fact that Ontario is now the only province in our country that doesn't have kids back in the classroom?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think the people of the province of Ontario will recall quite clearly that it was the Leader of the Opposition who in September asked us not to send kids back to school, and we said, "No, we have to have that done." We knew how important it was to the youngest Ontarians that they continue their education but also to give options for parents so that they could learn at home if that's what they felt they needed to do. We put that in place. We ensured that there were repairs to ventilation. We ensured that there were thousands of additional staff brought into boards across the province—thousands of additional teachers, hundreds of additional maintenance

workers—to keep our schools safe and to ensure that there was safety in the schools. We brought in testing for students. We have done all of that so that our kids could continue learning. We understand how important it is and how difficult this has been. That's why we've put additional resources in for mental health. We'll continue to do that, and we will ensure that kids have the best-quality education possible.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, tragically, the schools and the kids not being in the classroom are only the latest example of this Premier and this government's failure when it comes to the response to COVID-19. As we know, they ignored warnings that kept kids out of the classroom. They ignored warnings that led to 4,000 seniors losing their lives in long-term care. They ignored warnings in February that marched us right into this brutal third wave that we've all been trying to deal with. Every step of the way, they've ignored the warnings, they've denied the facts and they have put politics ahead of people.

Why was this government focused on "protecting the king" instead of protecting the people of Ontario?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think that question really speaks for itself, and I think it really underlines why it is that the NDP have never been given the confidence of the people of the province of Ontario to form a government but one disastrous time, a disaster that led the former NDP Premier to abandon his own party for another party.

What this Premier has done and what this government has done is focus on the people of the province of Ontario, keeping them safe, Mr. Speaker, right from day one. Even before the pandemic hit, we were working on long-term care, we were working on health care, increasing health care capacity. We knew that we had to bring in more staff. We knew that we needed more ICU capacity. We were working on that in advance of the pandemic, despite the fact that every single time that opposition voted against those investments, Mr. Speaker.

What it is, is you have to plan before, during and after. We have done that, and when we come out of this pandemic, we will lead the nation in economic growth like we did before the pandemic.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, teachers and parents and kids are exhausted. They're stressed out. There has been year after year of unpredictability, of disruption and uncertainty in our classrooms. Teachers, education workers and parents have all gone above and beyond during this pandemic. All of them deserve a government that prioritizes the mental, physical and emotional well-being of the children of this province, but that's not what they've seen from their government. Why?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, since day one, since we were elected, we knew that we had to make some serious changes in the province of Ontario. That is why the people of the province of Ontario entrusted us to make those changes.

When it comes to education, we started right away. We looked at those math scores and we knew we had to do something different. We looked at the science scores and we knew we had to do something different. That's why we started putting resources into those areas, so that we could improve outcomes for our students, and we saw that. We knew that, as the pandemic was hitting, we had to take action to get our kids back into class as soon as possible, but we couldn't do that without making the investments that, unfortunately, the previous Liberal government, supported by the NDP during the minority, did not do, Mr. Speaker.

Interjection.

Hon. Paul Calandra: The House leader for the Liberals might find it funny that his government never invested in schools. He might find it funny that they closed 600 schools. The parents of the province of Ontario don't find the failures of the Del Duca/Wynne government funny, Mr. Speaker. We will get the job done for the future generations of Ontarians who will be sitting in this chamber making decisions for—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Interjection.

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

The next question.

EDUCATION

Mr. Jamie West: My question is to the Premier. Speaker, with only three weeks left in the school year, Sudbury's parents, students and educators are anxiously waiting for the Conservative government to make a decision about reopening schools. Experts like the Council of Ontario Medical Officers of Health and the Hospital for Sick Children are supporting in-person learning:

“Public Health Sudbury & Districts is prepared to support schools to transition as quickly as possible to in-person learning and to lead effective case and contact management should COVID-19 cases emerge in our schools in the month of June.”

My question, through you, to the Premier is: Will the Premier follow expert advice? Will he listen to parents, students and educators and reopen Sudbury schools to in-person learning for the remainder of the school year?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, we will continue to do what is best for the people of the province of Ontario and put our students first. That's what we have been doing since day one, not only during the pandemic but—as I just said, when we were elected, we knew we had to do better for our students. That is why we set out to increase scores in math and sciences and make those important investments in rebuilding some of the schools. I just talked about the 600 schools that the previous Del Duca/Wynne Liberal government closed in the province of Ontario. We started to make changes.

When it comes to the pandemic, I can assure the member opposite and the people of Sudbury that what we will do is put students first. We will put the health and safety of our students first, Mr. Speaker. That has been our priority since September. Since September, when the NDP were calling us to leave kids home, we chose to go down a different path: keep our schools safe; hire thousands of additional teachers; hire additional people to keep our schools clean and safe for students. That will remain our number one priority.

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

Mr. Jamie West: Back to the Premier: Just to clarify, Speaker, what we stood for was having students come back, not in crowded buses, not in crowded classrooms, and with full ventilation. That's where they dropped the ball on health and safety for our children.

1050

Mr. McIntyre is a music teacher. He's been juggling a hybrid model of learning for his music class. He told me that trying to teach a classroom of in-class music students while also trying to instruct online learners is almost impossible. The in-class students progressed quickly. They received instant feedback every day and became excited and actively engaged in music. Meanwhile, the distanced learners quickly became disengaged. They often wouldn't submit assignments. They developed a negative attitude towards music and towards education in general.

The Premier has a quarter of a year, a three-month window, to ensure that all education workers in Ontario have their vaccinations before school resumes in September. Mr. Speaker, my question through you to the Premier is: Will the Premier prioritize first and second dose vaccines so that education workers are completely vaccinated before September 2021?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member opposite would know that we already have. But here is the problem with the NDP—you hear it in that question again, Mr. Speaker. The NDP, of course, always look short-term.

I'm not going to say that we're going to fix the entire education system in three months, because we started in 2018.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: You don't just do it in two months, like the NDP are suggesting. We knew that when we got into office back in 2018—

Interjection.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: —we had to make serious investments because our students were falling behind.

I don't want my children suffering because of the decisions or lack of decision-making by governments that I'm a part of. That's why we made these important investments. That's why we've done everything we could to keep kids in school since September. It was them who voted against it. They voted against those investments.

They wanted students at home. We wanted better for our students and we made sure the resources were there.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Just a friendly reminder to the House: When you ignore the Speaker's call to order, the Speaker has no alternative but to move to warnings.

Next question.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Earlier this week, the Moving Ontarians More Safely Act passed third reading in the Legislature by a near unanimous vote. This bill, also known as the MOMS Act, aims to combat stunt driving and other aggressive forms of driving on our roads.

This legislation also introduces measures to protect vulnerable road users, such as pedestrians and highway workers; improve truck safety; and strengthen provincial oversight of the towing sector. Could the Minister of Transportation please tell us why the MOMS Act is so important to get into place now?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Thank you to the member from Oakville for the question. There's always more we can do when it comes to road safety, and the MOMS Act is a big step forward.

This past year, with fewer cars on the road, we've seen an uptick in dangerous driving. Earlier this week, a 23-year-old driver in York region was caught driving more than 202 kilometres an hour in a 60 zone and charged with stunt driving. Needless to say, instances like this are unacceptable, and I am so relieved that no one was harmed.

The MOMS Act will send a strong message that those who don't play by the rules will face tough consequences. Our goal is to protect law-abiding road users while cracking down on bad actors, and I'm confident that this bill is a means to do that.

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the minister for your response.

Mr. Speaker, it's safe to assume that each one of us in the Legislature has also seen similar instances of stunt driving. This has been right across the province. It's extremely alarming. Could the minister tell us why she's confident this legislation is the right one to protect road safety?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Thank you again to the member for the question. The MOMS Act is not a one-and-done deal for road safety, but it's a big step of many more to come. Protecting road users is a priority for all of us here in this chamber, and I am very pleased with the support this bill has received.

When we brought the MOMS Act forward, OPP Commissioner Thomas Carrique said that the MOMS Act is an "important step" towards addressing the serious road safety issues created by aggressive drivers.

Our partners at the Toronto Police Service also support the MOMS Act. Superintendent Scott Baptist acknowledged that it creates "a series of escalating sanctions for

aggressive driving behaviours," focusing "the most significant repercussions on those most deserving."

Mr. Speaker, the work to keep our roads safe does not end here. Road safety is an ongoing priority because the costs of unsafe and aggressive driving in Ontario are just too high.

INDIGENOUS PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Good morning, Speaker. My question is to the Premier.

Remarks in Oji-Cree.

Speaker, the discovery in Kamloops has caused great pain, but especially for residential school survivors and their families. Garnet Angecone is an elder from Lac Seul First Nation and a survivor of the Pelican Lake Residential School near Sioux Lookout. He said: "What's happened in Kamloops really is a validation of the things that we—as survivors—have been saying for many, many years." When we spoke, he said that the survivors and their families need support.

Mr. Speaker, the discovery has opened many wounds. Healing initiatives and mental health resources are needed. What is Ontario doing to help support survivors and their families?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member has been raising a number of very important considerations all week, things I know that the Minister of Indigenous Affairs has been seized with and working on with our partners in Indigenous communities across the province of Ontario.

I think it's also worth mentioning that this is something that has been so important to Minister Rickford, long before he even became the Minister of Indigenous Affairs, having worked as a nurse in many of the communities across the north.

But the member is right: Work has to be done. It's not just about what we saw in Kamloops, as horrifically tragic as that is. I think what we have to make sure that we do—and I know that this member will not stop in his pursuit of making sure that his community and Indigenous communities across the province of Ontario and Canada finally get the resources they need, not only from the provincial government but from the federal government. We have to make sure that this isn't just a temporary thing that we see, because it's highlighted in news stories across the country, but it is something that we once and for all take action on.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary? The member for Toronto Centre.

Ms. Suze Morrison: My question is back to the Premier. Speaker, we've heard commitments from this government this week, but we need an actual commitment to funding the programs and services and, like my colleague said, the healing supports that are needed in the communities right now. We need more than hollow words, broken promises, lowered flags and symbolic gestures.

Frankly, Speaker, I don't know how we're supposed to believe the words of this government when they say that they're going to fund and support Indigenous communities through this tragic moment, when we've watched them decimate and cut. We watched them obliterate the Indigenous Culture Fund. We watched them take an Indigenous curriculum that was supposed to be embedded in Ontario's curriculum about the history of residential schools, and they downsized that curriculum and made it elective. This government says that they will work to never forget, but their actions say otherwise.

Will this government reverse its decisions, make the teaching of residential schools mandatory at the elementary and secondary levels, and restore the Indigenous Culture Fund?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Of course, Mr. Speaker, as I said, there is obviously a tremendous amount of work that still needs to be done on this.

If I'm not mistaken, the federal government will be outlining its response to the murdered and missing Indigenous women's report. I know that Minister Dunlop did so last week, but there is a tremendous amount of work.

I'm not going to satisfy the member opposite or any of the Indigenous communities that are watching in a 60-second response in the chamber, Mr. Speaker. More work has to be done.

But it's not just about what we saw in Kamloops, as horrifically tragic as that is. The members are raising points about finally addressing more than just that issue. It's about economic health of communities. It's about the spiritual healing of communities. It's about working together to find out what works best for our First Nations communities. Minister Rickford has been doing that since day one.

Does more work have to be done? Absolutely. Have we made good progress? Yes. Out of this tragedy, have we highlighted across the country that more still has to be done? Yes, and we will get it done, but I can't do it in a 60-second answer in the House.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, as this is my first opportunity to rise since the devastating news in Kamloops, BC, I do want to extend my condolences to the Indigenous communities. The generational trauma that has been caused—it's time for Canada and Ontario to do better, and that's all I will say.

1100

My question is to the Premier. This government has failed to create the conditions for reopening schools safely. Not only has this government shut down the economy and schools, but their lack of leadership and planning has resulted in a protracted debate about opening schools or patios, which should not be the case. Schools and patios are closed because this government has not planned and invested in the reopening. We need to see action. We need accelerated investments in ventilation, in teacher vaccination and for our education workers as well. We need PPE

and a robust testing and contact-tracing program to manage the outbreaks.

Speaker, teachers have heard every excuse under the sun as to why the Premier has not done his homework. It's time that the Premier does his homework and gets schools open safely now.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, she talked about doing better on ventilation. We've done that. She talked about hiring additional teachers. We've done that. She talked about hiring additional staff to ensure that our schools are safe. We have done that. That is why, in September, we were able to have our kids go back to school for in-person learning.

But we also knew we had to give parents choice, and that choice was to be in class or online. We made the investments to make sure that parents had access to both. That is what we have been doing since day one, since this pandemic hit. We will not stop putting the emphasis on our kids, on the next generation of leaders. That is our priority, and we will continue to make students our priority.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, this government fails to understand that not all households have the same resources to support students learning at home. Words are not enough; actions are what matters, and your actions are to cut \$1.6 billion in priorities and partnerships funding, as the FAO reported just this week. It shows the government's real intention.

In hot spots, schools are in need of repairs and not set up to deal with an airborne virus that is mostly transmitted indoors and in close proximity. There are real COVID learning gaps that are being developed, mental health risks for schools being closed, and things are not set up for a safe return to schools either now or in September.

Speaker, the government has not made sure that schools are safe for in-person learning now, and it is cutting funding for the next school year that should be invested in our schools. Does the Premier believe that this pandemic has had a worse effect on hot spot students and, if so, what is his plan to ensure that there are no learning gaps and that students in all areas of our province receive the supports they deserve, so there's no—

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

The government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: It's a strange question coming from a member who used to be the Minister of Education. Her question outlines why that member was such a failure as a Minister of Education. She says that we weren't prepared. She said that the schools weren't prepared to deal with the pandemic—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to caution the government House leader on his language and ask him to conclude his answer.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, the question was that schools were not prepared in the province of Ontario

for the pandemic. We began making those changes in 2018. The question was that our educators weren't prepared. We started making those changes in 2018.

I am very sorry that the Liberals find offence in the fact that their time in government was such a failure, but that is why the people of the province of Ontario turned to this government to fix all of the damage that that party did. I am sorry that they find that offensive, but the people of Ontario wanted change, and that's why they turned to us—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The member for Oakville.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. Stephen Crawford: We know that stricter border measures stop the spread of COVID-19. This reality is backed up by hard evidence and data. All the cases we have in Ontario can be traced back to an origin outside of Ontario.

Only a few weeks ago, the first cases of the B1617 variant, first seen in India, were detected here in Ontario. Can the Solicitor General tell the House more about how this variant has spread and why it's important to keep restrictions on our borders?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you to the member from Oakville for raising this. I think it is really important that we continue to talk about what we're protecting our friends and neighbours from. We have consistently called on the federal government to enhance our safeguards at the border. Many of the new variants spread quickly. The Indian variant, known as B1617 variant, has spread quickly. From May 12 to May 19, Public Health Ontario said the number of known positive cases of the B1617—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Member for Waterloo, come to order. The government House leader, come to order. Member for Northumberland–Peterborough South, come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Yes, you. Solicitor General?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you, Speaker. From May 12 through to May 19, Public Health Ontario said that the number of known positive cases of the B1617 coronavirus variant grew from 45 to 260. It is almost certainly even higher today. From a few cases, the B1617 spreads in a very short time frame. We are making progress in Ontario, protecting Ontarians, but we need the federal government to step up and do their job as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Member for Oakville, supplementary.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: We are all aware of how the original COVID-19 virus got here. It was through travel, obviously. Yet some would have us believe that a few infected travellers is nothing to worry about, suggesting that travel accounts for less than 2% of the cases here in Ontario. Yet we know that every variant of concern that has filled our ICUs has come from outside Ontario. Back

to the minister: Can she explain how other variants are of concern and why stricter travel rules are necessary now to protect the people of Ontario?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you again to the member from Oakville. We know that mobility is a factor in the spread of COVID. That is why we need to act now. On February 26, the North Bay Parry Sound unit found 12 positive COVID-19 cases from the B1351 variant first discovered in South Africa. As of May 31, we have a total of 949 cases in Ontario. It arrived here through travel and then spread.

Once again, on February 8, Ontario confirmed Canada's first case of the P1, also known as the Brazilian variant, in Toronto. The case was linked to international travel from Brazil. As of May 31, we have a total of 2,867. On December 16, Ontario confirmed Canada's first cases of the B117, known as the UK variant, in two individuals from Toronto. As of May 31, we have a total of 126,707 cases. It's travelling into Ontario, and the federal government—

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

The next question.

ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday, theatre-goers were excited to see work nearing completion on a new outdoor performance space for the Stratford Festival. They and other arts organizations have invested millions towards a safe reopening. Like so many others in their sector, last year the Stratford Festival cancelled in-person programming and pivoted to online engagements. This year, they and others, like the Waterloo jazz festival and Drayton theatre, are ready to return to safe in-person performances.

We all need this to happen. What they need from this government is a thoughtful, individualized approach to reopening performance venues, including outdoor spaces. For example, they need permission to rehearse outside. "You can't start up in step 2 having never rehearsed in step 1": This is advice from Mitch Marcus from the consortium.

After the year the performing arts have been through, the frustration is real and there are no provisions for rehearsals in the new road map, which doesn't make it a very effective road map for the performing arts community. Will the Premier work with the Stratford Festival and the performing arts community to ensure that they can open safely, sooner than later?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: I appreciate the member opposite's question. It's one that we've been working on throughout the last 15 months with this sector, particularly with the Stratford and Shaw festivals, as well as many other festivals across the province that have either been shuttered or that have—we were able to get some concessions in the previous framework for them to be able to do online and virtual performances.

Having said that, there's a great inconsistency with the member opposite and her leader. Her leader is telling us to shut more things down. She's telling us to open more things up. We spend a lot of time with the Minister of Health—she and I spend a great deal of time with these sectors—in addition to the jobs and recovery committee at cabinet, with which we have an audience with Dr. David Williams. At this time, they have said, at the health table, that we aren't prepared at that moment.

We are right now in pre-step 1. We would like to get to step 1, and the quicker we get into step 1, the quicker we get into 2 and the quicker we get to see these performance art centres back up and running. That's something I would love to see happen almost immediately, Mr. Speaker.

1110

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: We've asked for some common sense. Pre-pandemic, the Stratford Festival attracted 500,000 tourists annually, directly employed 100 people and created an additional 2,400 full-time jobs. If we want to talk about restarting the economy, it needs to be inclusive of these arts organizations and businesses like the Stratford Festival. They can't just turn the lights on and call action without having the ability to prepare for that opening. They are simply asking for clarity and the rules of engagement, if you will, so that they can plan for a successful season, but they are running out of time. They also want clear communication from the government in order for their season to move forward, rehearsing outdoors and a flexible model to maximize capacity limits safely for audiences.

Can the government commit today to these reasonable requests and establish regulatory fairness for the performing arts sector?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: As I mentioned in the previous answer, the ministry is working with health in order to provide those guidelines. We have established a table to try to make sure that we have a theatre strategy moving forward—the Stratford Festival obviously being part of that, as well as the Shaw, as well as others.

But again, I speak to the inconsistencies of the NDP. At the beginning of this question period, the leader wanted to shut more things down and prolong the lockdown. And now, this member opposite is trying to open more things up.

We continue to work with the sector. In fact, we increased funding to the sector by \$25 million, and we gave the Stratford Festival \$1.8 million. They said, "We are extremely grateful to the Ontario government for being so responsive to our needs. The Stratford Festival had to cancel its entire 2020 season, which was to bring in more than \$70 million in revenue.... Thank you, Minister MacLeod, for supporting the arts and artists in this province. We desperately need the stability this new funding offers."

ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Good morning. My question is for the Premier. COVID-19 is a public health crisis that

has required extraordinary government action, but Ontario has another public health crisis that is crying out for urgent government action. A recent report found that 2,050 people died of opioid overdoses between March and December 2020. That's an increase of 75% from the exact same time period of the year before. Speaker, that is 75% more deaths. But instead of taking action, the Premier has refused to remove the cap on overdose prevention sites that he imposed in 2018.

I have a simple question, Speaker: Will the Premier act now to save lives by removing the cap on the overdose prevention sites?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much to the member for the question. The opioid situation is very serious in Ontario. It has been for some years, but it certainly has been exacerbated by the pandemic. We are taking action. We have currently funded 16 consumption and treatment services sites, and there are other municipalities that are still applying to become consumption and treatment services sites. There's still room for others to apply.

In addition to that, we've allocated up to \$31.3 million for 21 CTS sites across the province of Ontario, and as part of our plan, our Roadmap to Wellness, our comprehensive mental health and addictions plan that was launched just before COVID struck Ontario, we have invested over \$525 million more in funding, including \$4 million for nurse practitioners for detox centres, \$8 million for addictions day and evening care and \$3.5 million for in-home withdrawal care and vans that can move across areas that are difficult to serve.

There's more that I can say in the supplemental, but it's something that we do take very seriously and are working on right now.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Everything is not okay. Public health experts are calling for action. The Ontario Construction Consortium just came out calling for action because 30% of the deaths are construction workers. Yesterday, Ontario northern mayors came out calling for action on the opioid crisis.

Just last week, I met with the drug strategy team in my riding, one of those 16 cities that has an overdose prevention site. They said, "Mike, can you convince the government to remove the cap so other communities can have the kinds of harm reduction services we have in Guelph?"

With all due respect to the minister, I'm asking the government: Will they remove the cap on overdose prevention sites and put more money into harm reduction services to help save lives?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Again, this is a very serious situation.

I can advise the member that there's no need to remove the cap because there are still municipalities that are applying. We've funded 16. There are 21 that can be funded. Municipalities can apply and make their case to have more consumption and treatment services centres. But it's not just about that. I heard you speak about harm

reduction. We need to have investments made across the entire continuity of care for people to make sure that we can have the consumption and treatment services sites. We need more RAAM clinics. We need more safe places for people to live for residential treatment.

There's a lot of work that has yet to be done. We are working on a plan now and we will be releasing the details of it very soon.

ENERGY RATES

Mr. Stephen Crawford: My question is for the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction.

We know that the government has been focused on helping small businesses save on utilities during this pandemic through supports like the property tax and energy cost rebate grants.

Hard-working families in my community continue to look for ways to ease pressure on their bottom lines, just like our businesses try to make ends meet.

Could the minister tell me how this government is helping families and individuals save on the cost of energy through the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you to the member from Oakville for his leadership during these times and for supporting small businesses across his community.

Our government is developing a regulatory approach that will require electricity and natural gas utilities across the province to implement the Green Button standard. The Green Button is a tool that will help Ontarians reduce their costs by finding new ways to lower their energy use. It also enables a market that customers can choose from to make better decisions and choices about their energy usage.

When consumers have access to real-time energy consumption data, they can identify and take immediate, simple steps to reduce their energy usage. This data can also help consumers find and opt for long-term, energy-efficiency solutions.

Ontarians have been asking for help to reduce their energy use and costs for some time, and this will help deliver in that goal.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Helping hard-working families find ways to save money makes life easier during this difficult period, and empowering families to better monitor their energy usage will be of benefit long after this pandemic is gone.

Can the minister tell the House how the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act will help businesses across this province?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We are going to continue to work on cutting red tape and reducing unnecessary burdens across the province to make sure Ontario remains competitive. To date, we have helped reduce their costs by over \$330 million by focusing on regulatory modernization. We are modernizing regulations so that it's

easier for businesses to understand and comply with regulations.

This pandemic has also proven that technology can be used to save time and money. This also applies to the not-for-profit sector. Virtual meetings have been a great example of this. That's why our government is continuing, through this act, to allow the not-for-profit sector and corporations to conduct virtual meetings indefinitely.

We're making government services faster and bringing more services online to improve the user experience for many of these consumers and businesses.

Currently, heavy truck, school bus and farm vehicle owners must renew their licence plate stickers at a ServiceOntario location. We are going to make the changes to ensure that they can do this online. We'll continue to do whatever we can to support small businesses during this recovery.

1120

ARTS AND CULTURE SECTOR

Ms. Jill Andrew: COVID hit, and artists, performers, art workers were dealt a devastating blow. Jobs were lost; venues shuttered.

My question is to the Premier. Roadmap to Reopen leaves live arts behind. I am begging this government to accept the clear and evidence-based demands of the #FairnessForArtsON campaign and many other arts organizations, like TAPA, MANO, PASO and CARFAC Ontario, demanding regulatory fairness on par with our good friends in film and television and sports.

My question to the Premier is this: Will you allow artists and all performers to rehearse as soon as the stay-at-home order is lifted so they can prepare for reopening? Tarragon Theatre needs to rehearse. Will you reinstate livestreaming and recording in venues as soon as the stay-at-home order is lifted? And will you outline clear percentages-based capacities indoors and distance-based capacities outdoors so we can get our artists, our performers, our arts workers back in, building art, creating art and helping their mental health? Please—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. To reply, the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: I want to thank the member opposite for the great question. Obviously, I have a very loud voice around the table and I really echo her comments. I really do feel that parity is important. But at the same time, I recognize we're in a public health crisis, and we take our guidance from the Chief Medical Officer of Health and our health care professionals.

I know that the members opposite don't like taking the advice from the Chief Medical Officer of Health and they have undermined him consistently, but I do sit around a table with him frequently during the week, along with the Minister of Health, and we want to make sure—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Toronto—St. Paul's must come to order.

The minister of heritage, please conclude your response.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: —when we reopen, we reopen for good. That's why the quicker we get to step 1, the quicker we get to step 2, and the quicker we can get our artists back up and running. I fully support the arts sector in this province—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Toronto—St. Paul's is warned.

Supplementary question? The member for St. Catharines.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: My question is to the Minister of Health. I have recently talked to several performing arts communities in St. Catharines, and they are asking a simple question. The government's reopening plan has made allowances for film, television and high-performing athletes to prepare; however, it has left out the protocols for live performers to rehearse. It feels like the arts were unfairly forgotten again. There is a lot at risk in Niagara. They cannot magically appear on stage. They need to start rehearsing today.

Organizations in my community, like Kate Leathers of Carousel Players and Rebecca Walsh at the Essential Collective Theatre, have said that without rehearsals now, they are at risk of cancelling their summer season. This will be months of actors, musicians and their techs not working. In Niagara, that means losing months of ancillary benefits to restaurants and small businesses. The arts sector is central to a safe jump-start to our tourist economy.

Minister, will you let performing arts rehearse now, like their counterparts in the film industry, so they can be ready to open on day one of stage 2?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: There's nothing more I would love than to see our performing arts up and running right here, right now, but we are in a global pandemic. I am part of a cabinet and I am part of a team that takes the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health very seriously.

I'm shocked that they never stand up when we invest an extra \$25 million into our iconic arts institutions or when we invested an additional \$62 million into iconic institutions that include the ROM and the AGO. They don't stand up when we increase the budget to the Ontario Arts Council, but, I'll tell you what, 15 months in, they're finally asking questions about the arts, the culture. I'm waiting for sport and I'm also waiting for heritage, and I would love to have a question on tourism, because I've got to tell you, the hardest-hit sectors are the sectors that are part of this ministry. I find it galling that they stand up only today, 15 months too late.

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The minister of heritage and sport, come to order. The member for St. Catharines, come to order. Member for Ottawa South, come to order.

The next question.

HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Premier. Highway 427 is an essential project that was committed to and started by the previous Liberal government, under the leadership of Steven Del Duca. This government only needed to maintain that progress. Highway 427 was meant to make lives better, create economic growth and unlock potential.

But, lo and behold, under the leadership of this government, the highway is almost a year behind schedule. The Premier claims to be open for business, but he can't even open a highway. Moreover, he has kept residents in the dark, leaving the people of Vaughan, Caledon and Brampton to hear about the status of the highway through media reports.

Why all the secrecy, Mr. Speaker? Will the Premier come clean on when the people of York and Peel can expect this already-finished Highway 427 to open?

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

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: This is a commercial matter between the government and the contractor. It's appropriate that Infrastructure Ontario handle disputes on a commercial level. As this dispute has recently been escalated to litigation, I don't have anything further to say on it at this time.

That said, our government is committed to delivering on ambitious infrastructure plans, which include billions of dollars in transit and highways. Ontario is investing more than \$21 billion in funding over the next 10 years, including approximately \$2.6 billion in 2021-22 to expand and repair highways and bridges.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: We all read the minister's love letter to the Premier in the Star this morning, but unfortunately, Highway 427 is still sitting there empty. The previous Liberal government already invested in this project and had shovels in the ground three years—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Sorry; I'm going to caution the member on his language. That wasn't appropriate. Please conclude your question.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Highway 427 is already a year behind schedule, but the Premier and the minister are unwilling to deliver this piece of infrastructure to the families of Vaughan, even though the highway is finished. It's just sitting there, waiting to be used, Mr. Speaker. Families are spending a longer time getting home. All the while, the highway is just sitting there.

Interjection.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: When will the government finally open this important highway? When can the hard-working families of Vaughan expect their commute times to be reduced?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: As I said, this is a commercial matter and it's subject to litigation, so it would be inappropriate for me to comment at this time.

But I am heartened to hear the member opposite talk about the importance of investing in highways. He's an opponent of Highway 413 and doing the important work that we need to do to evaluate whether or not it's a project worth moving forward with. I'm glad to hear that he has had a change of heart and thinks that we should be looking at investing in highways.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Bhutila Karpoche: Child care workers in this province are at a breaking point. That's the take-away from a recent survey of almost 2,000 child care workers by the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care and the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario. More than half of the workers reported decreased job satisfaction during the pandemic, and 89% of workers reported an increase in job-related stress.

Child care workers have gone above and beyond for children and their parents during the pandemic, but they are tired of being asked to do so much for so little. They're tired of being ignored by this government.

My question to the Premier is, will you finally listen to child care workers and make the investments needed to raise their wages?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I would certainly agree with the member opposite that child care workers have been so important throughout this pandemic, Mr. Speaker, especially when you consider that they have also been on the front lines of ensuring that our essential workers could continue to do their work. Whether it was being available for our nurses, doctors, PSWs, they have done tremendous work, and I want to thank them for all of that work.

We've made a significant number of investments in the sector. The member knows, and I'm sure she would agree, that we certainly inherited a horrific system from the Liberals, just another part of the disastrous record of the previous Liberal government that saw daycare rates increase to some of the highest, if not the highest, in Canada.

There is a lot of work left to be done in this sector, because we know how important it is to families of the province of Ontario that they have choice, whether they want their kids in an organized daycare or if they want other options. That's why we've brought in a tax credit.

I understand that after the federal government brought in their first promise back in I think it was 1993, with respect to child care, they brought another one forward. It seems to be like a Liberal calling card: Make a promise every single year and then never do it.

1130

But we'll work with them on this one, Mr. Speaker. We'll see what they have to say. We'll see if they can actually accomplish anything. We know that the previous Liberal government, four administrations in 15 years, did nothing in this sector, but we certainly will.

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

Ms. Bhutila Karpoche: All we hear from this government is thank yous, but thank yous don't pay the bill. "Thank you" is not a mental health service. Yes, this government did inherit a sector that was in bad shape, but they have actually made it worse.

Improving wages and working conditions is important to addressing staff retention issues, something that has plagued the child care sector for decades, and the pandemic made things worse. Almost half of the child care workers in the survey said they have considered leaving the sector permanently. If we don't pay child care workers the wages they deserve, we will never be able to recruit and retain the thousands of additional workers needed to build a truly affordable and universal child care system.

Again to the Premier: Will you work with the child care sector to improve working conditions, and will you commit to implementing a wage grid that ensures no child care worker is underpaid?

Hon. Paul Calandra: We've been working with the sector right from the beginning, but especially during the pandemic, because we knew how important they were to ensuring that the essential workers could continue to do their jobs, and they have.

I'm not going to stop thanking them just because the opposition is tired of hearing thanks, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to do that, because what they have done has been heroic and has helped us not only continue our economy in those essential areas. But more importantly, they have helped us ensure that essential workers, like doctors, nurses and PSWs, could continue to do the job that has led us to getting over nine million vaccines into people's arms, that has seen us bring that curve down. We have a lot to be thankful for.

There is a federal program, and again, I share the member opposite's worry as such. The federal Liberals have promised child care investments in the province of Ontario since 1993. I was 23 then. The member opposite probably wasn't even born when the first promise was made. The previous Liberal government was a catastrophe and did nothing on it, but we will continue to work with them and anyone who wants to make serious investments—

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

The next question.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Roman Baber: To the government House leader: Today, we expect the province to announce if it will open schools. Yesterday, I asked the Minister of Education why schools aren't open despite near-unanimous advice, including advice from the chief medical officer, to open the schools.

I predicated the question on a December study from SickKids that approximately 70% of Ontario's children are experiencing increased anxiety or depression, and McMaster Children's Hospital saying that its admissions for teens and kids attempting suicide have tripled. The government House leader took the question and decided to make a mockery out of it. Between my social media

platforms, his answer was viewed more than 20,000 times, with great interest and varying responses.

So, I'd like to follow up with the House leader on why the schools aren't open. Specifically, was it appropriate for the government House leader to dismiss and make a mockery of the fact that more than 70% of kids are anxious and depressed, and joke in the context of admissions for teens attempting suicide tripling in the city of Hamilton?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The gall of this member—I've just said in this House on a number of occasions that I have two children. I don't need any lessons from this member on what it takes to ensure that your kids have the ability to get through a pandemic.

The only person in this House today making a mockery of what we have faced as a province is the member for York Centre. He gets up in his place every single day. Yesterday, we heard the member suggest that it doesn't matter how he voted, that that doesn't matter at all. The fact that he voted to ensure the safety of the people of Ontario in March, April, May, June, July, September, October, November and December—he said none of that matters. Those votes don't matter. I think the people in his community might find that outrageous to learn, that when he gets up and votes in this chamber, it doesn't matter, because he's a flip-flopper. But for me and for us, it does matter.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Roman Baber: To the Minister of Finance: Last week, I heard from an aesthetician that she has no place to borrow anymore and that the only thing that's left for her to do is sell equipment. I heard from a constituent in the travel industry that he's close to being ruined. I heard from a friend in the entertainment industry that they cannot make ends meet anymore and they don't qualify for assistance. I heard from members of the beauty industry of multiple suicides. I'm hearing from various professional services that they're down 50% to 60% and that there are no more means to borrow.

People are losing their homes, their marriages, their lives; main street in Ontario is gone, because this government failed to protect long-term care and added 200 ICU beds in 15 months and not one ICU nurse. But none of these businesses are responsible for any spread. It's not COVID that killed these business; it's this government that's responsible for this catastrophe because of the Premier's quest for approval ratings.

My question to the minister: Please don't talk about how important small business is and the various programs that don't work. Please save it and tell us, will you open Ontario?

Hon. Paul Calandra: We will do so when it is safe to do so. Unlike the member opposite, I, the members on this side of the House and the members on the opposite side of the House—with the exception of that member—care about the health and safety of the people of the province of Ontario. We may disagree often, but collectively, we have worked very hard to ensure the safety and security of the province.

The member's previous question highlighted all that he is about. He's more worried about likes on Instagram than

he is about getting his job done. He's more worried about how many people look at his Instagram videos than making his vote count in this House. But I know one thing is certain: Next June, when the people of his riding have the chance to make a vote count, they certainly will, and that member won't be sitting in that seat.

Interjection.

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

That concludes our question period this morning.

I'd like to remind members that the supplementary questions they ask during question period should be consistent with the initial question and follow logically.

DEFERRED VOTES

BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE SKILLED TRADES ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 OUVRANT DES PERSPECTIVES DANS LES MÉTIERS SPÉCIALISÉS

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

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

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): 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 third reading of Bill 288, An Act to enact the Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act, 2021, has taken place.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 57; the nays are 0.

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

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

Third reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There being no further business at this time, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1209 to 1300.

SIGN-LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for Barrie—Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I am seeking unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding ASL service during statements by the ministry and responses.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Barrie—Innisfil is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion without notice regarding ASL

services during statements by the ministry and responses. Agreed? Agreed.

Member for Barrie–Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I move that a sign-language interpreter may be present on the floor of the chamber today to interpret statements by the ministry and responses, and that broadcasting and recording services be permitted to incorporate the interpreter into the camera shot where possible.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Khanjin has moved that a sign-language interpreter may be present on the floor of the chamber today to interpret statements by the ministry and responses, and that broadcasting and recording services be permitted to incorporate the interpreter into the camera shot where possible.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I beg leave to present the ninth interim report of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Rakocevic presents the committee's report. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Yes. As Vice-Chair of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight, I am pleased to table the committee's ninth interim report.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the membership of the committee for their work: Daryl Kramp, Chair; Bob Bailey; Gilles Bisson; John Fraser; Christine Hogarth; Robin Martin; Sam Oosterhoff; Lindsey Park; Sara Singh; and Effie Triantafilopoulos.

The committee extends its appreciation to the Solicitor General for appearing before the committee. The committee also acknowledges the assistance provided during the hearings and report-writing deliberations by the Clerk of the Committee and the staff in legislative research.

Report presented.

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I beg leave to present the 10th interim report of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Rakocevic presents the committee's report. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: As Vice-Chair of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight, I am pleased to table the committee's 10th interim report.

Again, I'd like to take the opportunity to thank the membership of the committee for their work: Daryl Kramp, Chair; Bob Bailey; Gilles Bisson; John Fraser; Christine Hogarth; Robin Martin; Sam Oosterhoff; Lindsey Park; Sara Singh; and Effie Triantafilopoulos.

The committee extends its appreciation to the Solicitor General for appearing before the committee. The committee also acknowledges the assistance provided during the hearings and report-writing deliberations by the Clerk of the Committee and the staff in legislative research.

Report presented.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

MAKING THE PATIENT OMBUDSMAN AN OFFICER OF THE ASSEMBLY ACT, 2021 LOI DE 2021 VISANT À RENDRE L'OMBUDSMAN DES PATIENTS UN HAUT FONCTIONNAIRE DE L'ASSEMBLÉE

Mr. Fraser moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 302, An Act to amend the Excellent Care for All Act, 2010 with respect to the patient ombudsman / Projet de loi 302, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2010 sur l'excellence des soins pour tous en ce qui concerne l'ombudsman des patients.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I will invite the member for Ottawa South to briefly explain his bill, if he wishes to do so.

Mr. John Fraser: The bill amends the Excellent Care for All Act to make the Patient Ombudsman an officer of the Legislature, which would mean that the Ombudsman would be selected by an all-party committee and would report directly to the Legislature, like the Auditor General or the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

It's critical, I think, that the independence of the Patient Ombudsman be increased because of what we've seen in COVID-19 and the pandemic and long-term-care homes, but also because of the changes the government has made with respect to Ontario Health.

CLEAN TRAINS NOW ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR L'INTRODUCTION DE TRAINS À ÉNERGIE PROPRE MAINTENANT

Ms. Karpoche moved first reading of the following bill: Bill 303, An Act to amend the Metrolinx Act, 2006 to provide for a committee to review matters relating to the Union Pearson Express / Projet de loi 303, Loi modifiant

la Loi de 2006 sur Metrolinx pour prévoir la création d'un comité chargé d'examiner des questions concernant l'Union Pearson Express.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: This bill is also titled the Clean Trains Now Act. This bill amends the Metrolinx Act, 2006, to require the establishment of a committee to review the Union Pearson Express transportation system between downtown and Pearson airport. The committee would be required to make recommendations to achieve the electrification of the UPX line, full-fare integration and an increase in service capacity. Additionally, the committee is required to report the recommendations to the minister, who must table the report and inform the assembly of the government's response.

Speaker, residents across Parkdale–High Park and Toronto have long had to grapple with the harmful health and environmental impacts of dirty diesel trains running through our neighbourhoods. Environmental and transit groups like Parkdale–High Park 4 Climate Action, the Clean Train Coalition, Green 13, Safe Rail Communities, Environmental Defence and TTCriders have all fought for the electrification of the UPX. We would like to see a greener, cleaner, more accessible transit system for all.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I feel compelled to remind members that when they explain their bill it be brief—and ideally, read the explanatory note that has been prepared in conjunction with the bill.

1310

HARVEY AND GURVIR'S LAW
(PROVIDING INFORMATION
ABOUT DOWN SYNDROME
TO EXPECTANT PARENTS,
REGULATED HEALTH PROFESSIONALS
AND THE PUBLIC), 2021

LOI DE 2021 DE HARVEY ET DE GURVIR
(FOURNITURE DE RENSEIGNEMENTS
CONCERNANT LA TRISOMIE 21
AUX FUTURS PARENTS,
AUX PROFESSIONNELS DE LA SANTÉ
RÉGLÉMENTÉS ET AU PUBLIC)

Ms. Singh moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 304, An Act to amend the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 respecting the provision of information about Down syndrome to expectant parents, regulated health professionals and the public / Projet de loi 304, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1991 sur les professions de la santé réglementées en ce qui concerne la fourniture de renseignements concernant la trisomie 21 aux futurs parents, aux professionnels de la santé réglementés et au public.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'd like to invite the member to briefly explain her bill, if she wishes to do so.

Ms. Sara Singh: Harvey and Gurvir's Law seeks to address the discrimination faced by persons with Down syndrome which continues to persist in the province of Ontario. This discrimination impacts how persons with Down syndrome access services by the provincial government, including those provided within our health care system.

Discrimination often begins with a prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome, when families are provided outdated, incorrect and antiquated models of disability. This information impacts how families understand the life expectancy, life outcomes, cognitive and physical abilities, as well as psychosocial outcomes of people with Down syndrome.

This bill seeks to amend the Regulated Health Professions Act to require that the minister ensure that up-to-date, evidence-based information relating to the diagnosis of Down syndrome is made available to members of the public. This act is further amended to require that members share this information with expectant parents when communicating a prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

SENIORS' MONTH

Hon. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to rise today and celebrate this June as Seniors' Month. On this day, we recognize, salute and appreciate the contributions that our seniors have made in building Ontario into a great province.

As the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility and a proud senior myself, I would like to raise awareness about the many supports and resources our government has dedicated for our seniors.

Older Ontarians are a significant, growing part of our population. They are expected to make up one third of the population by 2043.

Our communities are strengthened when our older adults can stay active and connected locally. These supports also enhance the overall well-being and quality of life for our older adults.

Mr. Speaker, this past year, we have seen the challenges that COVID-19 has placed on our older adults, highlighting the unique needs of this growing population.

"Stay Safe, Active and Connected" is the theme for this year's Seniors' Month celebrations.

The best way to ensure Ontario's older population stays safe from COVID-19 is through vaccinations. Seniors, including those in retirement homes, were among the

priority populations for the first phase of Ontario's three-phase vaccine distribution plan. Through increased vaccinations, our seniors are one step closer to living their normal lives again.

We have increased and expanded the programs available for our seniors, including for those who have been isolating at home due to this pandemic. These key investments meet both the immediate needs of our seniors and create stronger long-term supports. By investing more than \$60 million in enhanced infection prevention and control measures, we are preventing and containing future COVID-19 outbreaks in retirement homes. This helps to keep our residents, staff and their families safe.

Our government introduced the Ontario Community Support Program. This program ensures the deliveries of food, medicine and other essentials to those who must self-isolate. Since its launch, over one million deliveries have been made across our province, helping to keep our seniors safe.

We recognize the importance of providing Ontarians with information in the language of their choice. This is particularly important for our older adults. This is why we expanded Ontario 211 to now operate in over 150 languages, helping to provide information on government services to Ontarians in their language of choice. This helps remove barriers and ensure that those who need information can access it in an easier-to-understand format.

Staying home during the pandemic has led to an increase in social isolation for many seniors. We are addressing these challenges head-on by strengthening the supports which keep our seniors active and connected in their communities.

Through our investment of more than \$17 million, we are supporting nearly 300 Seniors Active Living Centres programs across Ontario. These programs help older Ontarians to stay active and connected virtually.

Our government recognizes that many community organizations across Ontario are helping our seniors to stay active. For this reason, we made record investments in the Seniors Community Grant Program. Last year, we invested \$4.5 million to support more than 180 projects across our province. They have provided vital virtual connection opportunities for many seniors. We are also excited to share more details in the near future on our next round of funding for community groups. Our continued investment in the Seniors Community Grant Program will benefit seniors for years to come.

Our government was elected with a promise to be for the people. Part of this pledge is providing Ontarians with more quality choices. For seniors and their families, this means an opportunity to live in their homes and communities for as long as they wish.

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It is in this spirit of empowering older adults that we launched the seniors' home renovation tax credit. We are providing seniors and their families a 25% credit on eligible renovation expenses of up to \$10,000. This program is a game-changer, Mr. Speaker. It gives seniors the choice on when they want to shift their living arrangements and

provides an important tool to help their homes evolve to meet their changing needs.

Just as our homes need to evolve to meet our changing needs, so too do our communities.

The pandemic has reinforced the importance of creating more age-friendly and inclusive communities. By launching the new Inclusive Community Grants Program, we are supporting municipalities and local organizations in developing social and physical infrastructure that enables aging in the community.

It pleases me to say that over 80 communities across the province are engaged in age-friendly community planning and implementation activities. Our updated age-friendly community planning guide provides municipalities and community organizations with a template for designing neighbourhoods that benefit all Ontarians.

Many seniors in our society continue to experience elder abuse; and as a society, we must not tolerate these heinous acts against our seniors. We are combatting elder abuse by supporting the province-wide Seniors Safety Line. This line provides safety planning and counselling to any senior who is experiencing abuse or those who are at risk of abuse.

The health and well-being of our seniors continues to be a priority for our government. I'm proud to stand with Premier Ford as we invest in the supports our seniors need and deserve.

This Seniors' Month, I ask my MPP colleagues from all parties to join me in proclaiming June as Seniors' Month in this great province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and happy Seniors' Month.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses?

Ms. Sara Singh: It's an honour to rise here today, on behalf of the official opposition, to celebrate and recognize Seniors' Month in the province of Ontario.

I think it's also important that while we respect, celebrate and honour our elders and their contributions, we also create systems that will help support them to age with dignity in our province of Ontario.

But seniors are being failed by this government. Whether they're in long-term-care homes, retirement homes or living in our community, we know that many are struggling to feel supported.

We know that the horrors in long-term care were caused by years of neglect by the Liberal and previous Conservative governments, but this government has only made matters worse. They failed to protect our seniors at every opportunity they could. And so today, let's honour and remember the nearly 4,000 seniors who lost their lives in long-term care because of COVID-19.

We must also not forget about Indigenous and First Nations people, their teachings, and the importance of elders in our communities. With the news of the remains of 215 children being discovered at the Kamloops residential school, I think today it's also important that we acknowledge that it is an open secret that children lie on the properties of these former schools, and that it is an open secret that we must not look away from. I believe that today is also an important day to honour and acknowledge

their lives. Many of them would be elders in their communities today—grandparents and great-grandparents, taken too soon.

I think, as members in this House, it's important that we not forget the histories and the legacies of the institutions that we are in and the important work and responsibility that we have as legislators to ensure that these histories are not repeated.

So I want to encourage members here in the House, as we honour and celebrate seniors, that we not forget Indigenous and First Nations people who have had their family members, their children, their grandparents taken from them.

I'm also reminded of the importance of remembering the seven generations who came before us and the seven generations who will come after.

And as I stand in a building that was never meant for my ancestors or my grandparents either, I understand the important role that I and all of us in this House play in leaving this world better than we found it.

Fighting systemic racism, our legacy of colonialism and large-scale institutionalization of our care services requires a commitment from all of us that we move away from institutionalized models of care that devalue our aging population and move towards models of care that will support our communities to thrive and stay connected, and that we value our elders and create circles of care around them. This is why investing in and supporting aging-in-place, culturally appropriate care must be foundational as we re-envision how we care for our elders.

The horrors of long-term care present this House with an opportunity to do better. That's why New Democrats have called on this government time and time again to protect elders in our community and invest in the supports they need: create a seniors' advocate; ensure that essential caregivers have access; ensure a minimum of four hours of direct hands-on care; pay those who take care of our aging population a decent wage; invest in community-based care so that elders can age in place and stay at home.

We know there is so much more work to do. It isn't enough to just celebrate. We can and we must do better for future generations to come.

Mr. John Fraser: It's an honour to rise today and celebrate seniors and aging this month here in Ontario, and to recognize the important role that seniors and elders play here in Ontario.

My mother is aging right now, my father is aging, and my in-laws are aging. And now I would say, arguably, as a senior myself, one of the things that strikes me the most about aging is isolation. That's the thing that happens to far too many people in our community, especially seniors.

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We can see the importance, for instance, in long-term care of essential caregivers—and the kind of damage that was done by not having access to that connection, to that being part of something, of being acknowledged and recognized and valued. There are a lot of things that we can do, as government, to make that better, but it's really about how we all look at aging; how we all think about

those people in our community who are alone, who are isolated. It's our job here to recognize that and to give voice and expression in our communities to how we as families and individuals must reach out, must make that connection. It's the most important thing we can do for people's health, for their well-being and for their spirit. I would encourage all my colleagues—and I know most of you do that already—to think about that in your communities and as we celebrate Seniors' Month this June.

Thank you for your time, Speaker.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's an honour to rise today to speak in this House to honour our seniors for Seniors' Month. I want to thank the minister for ensuring that we have an interpreter here for today's discussion.

We can't think about Seniors' Month without first honouring the nearly 4,000 elders we lost tragically in long-term care during COVID-19. I believe we owe it to those elders to ensure that we have a standard of four hours of care—not in four years, but next year. We owe it to those elders to ensure that those who care for our loved ones are taken care of, with a permanent pay increase and increased staffing in long-term care.

Speaker, we've all had an opportunity to reflect since the horrific discovery in Kamloops, BC, last Friday of the lost Indigenous children. One of the things that I reflected on is how much those of us who come from settler cultures can learn from Indigenous peoples—and one of those teachings is honouring elders. We don't do enough of that in Ontario, and I think it's one of the reasons we saw such a tragedy in long-term care.

I'm going to call on everyone in this House—and this is beyond party or partisanship; this is about people standing up and honouring and caring for our elders—to reimagine our relationship with elders, to make the investments so our elders can age in place at home, so we can pass legislation around co-housing for elders, so we can invest in seniors' community centres for our elders, so we can ensure that our communities are accessible for people of all ages and abilities, so elders have access to nature, so elders have access to each other and we address the crisis of loneliness that so many of our elders face.

Let's celebrate Seniors' Month, but let's celebrate it by making a commitment to caring for our elders.

PETITIONS

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It gives me great pleasure to present this petition on behalf of Dr. Greg Millar. It's entitled "Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario." It reads:

"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.”

I fully support this petition. I fully support fairness for Ontario’s optometrists. I will affix my signature and deliver it to the Clerks.

PLACES OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I’m very pleased to present these petitions signed by in excess of 1,100 people ranging from Windsor to Ottawa, from Barrie, Stratford, Leamington, Wheatley and other points in between.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas places of worship provide essential spiritual, emotional, and mental health services to ... combat depression, anxiety, fear, and other mental health disorders;

“Whereas gatherings at places of worship is essential, spiritual nourishment for the faithful;

“Whereas places of worship are important for good health and well-being for those in search of the truth;

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

“(1) Designate places of worship as essential during any COVID-19 or variant health crisis causing lockdowns and/or stay-at-home orders provided places of worship follow Ontario guidelines to ensure the health and safety of staff and those attending worship services;

“(2) Expand places of worship capacity as soon as it is safe to do so.”

I wholeheartedly approve of this petition, will sign it and give it to the Clerks’ table.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. John Vanthof: I’d like to thank Jennifer Osaba for gathering these signatures.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there is overwhelming evidence to show that paid sick leave significantly reduces the spread of infectious disease, promotes preventive health care and reduces health care system costs; and

“Whereas 60% of Ontario workers do not have access to paid sick days, and therefore must sacrifice income to stay home if they are sick; and

“Whereas low-wage and precarious workers who can least afford to miss pay are the most likely to be denied paid sick days; and

“Whereas employers benefit when sick workers can afford to stay home, limiting the spread of illness to co-workers and customers, and allowing workers to recover faster; and

“Whereas during an infectious disease emergency, it is unreasonable and dangerous to public health to make workers choose between protecting their communities and providing for their families; and

“Whereas mandating employers to provide paid sick leave through the Employment Standards Act ensures that workers have seamless, uninterrupted access to their pay...;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately pass the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act to provide workers with 10 permanent sick days ... without the requirement for doctors’ notes, and an additional 14 paid sick days during an infectious disease emergency, so they can follow public health advice and keep our workplaces and our communities safe.”

I wholeheartedly agree and will send them to the table.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government is taking action to address the housing crisis we inherited from the previous government;

“Whereas the Ford government believes that everyone deserves a safe space to call home;

“Whereas the federal government is shortchanging Ontario by \$490 million than it is due through the National Housing Strategy and the Reaching Home program when you factor Ontario’s share of households in core housing need;

“Whereas only 25 of Ontario’s 47 service managers have designated communities that receive funding through the federal Reaching Home program; and

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“Whereas the federal government has not matched the \$765 million in social services relief funding;

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

“Call on the federal government to immediately provide the province its fair share of core housing need funding of \$490 million and that the federal government immediately match the \$765 million in social services relief funding to support municipalities as we address” the affordable housing crisis.

I support this, and I will affix my name to the bottom of it.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: My petition reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Transparency for families in regard to the Ontario Autism Program.

“Whereas families and kids have been waiting for over two years for service after this government dismantled the Ontario Autism Program;

“Whereas the provincial government and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services has not provided families and kids with timely and concrete information;

“Whereas the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services has not answered these families’, nor the official opposition’s specific questions about the Ontario Autism Program;

“Whereas the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services has yet to confirm whether there will be an appeals process, what the success markers of the pilot program are, whether clinicians will get the final say in funding or whether it will be care coordinators who have no clinical expertise, and what criteria the minister used to determine invitations to the pilot OAP program;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to ensure families of children with autism receive actual answers to their valid questions, and that the ministry establish a direct contact with the ministry assigned to answer these questions in a timely manner.”

I wholeheartedly support this petition. I will affix my signature to it and send it to the Clerk.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: The petition that I have reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Transparency for families in regard to the Ontario Autism Program.

“Whereas families and kids have been waiting for over two years for service after this government dismantled the Ontario Autism Program;

“Whereas the provincial government and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services has not provided families and kids with timely and concrete information;

“Whereas the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services has not answered these families’, nor the official opposition’s specific questions about the Ontario Autism Program;

“Whereas the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services has yet to confirm whether there will be an appeals process, what the success markers of the pilot program are, whether clinicians will get the final say in funding or whether it will be care coordinators who have no clinical expertise, and what criteria the minister used to determine invitations to the pilot OAP program;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to ensure families of children with autism receive actual answers to their valid questions, and that the ministry establish a direct contact with the ministry assigned to answer these questions in a timely manner.”

I fully support this petition. I will affix my signature and deliver it to the Clerk.

TRUCKING INDUSTRY

Mr. John Vanthof: I’d like to thank Vince and Irene Vallee and many others for signing this petition. It’s very important in our riding.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the trucking industry is a key component of Ontario’s supply chain;

“Whereas recent data estimates that Canada’s 300,000 truck drivers move about \$850 billion in goods annually;

“Whereas the truck driver shortage in the industry is expected to increase from 22,000 to 34,000 by 2024;

“Whereas truck drivers have gone above and beyond to sustain the province’s supply chain in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic;

“Whereas owner-operators throughout Ontario face arbitrary rules and increasing costs to insure their commercial vehicles; and

“Whereas current insurance norms, policies and rates put many of these small businesses on the verge of closure, and hundreds of jobs at risk;

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

“—to call on the Ford government and the Minister of Finance to help small and medium-sized businesses in the trucking sector;

“—to put an end to arbitrary regulatory policies and rules, predatory premium rates, and skyrocketing training costs;

“—to act diligently to address the systemic truck driver shortage in Ontario.”

I wholeheartedly agree. I’ll sign my signature and send it to the table.

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 third 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: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise today to speak to the third reading of the proposed Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act. I would also like to note that I will be sharing my time with the chief government whip today.

I want to thank all of my colleagues through the committee process, those who have debated this piece of legislation. Without them, this couldn't have got to the point where it is today. The countless hours of consultation that have gone into it and the countless individuals who showed up to committee to voice their opinions and share their feedback—I am truly grateful to each and every one of them.

I would like to start by really putting this proposed legislation into context. We're all very well aware of today's situation that faces the economy, that faces business owners across this province. The pandemic has wrought devastating impacts on the health of our people, on the health of our economy, and it poses serious threats to the economy. That's why as we move forward our government is committing to do so in a way that supports the viability of Ontario businesses and also supports safeguarding people's health. Make no mistake, this government's top priority is, and will always be, to help protect the safety and health of all Ontarians.

The recently passed Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy brings the government's total investment to protect people's health to \$16.3 billion. This historic investment is helping us turn the tide on this third wave. And while we're not quite out of danger yet, this investment, combined with the countless sacrifices that have been made by Ontarians during these turbulent times—especially small business owners—have helped us get through the worst of this storm.

I would also like to take an opportunity to thank the countless numbers of front-line health care workers—and the incredible job that many of these small businesses have done to pivot, to do their part and stop the spread of COVID-19 and, honestly, for their courage and commitment to a greater good during this time.

Mr. Speaker, as the minister responsible for small business and red tape reduction, I really consider myself to be in a privileged position, one where I can protect the people of Ontario and support the businesses on which their livelihoods depend. I want to assure you that the bill that we are discussing today would play a part in helping to ensure the future viability of economic competitiveness in this province.

While our government continues to take decisive action to protect the health of our people, we're also working hard to support our economy. We recognize the pressures that small businesses have faced in responding to COVID-19. Whether it has been shutting down to stop the spread, adopting new safety protocols, to hosting pop-up clinics or donating much-needed resources, employers of all sizes, together with their dedicated workers, have gone above and beyond to protect and serve their customers, their communities and our economy. The way they have come together to respond to people's needs, while sacrificing to help protect public health, has inspired our government and many Ontarians across the province. I see the critical contribution they continue to make to our communities and our economy. I also see how much COVID-19 has intensified the demands on their businesses and their families.

1350

As a proud son of small business owners, I know how much work goes into running a small business at the best of times; unfortunately, for many businesses, these have felt like the worst. Our government wants these businesses to know that we are there for them, with relief to help them get through the dark days of the present and resources to help them prepare for a better future.

Through our 2021 budget, we have committed to taking additional steps to provide direct support for families, workers and employers. In fact, this landmark budget brings our government's total investment to protect Ontario's economy to \$23.3 billion. Through countless round tables and discussions over the last 15 months, we have been in constant contact with business owners, employees, economists and associations. We have heard their calls to provide businesses with urgent financial relief and to lay a foundation for future economic growth. Through the budget and this bill, we have heeded their call.

When the provincial shutdown was announced on December 26, 2020, our government knew we had to supply meaningful financial relief to businesses most affected as quickly and as seamlessly as possible. The result was the Ontario Small Business Support Grant, which provided up to \$20,000 to eligible small businesses that had to close or significantly restrict their operations. The extraordinary response to the program, with over \$1 billion in payments flowing in the first two months, demonstrated how much these small businesses valued this support.

With the third wave of COVID-19, we knew we had to do even more to protect these businesses. That's why we committed to doubling the grant program and providing eligible businesses with \$20,000 to \$40,000 in much-needed relief, in the form of a grant. We've also given them the flexibility to use these payments in whatever way they think makes the most sense for them, be it to fund or maintain their inventory or to support payroll to keep Ontarians employed.

Speaker, we want the world-class workers in Ontario's renowned tourism and travel industry to stay employed. As our public health situation improves, many of us will be looking at ways to reconnect with people we miss in parts of Ontario that we have not forgotten. It has been months since we've travelled to celebrate a milestone or a birthday or to visit cherished friends in places hours away. Our government appreciates how hard this has been on people and on businesses. That's why in our 2021 budget we're investing more than \$400 million over the next three years in new initiatives to support Ontario's tourism, hospitality and culture sectors. This builds on previously announced measures and investments of \$225 million, bringing the total to about \$625 million since the pandemic began.

We have also introduced the Ontario Tourism and Travel Small Business Support Grant. This is another program aimed at delivering urgent relief to those businesses in the travel and tourism sector that need it. It

provides payments of \$10,000 to \$20,000 to tourism and travel businesses with fewer than 100 employees. Travel and tourism businesses can visit ontario.ca/covid-support to learn more, and we encourage those that have not done so to apply by June 25. We want them ready to welcome us back when it is safe to return.

We are committed to keeping all employees safe on the job. That's why we are running a robust workplace testing campaign that will help protect people and the economy. Ontario has now delivered more than 10 million rapid test kits for COVID-19 to over 2,000 workplaces across this province. Rapid tests screen for asymptomatic cases of COVID-19 in the workplace that might otherwise be missed, helping to protect Ontario workers and jobs.

Innovative testing options aren't the only ways that we're preparing more businesses to cautiously reopen and compete. We're also helping small businesses to leverage digital innovation so they can continue to connect with their customers and become more competitive online. In fact, driving technology adoption and fast-tracking commercialization were key goals outlined in last fall's Ontario Small Business Success Strategy. It reflects the importance of digital innovation in Ontario's economy, which, during COVID-19, has taken on a new urgency.

To help more small businesses tap into the possibilities of e-commerce and position their operations for long-term growth, we're investing an additional \$10 million in the highly successful Digital Main Street program. This is on top of the record-breaking \$57-million investment into this Digital Main Street program last year that we announced in June. This is going to help, and has helped, more small businesses achieve a digital transformation and serve customers effectively online. To date, the program has provided close to 18,000 businesses with support for their digital expansions, while generating jobs for more than 1,600 students with strong tech and marketing skills.

We're also committed to modernizing the telecommunications infrastructure that is critical to creating and accessing digital technology solutions.

With the increases announced in our 2021 budget, Ontario's overall investment in broadband will total nearly \$4 billion over six years. This will lay the foundation for Ontario to become more competitive for decades to come, and it will position the province as a leader in the transformational shift to a digital economy where broadband connectivity is central to growth and development.

With financial relief in hand, rapid testing in workplaces and digital support on the main streets, hope is on the economic horizon. To help businesses embark on a strong economic recovery while preparing them for a more competitive and prosperous future, our government is focused on keeping costs low for business and growth high.

We've heard time and time again how businesses of all sizes must confront outdated, expensive, duplicative requirements that make it difficult to set up shop, create jobs and expand here in the province of Ontario, so before the pandemic began, our government worked diligently to

reduce needless burdens, help businesses to compete and grow. In fact, between June 2018 and June 2020, our government's actions to cut red tape led to savings of \$331 million in the cost of complying with regulations. And these are annual savings, so compliance costs are now lower year after year.

Since then, the demands on people and businesses have become more intense, more time consuming and more costly than before, and that has made our government's work to modernize regulations, ease unnecessary burdens and cut costly red tape more important than ever. The pandemic has reinforced the urgency of this work, requiring us to digitize processes and tackle persistent obstacles that exhaust overburdened businesses. That's why we've passed three high-impact burden reduction bills since July 2020. These pieces of legislation have helped businesses adapt to current demands while providing them with the flexibility to pursue new opportunities.

1400

Consider, Speaker, how the Main Street Recovery Act has helped support businesses, supply chains and families by enabling off-peak delivery. Through this act, the government made legislative changes that would limit municipalities from regulating noise during off-peak periods for the delivery of goods to retail stores, restaurants, pharmacies, hotels and distribution facilities. This builds on the success of temporary measures taken to help keep shelves stocked and families equipped at the outset of this pandemic. In fact, two previous pilots had shown that off-peak delivery could reduce rush hour traffic, fuel costs for businesses, and greenhouse gas and other emissions. By making these changes, we made sure that important goods were delivered to businesses and families had access to these things when they needed it.

Mr. Speaker, with the proposed Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act, our government would usher in a fourth high-impact burden reduction bill during COVID-19. It's the cornerstone of a spring red-tape-reduction package that contains about 90 regulatory changes, announcements and legislative items. And it couldn't come at a more critical time. Businesses and people across this province have dealt with urgent and unexpected cash flow, safety and physical-distancing demands since the start of the pandemic. Overly complicated, unnecessarily costly, outdated regulations that don't reflect today's reality represent additional burdens for businesses.

Smarter regulations are also easier to comply with, so businesses can invest their precious money in safety measures and preparing for a cautious and gradual re-opening.

We believe that making Ontario a modern regulator, one that communicates clearly and optimizes digital technology wherever possible, will empower more people and businesses to focus on what is important right now: staying safe and beginning the process of recovery.

It's a view shared by many Ontario businesses and stakeholders. For one, Shelley, CEO of the Women's Trucking Federation of Canada, has praised the government's work to digitize processes and modernize requirements. She said, "The province continues to improve

online services for the transportation industry. These new additions are welcomed.

“They will save time and money by allowing convenient renewals from your office or home.”

This, in fact, is our goal—to make it easier for businesses and people to recover through digitizing processes, helping them re-emerge from the pandemic stronger than ever before. We would do so while maintaining or improving all important health, safety, environmental and public health protections.

Speaker, we have taken a Team Ontario approach to burden reduction, working across ministries to better support people and businesses. Part of that team approach, as reflected in the legislation being debated today, involves protecting things we collectively debated today: public health, safety and the environment. We can’t stress enough how this proposed package has been designed to uphold these protections and, in many cases, improve upon them.

The first principle that we used informing many of these policies is to ensure that public health and safety and the environment is protected. We have worked to ease regulatory burdens in a smart and careful way, to ensure that health, safety and environmental protections are maintained or enhanced.

The second principle has been to prioritize important issues. Here, we’ve assessed which regulations cost the most time and money, while looking for innovative ways to ensure rules stay effective and efficient.

The third principle is to harmonize rules with the federal government and other jurisdictions where we can. We are targeting duplicative red tape and aligning our rules with other jurisdictions to eliminate needless steps that cost time and money.

The fourth principle is to listen to the people and businesses of Ontario. We have committed to hearing from people and businesses throughout this pandemic, to learn what we can do to remove obstacles standing in their way.

The fifth principle is to take a whole-of-government approach, a coordinated approach to make sure everyone is on the same red-tape-reduction page.

Mr. Speaker, we are using a broad, informed perspective to deliver smarter regulation for the government of Ontario, and higher economic growth to match that. As you can see, it is our position that regulations and rules are not negative in and of themselves; it’s the unnecessary, duplicative and outdated regulations that are the problem, and it’s these that we would update through this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to pass it over to my colleague the chief government whip.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I’m pleased to recognize the member for Whitby.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you, Minister Sarkaria, for your presentation.

Speaker, I’m always pleased to rise in the Legislative Assembly to speak on legislation—but particularly to third reading of the proposed Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act.

The pandemic has touched every corner of Ontario, and it has touched every corner of our country. Last spring, the outbreak triggered the sharpest global contraction since the Great Depression. But it’s absolutely heartening to see the remarkable resilience of communities.

As one of the fastest-growing municipalities in Ontario, Durham’s economy is ever-changing, and although the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been significant on our eight communities that comprise the region of Durham, Durham’s economy is more innovative and resilient than ever. In 2020, as an example, non-residential development increased by 54%, and major investments were announced as well for the region of Durham.

Over the past several months, our province has achieved a net employment gain of just over a million jobs, and with hundreds of thousands of Ontarians getting vaccinated every week, we know that there are better days ahead. There are better days ahead, but we continue to face enormous challenges as we work towards economic recovery, so we can’t let up right now. We all know that. 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—hard-working families in our great province of Ontario.

Let there be no doubt, Speaker, that we’re taking decisive action to support job creators struggling through a crisis unlike anything we’ve ever experienced before, and we’re focusing on helping Ontarians recovering from the economic impact of COVID-19 and preparing them for the future of opportunities. Since the early days of the pandemic, we’ve made temporary changes to regulations to help businesses get through this crisis and adapt to a dramatically different world, and many of the ideas for these changes have come from the people and businesses across this province, including my riding of Whitby.

Added to that, in the region of Durham, we struck a Durham economic task force in immediate response to the pandemic. It was done in partnership with 26 community organizations, who together led numerous projects to support local businesses through 2020.

But turning back to the province: With the leadership of the minister, 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.

1410

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. This goes back to feedback that we received from across the province from that industry asking for that to be done. So we listened carefully and we responded accordingly. Since then, we’ve made these temporary changes permanent, such as allowing alcohol with your food order.

One of the most important changes we’ve made was allowing trucks to make deliveries during off-peak hours

to retailers. This is to ensure that retailers in our food supply chain can keep their shelves stocked with items that our hard-working Ontario 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've also provided far-reaching support to businesses to help them get through this pandemic. The minister alluded earlier to some of them, but I think they bear repeating.

The Ontario Small Business Support Grant is one of those examples. It has had its effect in my riding, and it has had an effect in other ridings across Durham region. 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 and have applied for the Ontario Small Business Support Grant. This is \$1.7 billion of support that our government put forward. In addition, as we announced in Ontario budget 2021, we increased that to an automatic doubling to account for \$3.4 billion in direct supports to Ontario small businesses.

Speaker, through Ontario's Main Street Relief Grant, we are providing small businesses with up to \$1,000 to help offset the cost of PPE.

Also, 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. What a benefit that has had in the town of Whitby, with our business improvement association that was the beneficiary of one of these particular grants—and the effect it has had on the other businesses that have participated.

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 Ontario's Small Business COVID-19 Recovery Network across the province. What's clear is that we're 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.

I spoke earlier about opportunities, and I talked about a light at the end of the tunnel, and that's what I'm speaking of now.

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 cost of doing business in Ontario.

I know, from my participation earlier, prior to becoming an elected official, 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 families, their employers and their communities. Every day in this province, people count on those local businesses, whether it's in the town of Whitby or other parts of the region of Durham, to help them in so many ways. Now these businesses are counting on all of us.

That's why we're proposing a wide-ranging package of actions to bring regulatory relief to people and to businesses that they can rely on to help them to get ahead, to give them a hand up. 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 is a direct response to what we've heard across this province. Minister Sarkaria referred earlier in his remarks to literally thousands of round tables that he participated in across the province—I know he participated in at least four across the region of Durham that I was present in. We listened very carefully to the advice and counsel from businesses across all sectors. The bill in front of us here today reflects that input. It responds directly to the request for an efficient and modernized regulatory regime that would ease unnecessary burdens on people and businesses. This legislation would modernize rules, accelerate business growth, help Ontario attract investment, create jobs and—absolutely necessary as we are here today—build prosperity.

Speaker, we understand that complex and duplicative regulations slow recovery and stifle entrepreneurial spirit, making it harder for businesses to grow and thrive.

One of the leaders in my community of the town of Whitby—we have an entrepreneurial hub. It's called 1855. It's situated in a former land registry office in the town of Whitby. It's an adjunct to another historical building, the Centennial Building. I raise this example because one of the leaders of our entrepreneurial effort in the town of Whitby is Mr. David Lahey, who is the president of Predictive Success. David and others from his community participated in a round table, and they spoke about the complex and duplicative regulations which were slowing recovery and stifling entrepreneurial spirit. But they didn't only talk about that. They offered concrete suggestions. They spoke about the way forward. They also spoke about wanting to be part—or parts—of the solution, going forward. The time they took that afternoon—and their input is reflected in this legislation before us today.

It is for the kind of people like David Lahey and others in our small business community in the town of Whitby and across the region of Durham that we're working hard to simplify rules and processes that place unnecessary burdens on people and businesses while maintaining and strengthening standards that keep people safe and healthy. It's what we all aspire to.

This legislation is the centrepiece of the red tape reduction package that also includes a wide variety of regulatory changes and announcements.

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Although this afternoon we're focusing on the bill, I also want to take the members of 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, like Elexicon in the town of Whitby. 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. Again, this is a direct response to feedback that we've received from families here in Ontario.

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 want 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 the 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, of which we have many here in the province of Ontario, as you know, Speaker. These include an exciting opportunity to become a leader in the future of electric vehicle and battery manufacturing. As part of that strategy, we're working to streamline the processes and timelines for issuing mining licences. We're 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. I know that's of importance for our colleagues in the Legislative Assembly from northern Ontario. 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. There will be further consultation on what the size threshold should be before a claim holder is required to file an advanced closure plan.

Speaker, with all these proposals, we're balancing a competitive mining sector with environmental protection and sustainability. I think that's a very important piece, and I know that you've spoken to this area previously.

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—another important feature going forward.

Next, Speaker, I want to highlight a concern that I know some people have when they hear about some of the efforts to reduce regulatory burdens. It's not an easy process, but I think an important aspect of that process is the extent to which you engage and consult with a variety of sectors across this province. That, we've done. But even with that effort, sometimes people are worried that these could weaken regulations that are an integral part of our quality of life here in Ontario. As a government, we understand this concern, and in my remarks this afternoon, 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're not against regulation; we're against unnecessary regulation.

Ontario's hard-working 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's why we continue to work to make regulations effective, targeted and focused, while maintaining and strengthening rules that keep people safe and healthy and also protect the environment.

Speaker, both the minister in his remarks and I in the earlier part of my presentation spoke about the breadth and depth of our engagement with a variety of sectors across the province. We've raised that because of the importance of informing how these regulations are constructed. We want to demonstrate the breadth and depth of how well we listened to that feedback—the literally hundreds and hundreds of round tables that Minister Sarkaria led through all corners of this province, the number of virtual round tables that were hosted in the eight municipalities across the region of Durham. And we'll continue that work because of the importance of having regulations that are effective, targeted and focused. We'll continue that work to make sure that the people we have the privilege of serving continue to be safe and healthy.

I want to turn now to the first of five guiding principles that inform our approach to regulations 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 overall.

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In the region of Durham, there are many environmental features. I have one in the south part of my riding, which is the Thickson's Woods reserve. As part of the process here today, they played a role in providing their feedback, as they should, and others have as well, across the region of Durham.

The second principle is to prioritize the important issues. We're assessing which regulations cost the most time and money, and we're 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, as you would appreciate, Speaker, going forward.

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 spoken about the virtual round tables, and I've also spoken to other opportunities that we've taken to engage with the broader community, and that process continues, including the entrepreneurial sector as well, going forward. In the course of hosting these round tables and looking for other means by which to gain advice and counsel as we move forward, one of the consistent 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. That's exactly what we're doing and will be doing to make Ontario more competitive, to help with the recovery and the kick-start of our economy.

The fifth principle is to take a whole-of-government approach. We're 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.

Speaker, I want to talk a little about how the government will continue to remain committed to supporting businesses during one of the most difficult times that they've ever experienced, during the pandemic. I spoke about the Ontario Small Business Support Grant, a \$3.4-billion investment, a second automatic payment hitting the accounts of small business owners, and what a difference that has made across all sectors in my riding going forward. Ontario's Main Street Relief Grant helped with up to \$60 million in supporting small businesses to get the supports they need, to reduce the cost of PPE that impacted them, whether it was the Digital Main Street program—one of the largest investments in the province's and the country's history to help businesses pivot digitally and be able to operate in a digital environment—or whether it has been working with our federal partners to ensure that businesses can rely on up to 90% of rent relief or up to 75% wage subsidies.

I spoke earlier about partnerships and the type of partnerships that have brought us to where we are this afternoon, and it has included a number of sectors in terms of the partnerships.

I want to talk a little bit more about the exceptional work of the Durham economic task force that was formed shortly after the pandemic took place in March. It was initiated by the regional chair's office, by John Henry, a long-standing friend of mine and Rotarian, a great leader and friend of small business, a great leader of families and friends and of entrepreneurial businesses. This new task force came together rapidly, within a week. It was a collaborative response team made up of, yes, the Durham region's economic development and tourism team, the Business Advisory Centre Durham—all of Durham, and you know how big Durham is; geographically, it's the largest region in the entire province. Imagine that. It's that big. It's going to have a million people in six years. Added to the eight chambers of commerce, there were also local municipal economic teams, and they engaged with a variety of key stakeholders across the region of Durham, and they also engaged with local business improvement areas. Part of that engagement included the surveying of the business community to understand the types of impacts they were experiencing—and it wasn't just a one-time survey; they undertook three or four surveys. In the process of that surveying, they received hundreds of responses, and it provided detailed reports of significant and immediate financial impacts and the type of information and support needed to help them navigate through this crisis. Thanks to that information, the Durham economic task force—the team that I just referred to, and how it was constructed—was able to take swift action to connect businesses to the resources they need urgently—and did need, and some continue to need—for themselves, their workers and affected hard-working families in the region of Durham during a challenging time, an extraordinary time.

I raise this again because it's a practical example, again, of the breadth and depth of engagement. All of the information that I just described across a number of sectors was gathered and was provided to Minister Sarkaria and his staff, and he, in turn, shared it with other members of our economic recovery team going forward. That particular Durham economic task force continues its work—and it continues its work not only under the leadership of John Henry, our regional chair, but also under the leadership of Simon Gill, the director of economic development and tourism for the region of Durham.

One of the aspects that they've done—and this is really illustrative of how creative and resilient they were—is that they put together a new website. It was a comprehensive website to share timely information and resources to support the local businesses, the people who were working in local businesses and their families. It was updated daily to make sure it had current information about business supports available, both federal and provincial; how to access funds and employee/employer resources; and if they had questions—and many still have—a feature of that

website was allowing them to connect with both provincial resources and federal resources or their local chamber of commerce or local municipal economic development office going forward. This particular Durham Economic Task Force and the immediate and longer-term priorities is a practical example of how, working together, you arrive at a common spot that's going to help local businesses and families.

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I see that I'm running out of time, so I just want to highlight and reinforce some of the key messaging of my presentation going forward. Modern regulations that are easier to understand and comply with would allow people here in the province and businesses to invest time and money in what's important right now, and what's important right now is recovering, rebuilding and re-emerging from this crisis stronger than before. Continuing to improve Ontario's regulatory framework is key to making Ontario work better for people and smarter for business.

I would also like to re-emphasize that Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy brings total investments to \$16.3 billion to protect people's health and \$23.3 billion to protect our economy. Speaker, Ontario's COVID-19 action plan support now totals \$51 billion going forward.

What's clear, absolutely clear, from today's discussion and presentation is that 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. I would like to commend Minister Sarkaria and his staff for all of the innovative and hard work that has been undertaken to bring us to this point today. Thank you, Minister Sarkaria.

Speaker, there is light at the end of the tunnel. Let there be no mistake that there is light at the end of the tunnel. I hope all members here today will join me in supporting this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Time for questions.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I would like to ask a question about what they've done for small businesses. We know that the small business grant has been really, really rolled out extremely slowly. I've talked to the minister I don't know how many times over the last couple of months about the number of business in Niagara that had applied for the grant, didn't get the grant and weren't given any real reason—and how to get back with the new 100 employees that he hired to help the system. So we know small businesses are hurting. We know this third wave hit us as hard as the other two waves.

My question is pretty clear: Small businesses need help; we all know that. Will the government agree to offer a third round of funding for the thousands of businesses in Niagara and across the province of Ontario that are still closed due to the government's failure leading up to the third wave?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I turn to the associate minister of red tape.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We have rolled out significant supports for small businesses across the province. We announced in our latest budget an automatic doubling of support payments that have paid out over \$1.2 billion, in addition to the first round of payments for supports, totalling over \$2.8 billion to those small businesses impacted, many in the Niagara region and those that the member opposite did bring to us. We have been able to reach out to and help those specific businesses and we'll continue to do that. The small business support program is just one part of the support system that has been put forward. It is the largest support program throughout Canada. You look at coverage for property tax to 100%; energy costs, 100%; Digital Main Street grants of up to \$2,500—significant supports to help small businesses weather the storm.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Thank you to both members for their presentation this afternoon. I wanted to speak about schedule 9 of Bill 276, which amends the definition of "government agency" in the French Language Services Act to permit the designation of municipal homes and joint homes as public service agencies. As a strong advocate for the French language in Ontario and a strong advocate for language accessibility in long-term care, I see this amendment as being a step forward in improving the experiences of those in long-term-care homes. I think we all agree that receiving important care in either of our official languages is fundamental to ensuring a high standard of care.

Can the minister elaborate more on what this schedule means for francophones across Ontario if long-term-care homes become a necessity in their lives?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I want to take an opportunity to thank the member from Mississauga Centre, who has worked tirelessly on issues like this one and brought them forth towards bills like we have today. We know that in our long-term-care system the lack of francophone accessibility is an issue. It's something that we've inherited. But the member, being a passionate advocate for the francophone community, has identified issues like this and worked towards legislative and regulatory amendments that would help and support getting these changed. We know how important it is to have these types of changes made to support the francophone community. More importantly, it builds on our plan of 777 more francophone beds that we have outlined by also leveraging municipal homes that are very well positioned to provide high-quality care and linguistically appropriate care to Franco-Ontarians.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Il me fait toujours plaisir de me lever. J'ai écouté attentivement le ministre, son allocution, et aussi l'autre représentant. Mais ma question est concernant l'annexe 16 sur l'école de médecine universitaire du nord de l'Ontario. On a entendu le gouvernement parler de consultations puis de consultations puis de consultations, mais, c'est drôle, moi,

quand j'étais en comité—au contraire. Il y a eu des présentations que—je viens de vous en parler, comme, dans le *Globe and Mail*, la présidente de Lakehead University, Moira McPherson, a dit qu'ils n'ont pas été consultés. On consulte? On consulte avec qui? Il me semble que les parties prenantes devraient—

Le Vice-Président (M. Rick Nicholls): La question, s'il vous plaît.

M. Guy Bourgouin: —les municipalités et les étudiants.

Ma question au ministre : c'est avec qui que vous avez consulté pour l'annexe 16, quand tout le monde demande de retirer l'annexe 16?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Before undertaking any measures in this piece of legislation, whether it's the member ministries, we've got over 90 legislative actions that have formed the basis of this legislation that we have put forward, whether it be regulatory amendments, announcements or legislative amendments. This has been done through wide consultation with stakeholders from across the province. The Minister of Colleges and Universities has undertaken many consultations in the past couple of months which have led to many of the changes that we have seen in this piece of legislation.

It is very important for us as a government to ensure that students in the north have certainty, have predictability, have world-class institutions to be able to go to. This is what our bill is making sure of, that those institutions continue to operate in the way that has been put forward by those in the north, especially students.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Jane McKenna: I want to thank you so much, Minister, for all your hard work. I know a lot of people with businesses, obviously, are suffering right now and I know that they appreciate all your hard work.

Can you just tell me though why the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act is so important for our road to recovery for the people out there who are listening right now?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you very much to the member from Burlington. Time and time again, when we're hosting these consultations—we've undertaken over 120-plus round tables with business owners and with associations to learn first-hand what the needs are and what we as a government need to do.

We've put forward record-breaking financial support.

Another key element of the road to recovery is improving Ontario's competitiveness. We inherited one of the most regulated provinces in all of North America. This made it hard to create new jobs, to sift through countless pieces of regulation when trying to expand a facility or trying to expand operations. What we needed to do is really listen to those businesses that just wanted to invest and create more opportunities in Ontario and modernize our regulatory framework so it could be easier to be more competitive, and more productive as an economy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Vincent Ke: Thank you for the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction's wonderful presentation.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted business in every sector, and a lot of businesses are struggling with the need to hear from our government. They need our government to take some action to help them to create jobs and opportunities for Ontarians.

Speaker, my question to the minister is: Can he tell us why the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act is so important for our road to recovery?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I want to thank the member from Don Valley North, with whom I've had the opportunity to also hold a round table with local businesses, and I appreciate the work that he has done.

We've collectively heard how important it is for Ontario to be competitive as we compete for jobs all across North America. We were left with the highest energy costs in all of North America, almost, due to the failed ideological policies that were put forward by the previous government and supported by the official opposition. We were the most uncompetitive jurisdiction for attracting new investments in manufacturing. Over 300,000 jobs were lost in the manufacturing sector.

Being more competitive and making sure that our businesses can be more productive is going to help us on our road to recovery to ensure that people have jobs, high-paying jobs, in the future. That's exactly what we are doing with this piece of legislation. We're focusing on competitiveness and focusing on productivity, and making sure businesses have the opportunity to succeed.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to join the debate today on behalf of the good people of Waterloo and Kitchener Centre, and actually Thunder Bay–Atikokan, Toronto–St. Paul's and Windsor West, because as my colleagues in this House know, we're on a cohort system here in the Legislature. We came to some agreement with the government to try to reduce the numbers here in the Legislature to keep people safe.

I do wish the members from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston and York Centre would stop telling people that we can all vote at the same time as we would outside of a pandemic. It has actually caused a lot of confusion, a lot of anger, and a lot of hate mail, I would say. I want to put it on the record: It is downright irresponsible to put misinformation out there on social media saying that we can all vote at the same time when we have come to an agreement to keep us all safe and to model best public health practices.

That said, Mr. Speaker, on Bill 276, of course we will not be supporting this piece of legislation. I only have an hour to tell you all the reasons why, and so I'm going to focus on a couple of key issues. But suffice it to say, Bill 276 is yet another omnibus red-tape bill that is misnamed, branded as a "COVID recovery bill"—and I put that in

quotations—mostly making minor and technical changes in line with the government’s pre-pandemic priorities.

Not only does the bill fail to respond effectively to urgent COVID-related issues; it doubles down on harmful policies that target people who are desperately struggling during the pandemic, including Ontario Works recipients and tenants. In fact, schedule 1 pushes ahead with the government’s harmful privatization plans for Ontario Works, announced a year before the pandemic, so you’ve just picked up where you left off before a major global health crisis.

Schedule 27 launches another attack on tenants and the open courts principle, in support of cruel eviction blitzes that have been under way during the pandemic. Notwithstanding legitimate concerns about privacy, the schedule fails to achieve the necessary balance and seems to focus on preventing participants and observers from ensuring that justice is served and is seen to be served. This will allow more unfairness and injustice during the virtual adjudicative hearings, particularly virtual eviction hearings, which have been condemned by legal experts and tenant advocates for denying justice to people with disabilities and those who have language barriers or a lack of access to technology.

Schedules 16 and 28 do nothing to save Laurentian University, and my friend and colleague from Sudbury is going to address those concerns.

Most of the other schedules in Bill 276 are minor and technical, and will not do much to help people or businesses survive or recover from the pandemic. As with many of the government’s so-called COVID recovery or protection bills, Bill 276 is completely in line with the government’s pre-pandemic priorities.

Finally, we know as a province and as legislators how important it is to ensure that people have the opportunity to get vaccinated. If you were serious about ensuring that people could have access to health care and to vaccines, you would have embedded what the health science table has recommended, which is paid vaccination leave or rent relief for tenants. People getting evicted during a health crisis is obviously not in the public interest, and these are things that we have repeatedly called for.

In fact, the member from Toronto—St. Paul’s, I will say, has been a passionate advocate for her community, particularly on the issue of tenant rights, because she has seen it all, as has our critic on the issue. On May 27, the member from Toronto—St. Paul’s put forward a private member’s motion around Bill 276, calling on the government to remove schedule 27 from this piece of legislation, to help ensure access to justice for tenants, and that motion reads as follows:

“That, in the opinion of this House, the ... government should, as part of an effort to protect the rights of tenants, withdraw the proposed amendments to the Statutory Powers Procedure Act from Bill 276, including the punitive fines for recording proceedings, and instead develop procedures to ensure broadcasts and recordings of such hearings adhere to the core open courts principle as part of an effort to ensure transparency and accountability of the tribunal process.”

This motion still stands on the books, as it should. The government members who have obviously heard from advocates from across the province have heard the terrible stories of the tension that is happening at the Landlord and Tenant Board meetings. Despite the government’s language around preventing evictions, evictions have been allowed to continue, and we have the evidence to show that.

This is just a quick media scan on what the media is saying about what’s in this bill. This is from the Daily Hive: “Near the bottom of the bill”—schedule 27—“it includes a section that prohibits the audio, video, or photographic recording of any eviction proceedings....”

“Despite there being periods where evictions were not allowed to be enforced due to provincial restrictions during stay-at-home orders, the LTB continued the process of issuing eviction orders....” This happened in all of our ridings.

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“One advocate group, PeoplesDefenceTO, has taken to sharing recordings of the LTB hearings on social media. In one instance, advocates were booted from an online hearing before a disabled woman who had fractured her back and couldn’t work was reportedly ordered to abide by a rent repayment plan of \$11,000 in 11 days.

“In another video, a tenant was not given a translator and had their child trying to translate for them. A tenant advocate is heard accusing the LTB of coercing the child into accepting a repayment plan on behalf of the parent that the parent did not understand” because of language barriers.

“As the Ontario Landlord and Tenant Board continues to churn out hundreds of eviction orders each week, the government is moving to eliminate exposure of mass evictions by targeting tenant organizers with massive fines.” This is from Evictions Ontario.

From Now Toronto: “People recording online eviction tribunal hearings could be fined up to \$25,000....”

“The bill comes as the Landlord and Tenant Board processes a backlog of eviction applications” with online bookings.

“Tenant organizers, housing activists and other supporters began joining these virtual hearings, recording them to show how adjudicators were speeding through proceedings, and sharing clips on social media.”

Obviously, there are so many problems with preventing an open court process, the principle of an open court process, and that leads, in our estimation, to a lack of accountability—just one of the many reasons why we won’t be supporting Bill 276.

The member from Thunder Bay—Atikokan obviously is not on this cohort. She has been connecting with various stakeholders and community leaders in her community. I want to tell you I feel strongly that since she was elected in 2018, she has been working tirelessly to rebuild trust and genuine relationships with the education, with the business, with the health care sectors, and she has been doing an amazing job.

She wanted me to get on the record specifically around the ministers for post-secondary education and the government's attempt in this legislation to sever the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, NOSM, from its existing partnership with Lakehead and Laurentian Universities as part of Bill 276. I have to say, I've seen a lot of things in this House over the years. From an analytical and from a research perspective, this particular move makes zero sense whatsoever.

In fact, it has caused so much conflict in the community and so much concern about the direction that this government is going in that your candidate resigned. You had a nominated candidate in Thunder Bay–Atikokan, and she said, "Listen, this is not in the best interest of the community. There has been no consultation with the community to sever the Northern Ontario School of Medicine from Lakehead and Laurentian, and I will not run for a party that does that." I mean, if that is not a wake-up call for the government, I don't know what is.

The MPP wanted me to actually read into the record specifically from the Lakehead board of governors, who did present at committee. Remember that this piece of legislation was rushed through again. And later on, I'm going to go through the pattern of rushing through legislation that this government has. It is obviously a learned behaviour; however, it has never been corrected—because you've actually had to go back and amend legislation that you rushed through.

This is specifically the Lakehead University board of governors. This was submitted to the government by Angie Maltese, who is the chair of the board of governors at Lakehead University. She goes on to say that they are asking—actually, almost every leader in Thunder Bay is asking the government to withdraw schedule 16 from Bill 276, and they are on strong moral, ethical grounds to do so.

The chair goes on to say that, "Lakehead is proud to play a central role in our local community"—I'm a huge fan of Lakehead University—"northwestern Ontario, and Simcoe county. Lakehead contributes \$1.6 billion to Ontario's annual gross domestic product. Alumni and community members have supported the creation, development and ongoing operation of NOSM over a period of 27 years."

This is a project that was innovative and ahead of its time and has been in place for 27 years. And then with a stroke of a pen, this government decides to sever it from this really creative partnership.

She goes on to say, "The current model under which NOSM operates as a faculty of Lakehead is a success."

I would think you would be looking for good news. I would think that you would not be trying to mess more things up by severing the school of medicine from Lakehead. Severing NOSM from Lakehead is not a natural evolution. NOSM is a faculty that is supported by and is an integral part of Lakehead, which itself is a successful, comprehensive, research-intensive university. This distinction is critical.

"The proposed legislation will not contribute to a reduction in red tape. In fact, it is the opposite." What you

are doing by maintaining schedule 16 of Bill 276 is you are actually creating more red tape. You are duplicating and creating more bureaucracy. No member at committee was able to tell the public at large what the rationale is for this decision. There was no evidence given. There is no one seeking this nonsensical move to interrupt a successful ongoing project.

The chair goes on to say, "The proposed legislation creates accreditation risk for NOSM and financial risk for the taxpayers of Ontario. The foundation provided by NOSM's host universities ... ensures that required quality assurance and accreditation outcomes."

You are actually putting the success of the project at risk by meddling with it. I would think that you have created enough messes that you have to clean up without actively creating another mess. The member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan has been resilient in her defence of Laurentian, of Lakehead and of the medical school as being in the best interest of the north.

The chair goes on to say, "Money should not be wasted in duplicating university infrastructure and administrative overhead—it should be spent directly on student learning." What a concept that is, to invest in the student learning experience. "Creating a new university is not expense-neutral." The fact that she has to tell the government this is something else. "To the contrary, creating a new university will require substantially higher administrative costs to replicate the comprehensive services that Lakehead currently provides, and students demand and deserve. I am not aware of any financial analysis or business plan that addresses this issue."

You have not done your due diligence as a government. The minister has not done his due diligence. The parliamentary assistant has not done his due diligence. There is no financial analysis. There is no rationale for this decision given whatsoever to the community.

She goes on to say, "The proposed legislation is setting up a stand-alone NOSM to fail."

This is what the community is telling you. Right now, Lakehead, Laurentian and NOSM are working. They are working in the best interests of the health and well-being and the economy of northwestern Ontario. You are intentionally disrupting a productive relationship which is doing exactly what you say you want to do. By maintaining this schedule in Bill 276, you are knowingly creating a crisis in the north.

She goes on to say, "The additional cost will likely be pushed on to either the taxpayers of Ontario and/or students in the form of higher tuition fees. This will disincentivize students from pursuing their medical education in northern Ontario and will have a negative downstream impact on physician availability in the region."

If we had been able to go to the north in a multi-partisan budget consultation process this year, you would be hearing how dire the situation is in northern Ontario to access primary care doctors. You would have heard that. You would have heard how people are denied their rights as Ontarians to timely access to public health care, because they cannot access a primary care physician.

1510

And this is what the chair of Lakehead is telling you, as well: “The proposed legislation would establish a stand-alone NOSM that lacks financial stability.” Once again, the point is that you are setting up the stand-alone medical facility to fail. “Having observed the Laurentian CCAA process, it is distressing to watch the government sever NOSM from Lakehead. NOSM will be more financially stable if it continues to be attached to Lakehead than if it were severed from it.”

I have to tell you, aside from the strongest point that this will waste money, create duplication, create more red tape, create more bureaucracy—aside from those very strong points, I want to tell you how damaging it is for other jurisdictions to see the government do this to the university sector.

I have two universities in my riding: the University of Waterloo, an amazing facility, and Wilfred Laurier University, an amazing facility. I also have Conestoga College. This kind of action—when the government unilaterally, with no rationale, with no consultation, dictates and really damages a very effective education model—destabilizes the entire sector, undermines confidence in the ability of a government to govern and not interfere in the post-secondary education sector and, obviously, leaves people feeling very vulnerable.

This is not the first move that you have made as a government which makes the post-secondary education sector feel vulnerable or at risk. There’s this culture of, “What are you going to do now? What will you do to us now? We can’t really critique policies and procedures, because what will you do to us then?” That is a very real feeling that the PSE sector has because of the actions of this government.

The chair of Lakehead’s board of governors goes on to say that the proposed legislation also “jeopardizes Lakehead’s success.” So you’re going for the double whammy here, because you already left Laurentian out in the cold. The chair of the board of governors goes on to say, “The proposed legislation to sever NOSM from Lakehead will weaken both entities.” Knowingly, eyes wide open, you’re still moving in this direction.

She goes on to say, “The proposed legislation will negatively impact Lakehead’s ability to attract students.” Is that in the best interest of this university? No. “Passing the proposed legislation would sever a critical part of our university community and send a signal that northern universities and medical schools are inferior.” Is that your intention? Is that the goal? Is that the purpose of the government, to undermine Lakehead University, as you did Laurentian?

“As chair of Lakehead University’s board of governors, I can confidently say that the board would welcome every opportunity for any discussion.” They want to be part of the conversation and the discussion of how this came to be and how it can be prevented. “The collaborative model between Lakehead University and Laurentian University has a long history of success while being cost-effective and delivering on its mandate to develop physicians in the

north for the north. We believe that any aspirations for expanded health and medical education in the north can be achieved by collaboratively working together and preserving NOSM as part of Lakehead.” They ask that you “withdraw schedule 16 from Bill 276 and permit Lakehead to retain NOSM as its faculty of medicine.”

This is one of the strongest letters that I’ve ever seen from a board: factual, presenting evidence, making a strong argument for their community and the economic value of having a medical school as part of a post-secondary education institution.

It defies logic. It really does. It leaves one wondering, and the members at committee were fairly silent, I have to say. No member could actually give a rationale for this decision. It does leave one feeling—who is behind the curtain? Who is making the decisions? Who is pulling the levers here? Because this decision to sever NOSM from Lakehead University makes no sense. MPP Monteith-Farrell has made this point several times, and, actually, the city council passed a motion, “Please don’t do this.” The Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association, a part of ROMA, asked, “Do not do this.”

It is not an economically advantageous decision to be making; in fact, just the opposite. One wonders, what does this government have against the north? Because it seems very targeted. I can guarantee you if you tried to do this in Waterloo, they would be on the front lawn of Queen’s Park. That’s how important it is, especially now that we have experienced a global health pandemic and we now know how important it is to have some self-reliance, to not be dependent on other jurisdictions for vaccines, for medical equipment, for PPE.

I have to say, as a former researcher, the work that has been happening at Lakehead through the medical school—the partnership has enabled NOSM to attract almost \$14 million in research grant funding and has an economic impact of \$129 million to \$142 million annually. Research matters. In fact, our post-secondary sector is so hungry to have a government that truly values that investment in research, because that is key to, from an economic perspective, holding those jobs in our communities, and then also developing the health and medical science that we need to remain healthy as a population.

The positive partnership between Lakehead and Laurentian was forged over so many years. It was around collaboration, commitment and support of many dedicated local partners. The partnership provides for the unique and complex health needs of people of Ontario. It has cultivated a network of more 1,700 health care professionals supporting a distributed learning model throughout northern Ontario, and, through this partnership, over 600 highly skilled physicians have been trained through a curriculum that responds to the needs of the north. This partnership has enabled NOSM to attract people into their community. That return on investment to the local economy cannot be denied.

In fact, just in case members of the government don’t know this, because clearly you didn’t know a lot about this before you decided to wreck it, it’s the first of its kind in

Canada and it has been recognized internationally as a model of best practice in the development of new medical schools. Nothing that you can say makes this decision and this inclusion in Bill 276 make any sense for the north, for Ontario, for our economy. You claim to want to reduce red tape, and yet you are creating more red tape through the duplication of bureaucracies. You're setting up both entities to possibly fail. You couldn't make it up.

There will be fewer funds to train doctors and more money spent on administration. Administrative efficiencies will be reduced. Funding that could have been applied directly to learners and research will instead need to be directed at establishing administrative positions to recreate infrastructure.

I would love to hear a government member—I'd love to ask the minister a question on this. I would love the parliamentary assistant to be able to say who came up with this idea. Who is driving this idea? Who is going to benefit from this idea? Because it certainly isn't going to be Thunder Bay, Lakehead, Laurentian, the students who attend, or anybody who needs a doctor in the north. This is actually a damaging move for the government to make “for the people,” “for some of the people most of the time.” Whatever slogan you want to work with, it makes no sense.

Our critic—I hope that she's happy with me getting all of her concerns on the record, but I literally could talk about this one decision the entire time, especially as a social researcher knowing the value of research to the local economy and to the well-being of Ontarians.

1520

With that, I want to talk about schedule 27 a little bit, but first, I actually want to address one of the other key issues. This has to do with the renewable energy. We heard a riveting speech earlier today on how energy will be simplified; like, the energy sector is looking for a partner in the government.

This is from the National Observer. It says that the PC “government is seeking to deprioritize renewable energy, repealing measures that made it easier to build new green power projects.”

I want to tell you why this is so important—because I know my speech is also riveting: “Under the current rules, Ontario's electricity regulator, the Ontario Energy Board, must consider the promotion of renewable energy when it decides whether an electricity transmission project is in the public interest.” If passed as Bill 276 is currently crafted, they would do away with that requirement.

“The legislation would also eliminate rules that give clean energy projects a priority timeline for getting connected to the grid.” So you want to take even the idea of renewable energy out of the mix in the year 2021.

“Jack Gibbons, chair of the Ontario Clean Air Alliance, said the proposed changes are ‘economically and environmentally irrational.’” I guess that would be the theme of Bill 276 to date.

It isn't an aside, because it's absolutely important, but I do want to say that overall, if you look holistically, this “whole government” language that the parliamentary

assistant and the whip were recently talking about—if you look holistically at how the government has created these so-called red tape bills—to date there have been six. You'll remember back in October 2018, after they were newly elected, there was Bill 47, which was called the Making Ontario Open for Business Act—which is somewhat ironic today. This was the bill that slashed the right Ontarians had to two paid sick days. That was your red tape: two paid sick days.

Perhaps nobody could have foreseen the health crisis that this province would be in and how important it would be for sick people not to go to work and transmit COVID-19, but even at the time, this piece of legislation also segmented the provisions for personal emergency leave. It was a very callous move. It was again in the name of red tape reduction. Clearly, that decision worked out disastrously for the government, as it became clear extremely early in the pandemic that workers need paid sick days. It took you almost 15 months to get to that place, after huge public pressure and the health science table essentially begging you. If you want to interrupt the transmission of COVID-19, sick workers cannot have to go to work. You have to give them an option to stay home and get medical attention.

In the Hansard from that debate—actually, I'm quoting myself. I said, “I guarantee you that Bill 47, the Making Ontario Open for Business Act, 2018, will have a detrimental, devastating effect on the workers of this province and on the economy of the province.”

Then I also cited Goldblatt Partners at the time, because they had submitted a legal opinion on this red tape bill. This is a direct quote from their assessment: “As compared with the sustained, extensive consultations and expert research which preceded Bill 148, Bill 47 appears to be a drafted piece of legislation that strips important protections from workers—particularly for the least well-off workers—for the benefit of wealthy business interests with close connections to the government.”

I at the time said, “I never thought, not in all my years of politics”—and I've been here nine years now—“that in the year 2018 I would still have to come to this Legislature and fight for basic rights for workers in Ontario. I think that it is a dark day.” That really set the tone for this entire term that the government has been in.

That was followed quickly by Bill 66, another red tape reduction bill. But you will also remember that this is the bill that, through schedule 10, tried to formally open the greenbelt for development. I reference this because I see parallels between the way you have designed Bill 276 and how Bill 66 was constructed. You'll remember that the government had to walk back schedule 10 of Bill 66.

It continues this somewhat ironic tradition of—when you were in the official opposition as MPPs in this place, you railed against the omnibus legislation. I've used quotes from Hansard because those words will come back to haunt you eventually. You essentially said that it was undemocratic to have these pieces of legislation, and yet you followed right in the Liberals' footsteps.

I just want to get on the record that I really wanted to thank the Ontario Federation of Agriculture for fighting

schedule 10 in Bill 66. They came to the Legislature, they pushed hard to ensure that we have arable farmland and green space in Ontario.

That was followed by Bill 132, the Better for People, Smarter Better for Business Act. I don't know who writes these titles, but they're very creative. This bill slashed environmental penalties and changes to pesticide policies. It made controversial changes to the Aggregate Resources Act. And from Hansard, a constituent wrote—and I spoke to this piece of legislation, as the critic: “To start with, the name of the bill is an insult to the people of Ontario. Passage of such a bill will result in the degradation of our water resources and line the pockets of heavy industry. A \$200,000 fine for contravening the Environmental Protection Act is a drop in the bucket for an industry which sees pouring chemicals and waste products into our rivers and lakes as a cheap way of disposing of toxic substances.”

On the Aggregate Resources Act changes, I said at the time that, quite honestly, I had never in all my years seen the Association of Municipalities of Ontario come to Queen's Park and ask to be relieved of their legal responsibility around sound water protection. This was unprecedented. AMO has been coming here for years and has worked with every kind of government from every stripe, but what happened with Bill 132 is that they didn't want to be held responsible for a provincial policy, which they would ultimately be responsible for. They wanted indemnification, actually. They said either don't allow extraction below the water table—which would be the reasonable and rational thing to do—or indemnify municipal councillors from decisions they do not make. This still stands now. There's going to be a lot of work to undo some of the damage that this government has done.

That was followed by Bill 213, another red tape reduction bill. This time, you recycled the title so it saved somebody some time. This was the bill that tried to sneak through the university status of Charles McVety's Canada Christian College. That also did not go very well.

In almost every piece of legislation, as you will have to do with schedule 16 in Bill 276, you had to walk part of it back. You had to take a stand and say, “Obviously, we rushed this through. It's not going to work,” and you succumbed to public pressure.

On the McVety thing, we're still trying to get the government to not replicate that same mistake. It was emotional labour for students on campus, and it was a real challenge for universities and colleges, once again, who looked to this government and said, “What are they doing? Are they intentionally trying to undermine our post-secondary system?”

Following that bill, Bill 213, we had Bill 215. Here we are in the pandemic, and this bill also was messaged for some unknown reason as a tool to help get businesses back on track. Instead, what the bill did was tinker with a few bills that had very little to do with actually supporting businesses. There's a pattern here which obviously is not serving the interests of the people of this province, and they know it. This bill had amendments to the City of Toronto Act and the Highway Traffic Act, and I said at the

time—because we had also heard delegation after delegation for four months on where we should be taking the province from an economic recovery perspective.

1530

I have to say, I had to start off my debate by saying how completely disrespectful I think it is of this government to bring forward a piece of legislation like this in response to an economic crisis in the province of Ontario. It defies logic on so many levels, because the voices and the businesses from the five sectors that we heard from for June, July, August, September—over 800 hours of testimony—were essentially ignored with this bill. So this “listening to the people” business—people are not buying that either.

At that time, the government was still dead set against direct financial support to businesses—which in the end you had to do because businesses paid the highest price for being shut down, even when they had the best intentions, even when they put in the safety protocols. Certainly, wave 1, wave 2, but wave 3—by not listening to the health science table, this Premier walked us right into that third wave. That's why there is so much caution, obviously, on the fourth, because everything that you have touched thus far has not gone very well, I would say.

Bill 276 now, what we have now: Schedule 15 demonstrates that with a lot of their legislative work, the government rushes things. Schedule 15 amends a bill that was put forward just last year, so you're already cleaning up the mess that you made just under a year ago. Many bills we've seen from this government have legislation drafted but regulations are left to be written at some indeterminate time in the future—a practice started by the Liberals, which you complained non-stop about, and yet you have doubled down on that practice.

A minor example, for instance—and this was something that we supported: the PAWS Act. That was supposed to provide for animal welfare legislation. It was written and passed but had no regulations for the longest time. Local humane societies weren't able to act on complaints because the government hadn't written the regulations. You forgot that part.

There was also an instance during a technical briefing on Bill 132 which I remember, where we had asked about who had been consulted on the changes to the environmental penalties, and the government officials said nobody was.

The privatization of the Ontario Works piece—Australia tried this. It was a disaster. It ended up actually costing more money. This is something that, for some reason, the government refuses to acknowledge—that if you are building a profit margin into a for-profit service delivery business, then it is going to cost more money, and the service delivery system fails. It fails to meet its purpose because the driver is the profit piece. My colleague from Windsor West and I raised this, and we had a briefing on this direction, way back, before the pandemic, in February 2020.

This model of allowing private companies to run OW and ODSP has not worked in other jurisdictions like, as I stated, Australia—and even a failed pilot by the McGuinty

Liberals in the mid 2000s in Peel. They tried this in Peel. The Auditor General evaluated it. She found that it was a disaster. The Liberals didn't even try to do this, and they would have privatized anything by the end of their last term. If it wasn't moving, they would have privatized it.

Despite these lessons, the government has moved ahead with these changes.

So Bill 276 once again missed the mark around approaching and dealing with the real economic challenges that we are seeing in the province of Ontario. Right now, the only people who I think are thriving, aside from the large corporate entities, which you allow to seriously operate at full service even while you shut down main street, are those companies that make stickers. We've got stickers that tell us to "stay six feet apart". We've got stickers that say "stand up," "sit down," "go in this direction." We got stickers saying "wash your hands," how to sneeze—

Mr. John Vanthof: "Stop the carbon tax." But they fell off.

Ms. Catherine Fife: "Stop the carbon tax" did fall off the gas station—

Mr. John Vanthof: They didn't stick.

Ms. Catherine Fife: They did not stick.

And then, of course, you've got the "closed for business," "closed" and "for lease" stickers. So anybody who is making stickers in the province of Ontario, apparently, is doing very well.

I will say that, having learned, now that we are 15, 16 months into this pandemic, the government should know where to invest strategically so the return on the investment benefits the people of this province. You have consistently not done that, and Bill 276 is a perfect example of that.

I want to thank the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan and my colleague from Sudbury for being such strong advocates for the post-secondary institutions which really bring so much cultural and economic health and wealth to their communities. Why the government is moving in this direction, particularly with severing the northern Ontario medical school from Lakehead, is just one of one of the many reasons we will not support this piece of legislation.

We are already starting to put our minds to fixing the mess that you're going to leave this province in at the end of this pandemic.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It's time for questions.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to the member from Waterloo for your presentation.

The Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act is expected to save business time and costs in regulatory policy to business.

Is the member opposite against the government helping businesses reduce the regulatory burdens and make it easier for businesses to create jobs in Ontario?

Ms. Catherine Fife: What we are supportive of are strategies and investments that help the economy and that are inclusive of everyone in our economy.

That is why I referenced the missed opportunity in Bill 276 to not build in vaccination leave. If you are a

precarious worker in Brampton, in Scarborough, in Kitchener, you still—the paid sick days so-called strategy that you've put in place is not actually easily accessed. That's why you are actually seeing the testing rates go down. There is a price to getting COVID-19, and it's isolation, and unpaid isolation at that. Not providing a vaccination leave in Bill 276 is such a missed opportunity, when we know that vaccinations provide so much hope for our economy on a go-forward basis.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Mr. Gurratan Singh: I do want to thank MPP Fife for her amazing advocacy for folks not just in Waterloo but across Ontario. She is truly someone who puts people first in all the work that she does.

We know that this legislation doesn't do enough for small businesses, and we know that small businesses deserve a lot more.

What do you think small businesses deserve in this incredibly tumultuous time, and how can better supports be provided to them to get through this pandemic?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member.

Last week, we put forward a strategy that we hoped the government would embrace. It involves a third round of funding—much needed. It changes the criteria for who is eligible for the small business grant. We asked for a streamlined process, something that actually works, that gives some openness and transparency about who qualifies for that funding and who doesn't.

The summer is coming up. This morning, I asked a question of the minister of tourism. I said, "The Stratford Festival needs to rehearse so that they can open." That doesn't cost you any time. That doesn't cost you any energy. What it does cost you is a little bit of effort, to reach out to that sector and say, "We understand. You won't be able to open in step 2 if you don't get to rehearse in step 1"—so clarity of guidelines.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Aris Babikian: The bill streamlines and harmonizes regulations with other provinces to make life better for people and smarter for business, while still maintaining health and safety standards.

Will the member opposite agree with me that simplifying and harmonizing regulations is good for the public?

1540

Ms. Catherine Fife: I will not agree that this bill streamlines and harmonizes regulations.

In fact, I gave you a specific example in schedule 16 where the government is intentionally creating more bureaucracy by severing the Northern Ontario School of Medicine from Lakehead, creating more tape, focusing more funding on administrative and red tape costs and actually leaving the taxpayers with the bill and hurting students in the process. This schedule should be completely pulled out of this legislation. I can't believe it survived committee.

So you and I are in complete disagreement on what this bill does.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I always love listening to my colleague speak to a bill.

But I'm going to start with talking about the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore, who put some stuff up on social media that wasn't accurate. Our cohorts are here for a reason. We're here to make sure everybody's safe. The public might not know that two PC MPPs have gotten COVID-19, including their spouses. We've had people here from our own party get COVID-19. We've had our staff, who do a wonderful job every day, get COVID-19. We're trying to do everything we can to make sure we're all safe and trying to our jobs. And when you put out misleading information, it has caused some real hardship for some members in this assembly, including some words in the—

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock, please.

Mr. Wayne Gates: So my question is—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Sorry.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The clock has been stopped. You'll have a chance to ask a question.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate that. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Mississauga East–Cooksville on a point of order.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: I think the member opposite is pointing out information and saying it is misleading and all those words. I don't think they are parliamentary—in terms of social media and stuff like that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I just want to caution the member, because you did mention the member's riding and you utilized the term “misleading.” That is unparliamentary, and I would ask that you would refrain from that. But I will now give you time to ask your question.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate that. I just want everybody to be safe and to go home to your families.

Why do you think this government has not offered clarity on how the live performing arts return safely? Places like the Shaw Festival in my riding, in Niagara-on-the-Lake, have received nearly no details on what a reopening plan would look like for them. Also, you talked this morning on a question around your area, with Stratford.

Ms. Catherine Fife: The member quite rightly cites the Fairness for Ontario Arts consortium, which is asking government for three basic things. They want some flexibility around the capacity and the ticket sales based on the size of the theatres—not a cookie-cutter model. They want to be able to rehearse in this first step so that they can actually open in the next step. This makes sense. It's actually a key part of the performing arts.

The response that we got from the minister this morning was incredibly defensive.

The health science table has said that activities like golf and tennis and cricket can happen outside. But why could three people, not on a stage, not rehearse outside in anticipation of opening in stage 2?

We're going to keep fighting this. We're going to keep adding pressure. That seems to be the only way we get anything done around here.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions? The member from Don Valley North.

Mr. Vincent Ke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker—and thank you for the member from Waterloo's presentation.

Speaker, this bill is modernizing the direct deposit rules. Our government is eliminating an outdated requirement that the employer must get an employee's written agreement in cases where wages—on the deposit to an employee's account in a financial institution if an officer of the facility of this institution is located within reasonable distance to the employee's usual workplace. This is another example of simplifying procedures to reduce red tape.

My question is, does the member from Waterloo agree that this simplifying requirement will help Ontarians to get their salary paid more easily?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you for the question.

There are schedules in here that are minor, technical and make sense, but then there are schedules which defy the entire purpose of the title—reducing red tape. The schedules that prevent us from voting for this piece of legislation are the privatization of OW and disability services; the removing of and severing of a successful school of medicine from Lakehead, which is detrimental to northern Ontario—and what do you have against northern Ontario? So there are poison pills, essentially, in this legislation which prevent us from supporting those small, technical moves.

This is a time for the government to be bold. You should be working with us to make sure that all of our communities can be successful, and this includes Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Thank you to my colleague from Waterloo.

My question is on schedule 21. ODSP and OW advocates warn about the effect of privatization on Ontario social services delivery. It's a race to the bottom. I'd like to have more of your perspective on this race to the bottom and how that's going to affect people on ODSP and OW.

Ms. Catherine Fife: This government obviously favours privatization even more than the Liberals did. But advocates warn that the effect of privatization of Ontario social service delivery would be a race to the bottom, with cost-cutting the primary goal.

In the end, when you privatize a public service like this—and the Auditor General has actually warned the government about this—you do need greater accountability about where the money is going. If there is a profit motive, then the money is not going to get to where it needs to go.

There's a lot of hurting people in this province. You must see them as much as we do. Privatizing social services is not in the interests of them or the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Deepak Anand: It's always a pleasure to rise in the House and speak. Today, it's again a pleasure to speak to Bill 276, the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act.

As you know, Bill 276 is one of the many ways through which our government is continuing to ensure families, businesses, individuals—in fact, all Ontarians—have access to the resources and opportunities they need without unnecessary regulatory barriers. Through reducing burdens and modernizing rules for all Ontarians, this important piece of legislation will help pave the way for economic recovery and growth for Ontarians like us.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, due to COVID-19, sectors across Ontario have faced enormous challenges over the past year, including a decline in revenue, layoffs, and closures. Industries like food services, arts, entertainment, recreation, leisure, hospitality, tourism and retail have been hit hardest by the pandemic. Between February 2020 and April 2021, tourism-related industries experienced a total combined loss of 141,000 jobs.

As you know, Pearson International Airport, located in my riding of Mississauga–Malton, experienced a \$266-million net income loss during its third quarter of 2020, with over 13,000 layoffs issued airport-wide.

Small businesses, as you know, Mr. Speaker, are the heart and soul of our local communities and also continue to experience financial losses and burdens due to the ongoing pandemic.

The significant impact on Ontario's workforce, small businesses and industries has resulted in a major setback to our province.

In 2020, the province reported a 5.9% decline in real GDP, along with high unemployment rates and declines in business production, operation and investment. The financial impacts of this pandemic cannot be underestimated.

At the same time, I want to give you good news: Ontario has come together, stronger than ever before, to keep people healthy and safe while helping businesses and the economy to get back on track. For example, the Ontario budget 2021, Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy, introduced by the Minister of Finance, contains a total of \$6.7 billion in pandemic-related spending, including \$1 billion for Ontario's ongoing vaccination rollout; \$2.3 billion for expanded COVID-19 testing and contact tracing efforts; and an additional round of support to small businesses through Ontario's Small Business Support Grant, accounting for \$3.4 billion in direct support to approximately 120,000 Ontario small businesses.

1550

Mr. Speaker, we know the tourism sector has been hit hard. That's why \$100 million is in support of businesses

in the tourism sector through the Ontario Tourism and Travel Small Business Support Grant.

This brings Ontario's total COVID-19-related investments to \$51 billion. Through these significant investments into Ontario's health and economy, the province has put a plan forward to protect hard-working Ontarians, increase employment, and stimulate economic recovery. That's where Bill 276 will further support our efforts.

The road to recovery is, of course, not possible without the ongoing contributions and sacrifices of our health care heroes, essential workers and volunteers, community organizations, places of worship, small businesses and local public health units, who have worked collectively to help stop the spread of COVID-19 and vaccinate our residents. So I want to say thank you to all of you.

I want to give a shout-out to many community organizations and places of worship located in and around my riding of Mississauga–Malton for supporting Ontario's vaccine rollout by hosting and volunteering at pop-up clinics. The list is long, Mr. Speaker. It includes Ontario Khalsa Darbar, Malton Masjid, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Malton Community Centre, Malton Neighbourhood Services, Maple Leaf Foods and Maple Lodge Farms, who have all stepped forward to ensure the safety of essential workers and our residents. Thank you. It actually gives the opportunity for our youth to volunteer. And I want to talk about my daughter, who actually volunteered twice in those pop-up clinics. Every time I went to pick her up, she said, "Dad, when are we going to go to the next pop-up clinic to volunteer?" So I want to say thank you to these pop-up clinics for giving her the opportunity, giving her the confidence and giving the Ontario spirit to her. Thank you so much.

Mr. Speaker, during this ongoing vaccine rollout, BAPS actually administered 21,000 vaccines, with a dedicated 4,400 hours of volunteering time; and Malton Masjid administered over 1,500 vaccinations in just one week. That, again, is the Ontario spirit.

I want to say thank you to the countless volunteers who helped residents book vaccination appointments over the phone and those who ensured protective COVID-19 measures were in place. Malton BIA, thank you so much for supporting the booking system. We cannot thank you enough. Thanks to the Ontario spirit, along with the residents rolling up their sleeves, the province is moving full steam ahead with its vaccine implementation.

To date, we have administered over nine million total doses. That's 67% of Ontarians who have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine. The significant progress in Ontario's vaccine rollout is complemented by declining rates of COVID-19. In the last couple of days, we have seen around 700 new cases, the lowest number of cases since October of last year.

Given this positive news, I can say this: Ontario is expected to enter step 1 of its Roadmap to Reopen during the week of June 14, and that's what our whip was talking about—the end of the tunnel and the light ahead.

So again, as vaccinations go up and the number of cases goes down, Bill 276 is much needed for supporting our recovery and competitiveness.

Public health units are also reporting small but continued improvements in the health care system.

As burdens on our hospitals are decreased, there will be an increase in demand for blood to support surgeries. I was on the public accounts committee last week. I want to share with you, since the start of the pandemic, there has been a reduction of 20% in blood donations across Canada. And as we know, with more surgeries coming in place, we need more blood.

I want to share another thing: According to Canadian Blood Services, every year 100,000 new blood donors are needed to make up those who no longer are able to donate. It is important to note that only 17% of the blood that we get is contributed through voluntary donations. The rest, 83% of the blood, is actually purchased. When I looked at the Canadian Blood Services website, it says they emphasize that blood should not be bought. It's an ethical issue. So we're saying that we need blood, but we don't want to buy the blood. But then we look at the other side of it: We actually have 83% of the blood that we buy from the United States and other places. We, as Ontarians, should not be in this ethical dilemma. There is a higher need of volunteers to give blood. At our office, we have annual blood drives, which we do every year. But since we need more this year, what our volunteers at our office have done—we're actually doubling our effort. We will be having a blood donation camp on June 19 and June 26. Through this message, I want to say to all my caucus members, let's do our part. Let's have similar blood donation camps, and let's build that inventory for Ontario.

Additionally, I'm a supporter of organ donations, critical to saving so many lives, of which we have seen another decrease by 20% to 30% during COVID-19. As you know, one donor can save eight lives.

So I encourage my fellow MPPs and fellow Ontarians to support the blood donation drives and also to register for organ donation.

Moving over to Bill 276 again: As Ontario moves closer to a safe and cautious reopening, it is more important than ever that Ontario's hard-working entrepreneurs, small businesses and individuals are set up for success. It is vital that they don't have to face unnecessary regulatory burdens as they begin to recover from the ongoing impacts of COVID-19. The Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act will modernize rules, accelerate business growth and attract investment, create jobs and build prosperity in our great province.

Under the leadership of Premier Ford and the efforts of the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction, along with my MPP colleagues, Ontario has been at the forefront of reducing regulatory burdens to help businesses and people thrive. Since the onset of the pandemic, our government has passed three high-burden bills, including the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, the Main Street Recovery Act, and the Better for People, Smarter for Business Act.

To give an example, in April 2020, Ontario launched the COVID-19: Tackling the Barriers portal for businesses to suggest ideas to overcome the unique regulatory

challenges created by the global pandemic. It resulted in over 50 changes—allowing restaurants and bars to extend outdoor patios, capping delivery fees, and also making sure the government permanently allowed 24/7 deliveries to retail stores, restaurants, hotels and distribution facilities.

Mr. Speaker, when we do good things, good things happen. To give an example, in the 2021 provincial Red Tape Report Card, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business gave Ontario an overall of 8.5 out of 10, which is a grade A on regulatory accountability, the highest score the province has ever received, in comparison to C. Remember this: We are going from C to A just from 2018 to 2020.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, from June 2018 to June 2020, there has been a 4.2% decrease in regulatory burden which, in other words, means savings of \$331 million in net annual regulatory compliance cost savings to Ontario's not-for-profit businesses, municipalities, universities, colleges, school boards and hospitals. The bottom line is, red tape reduction enables hard-working Ontarians to save money and save time, so that they can focus on building their lives and serving their communities while boosting Ontario's economy. More than ever, we need that today.

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The Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act is proposing to bring forward numerous regulatory changes across different ministries that will support hard-working Ontarians as they build their small business, kick-start their career, accumulate savings, give back to the community and actualize their full potential. Today, I would like to shed light on a few of these amendments—amendments that will result in economic growth and investment through digitizing processes, removing burdens on employees, families and Ontarians, therein increasing Ontario's competitiveness.

Through amendments to the Employment Standards Act, for example, the change will serve as a useful tool for employers, who can walk through the auditing process with an officer and better understand how they can align their practices with employment standards. This will help employers become more self-sufficient, allowing them to better identify and correct systemic problems going forward.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, the pandemic has brought many changes in our day-to-day lives, from the ways we run business to how we interact with each other, with our loved ones, to how we receive medical care. More than ever, it is important that we give workplaces the flexibility to meet through a phone or a virtual call and safeguard the health and safety of their team members, staff and the people they serve. That is why Bill 276 will ensure not-for-profit and other corporations can continue to conduct virtual meetings during COVID-19. Having this flexibility helps organizations and their team members to make empowering decisions that will make it easier and more efficient for them to serve their customers and community members throughout the pandemic. This is true of organizations across Ontario that continue to ensure that others

in need have access to necessary resources and tools during these tough times.

I want to talk about another organization located in my riding, EveryMind, an organization that provides mental health services to children in the region of Peel. They have developed and provided a series of webinars, and they will benefit from this bill.

Many not-for-profit organizations play a vital role. For example, Indus Community Services has also provided assistance to help over 150 people file their taxes. Through these changes through Bill 276, our government supports the efforts of organizations as they make key decisions that will positively impact the lives of so many Ontarians.

Another one: From being able to book vaccination appointments to helping Ontarians renew a driver's licence online, digital forms are making life easier and convenient for all of us. That is why Bill 276 will permanently remove the requirement for students to complete and submit paper-based forms. This will allow schools and boards to develop their own processes, including online options for students to report completed hours. By being able to access and submit an online volunteer form with the click of a finger, students across Ontario will get one step closer to reaching that important milestone in their academic careers and actualizing their goals without undue stress and tension.

Ontario produces more than \$10 billion worth of mining supplies, attracting exploration spending and producing more minerals by value than any other jurisdiction in Canada. The government has a bold vision for Ontario's critical minerals industry, one where the province can create great investment and increase its production by more than \$10 billion worth of mining supplies and services every year, attracting exploration, spending and producing more minerals. The government is making sure we have this bold vision for the critical minerals industry.

As outlined in the critical minerals framework discussion paper, Ontario is committed to strengthening and clarifying the process outlined in the Mining Act for mine closure planning and for advanced exploration closure planning. Ontario will also commit to undertake a review of our bulk sampling practices to ensure they meet the balance of a competitive mining sector. Bill 276 would create business clarity and improve timelines for mining projects, helping to ensure Ontario companies are more competitive globally.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, as we move forward in the upward battle against COVID-19, what we need more than ever are less burdens on our hard-working Ontarians. As you know, as we talk about a global village, as we come to an end to the COVID-19 pandemic, as we move towards recovery, the whole world is going to look up and is going to go and find the places where they can invest, and we want to be at the forefront. Through Bill 276, our government will continue its commitment to bring necessary measures in place to help Ontarians to put food on their table and make a sustainable and satisfying living; to make sure that our province is ready and competitive.

As you know, our province is an economic powerhouse. From our automotive industry to our manufacturing sector

to innovation in information technology, Ontario is home to the best talent, groundbreaking innovation and unlimited possibilities. As we move forward on the road to recovery, supporting our people and our economy, it is time that we unleash Ontario's potential, locally and across the globe.

I fully support Bill 276 and know that everyone in the House will support the growth and the prosperity of Ontario and Ontarians. Let's join our hands and build a better Ontario to live, raise a family and serve the world.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Before I begin, I want to wish the entire Azerbaijani community a very happy Republic Day of Azerbaijan, which marks the anniversary of the founding of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan on May 28, 1918.

My question to the member is as follows: This bill effectively opens up the privatization of OW and ODSP. We know that these kinds of privatizations are going to result in huge, huge inequities for people who need these services. How can the member support the privatization of these kind of support services, which ultimately have proven in the history of Ontario to always provide worse services at greater costs?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Talking about Mississauga–Malton, I want to say that I'm proud of my riding of Mississauga–Malton: a 61% immigrant population; 79% visible minority; risk indices of 6.1%; unemployment rate for the youth—we have 24% youth and 26% unemployed youth.

So when it comes to the vulnerable people, I want to say this: We have constantly had the backs of our most vulnerable, both before and during the pandemic. That is why our government made sure that we introduced the social services relief fund during COVID-19 and poured close to \$1 billion into continuity of critical supports for vulnerable households, including rent assistance programs, protection of residents and staff in the homeless shelters, and the creation of long-term housing.

We were there, and we will always be for our vulnerable populations.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: It was great hearing the member from Mississauga–Malton. I know you care about your community and a lot about small businesses in your community. I did want to ask you a little bit about that as it pertains to Bill 276. We know the last thing business wants is to be burdened down by unnecessary, archaic rules, regulations, paperwork and forms. Government should not be a barrier to economic prosperity, but should be there to help unleash that.

Can the member elaborate a little bit more on how we're helping small businesses run more smoothly at a time where they need it the most?

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Mr. Deepak Anand: First of all, I want to talk about the member from Oakville—I really miss sitting with him in the front row—who has been a champion and advocate

for his riding, especially all the issues related to Oakville. You're doing an incredible job; I'm proud of you.

Talking about Mississauga–Malton, you hit the nail—look at the Mississauga–Malton riding: 15% of the riding and 24% of the revenue comes from Mississauga–Malton for Mississauga. Imagine this. So it is very important to talk about what you just said about the small businesses.

As we know, every burdensome regulation cut and every single document slashed is time saved that can be invested and used in running the business, keeping the people employed, and working towards economic recovery. As the Associate Minister of Small Business said earlier in this House today, we are modernizing the Occupational Health and Safety Act. We are making sure we are creating easily understandable rules and regulations that make it easier for a workplace to understand and comply, all while keeping our workers healthy and safe.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's always unfortunate when you have a bill like this. They always put a poison pill in these types of bills, like the privatizing of ODSP and OW, where it's a race to the bottom of the barrel and it's all about cost-cutting rather than taking care of individuals in the province of Ontario.

One of your colleagues just asked a question about small business and how important small business is. I agree 100%. I've talked to a lot of my small businesses in my riding.

So my question is very clear, and I've already asked it once today. I'm going to ask it again. Will the government agree to offer a third round of funding for the thousands of businesses in Niagara and Ontario that are still closed due to the government's failures leading up to a long third wave? They need help; they need help now. Will you commit to making sure they get compensation for a third wave?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the member opposite, the member from the capital of honeymoon locations, or whatever you call it—

Mr. Wayne Gates: Honeymoon capital of Canada.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Honeymoon capital of Canada, okay.

You're so right. We know that we have seen that Ontario tourism and travel has been impacted a lot. That is why the minister has actually introduced the Ontario Tourism and Travel Small Business Support Grant, which will go a long way in supporting our travel agents, our recreational vacation camps, our hotels and motels, and everyone who is there.

You talked about the small business grant. We know that over 120,000 small businesses have received the grant, 75,000 have already received their second payment, and we have already invested \$2.6 billion in support.

Through you, Speaker, we believe, we understand the pains that small businesses are going through, and we'll always be there to support them.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: First of all, I would like to wish all the Italians a happy Republic Day, and to my six colleagues of Italian origin as well here in the House.

I would like to ask the member from Mississauga–Malton how he will ensure that the red tape reduction and regulation modernization changes do not pose a risk to the environment and public health and safety.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore for that important question. As you know, the COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the need for the government to take stronger actions to modernize the digital—and how to operate Ontario to work better for people and smarter for businesses.

But I want to assure you, as we look for the opportunities to modernize regulation and reduce red tape, our government is committed to following five guiding principles. Out of that, the first of which is to make sure that the health and safety and environmental protections be maintained or enhanced. So I want to say smarter regulation would also be easier to comply with, but we will make sure that the environment and public safety come first. Thank you for your question.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Guy Bourgoïn: My question is on section 16, Northern Ontario School of Medicine. We've heard many times about consultation, and yet Lakehead University said that they weren't consulted, and the NOMA president in committee said that they weren't consulted. Students testified that they weren't consulted.

So I ask: Who did you consult with? Who came up with this idea? Because this will affect northern Ontario. We already have problems getting doctors and specialists. This came from a Conservative government, Mike Harris's Conservative government—the creation of NOSM. Yet you're destroying it, which will impact our communities. I want to know: Who did you consult with? Who came up with this brilliant idea? Because everybody is telling you to withdraw schedule 16, and yet you're maintaining this position.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I want to thank the member opposite for advocating for northern Ontario. We don't have many Ontarios; we have only one Ontario. So if we want to make sure Ontario prospers, we have to make sure all of Ontario, including northern Ontario, prospers.

The member talked about the medicine school for northern Ontario. I want to talk about the schedules that have been put in place to make sure two independent degree-granting universities will be there in northern Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to stand up and say that our government is supporting medicine in northern Ontario, which is especially a concern given our current situation. This pandemic has reminded us that we need to invest in our domestic health care, and I'm proud to say that the 2020 budget does exactly the same and makes sure that we have post-secondary institutions that play a critical role in stimulating our community. That is why we're investing in northern Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Unfortunately, there isn't enough time for additional questions and responses.

REQUEST TO THE INTEGRITY
COMMISSIONER

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table a request by the member for Orléans to the Honourable J. David Wake, Integrity Commissioner, for an opinion pursuant to section 30 of the Members' Integrity Act, 1994, on whether the member for Oakville has contravened the act or Ontario parliamentary convention.

SUPPORTING RECOVERY
AND COMPETITIVENESS ACT, 2021
LOI DE 2021
SUR LE SOUTIEN À LA RELANCE
ET À LA COMPÉTITIVITÉ

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to say a few words about Bill 276, Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act.

First, let me tell you that the title has nothing to do with what's in the bill. Just to give you an idea, I will be talking quite a bit about schedule 16. Schedule 16, the Northern Ontario School of Medicine University Act of 2021, turns the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, which is the faculty of medicine for both Lakehead and Laurentian Universities, into an independent university. It enables the government to regulate and amend any contract signed between Lakehead, Laurentian University and NOSM, the Northern Ontario School of Medicine.

Let me tell you a little bit about the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. It is "an award-winning socially accountable medical school renowned for its innovative model of distributed, community-engaged education and research. With a focus on diversity, inclusion and advocacy for health equity, NOSM"—short for Northern Ontario School of Medicine—"relies on the commitment and expertise of the peoples and communities of northern Ontario to educate health care professionals"—not just physicians, Speaker; health care professionals—"to practise in Indigenous, francophone, rural, remote and underserved communities...."

"NOSM's primary mandate is to provide physicians in these areas of need. NOSM also leads in advocacy for sustainable solutions for health human resources in the region. By preparing, attracting and retaining health care professionals, the school improves access to equitable high-quality health care" to the people of the north.

"NOSM graduates, faculty, learners and staff are change-makers who lead health-system transformation in northern Ontario. The school is a recipient of the Charles Boelen International Social Accountability Award from

the Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada and the prestigious ASPIRE award, which recognize international excellence in social accountability and medical education...."

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"Innovation drives the education of NOSM's next generation of health-care professionals and researchers...."

"NOSM connects researchers, learners, teams and their findings to research entities, provincial health teams, research institutes, academic health sciences centres and health-care organizations. The school strengthens research capacity in Northern Ontario, improving performance and measurable outcomes in health services, quality health care, health and biomedical research and knowledge translation."

Why did I want to put that on the record, Speaker? Because all of this is at risk. All of the good work that has been done by the Northern Ontario School of Medicine is at risk because of schedule 16 in the bill.

NOSM does not only train physicians. Since 2007, NOSM accepted its first cohort of interns into the Northern Ontario Dietetic Internship Program, which educates dietitians in more than 75 sites across northern Ontario. It is really hard to recruit dietitians in northern Ontario, and NOSM plays a huge part in making those professionals available to us.

In 2014, the Northern Ontario Dietetic Internship Program—NODIP, it's called—received full accreditation status from the Dietitians of Canada and the status goes till 2022.

Since 2006, NOSM has hosted an annual Northern Health Research Conference that promotes networking and collaboration in health research in northern Ontario. Those are not just for physicians; they are for anybody who works in health care: nurses, PSWs, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, dentists, optometrists—anybody who works in health care. NOSM organizes those conferences.

NOSM partners with schools in southern Ontario to provide challenging clinical experiences for learners in audiology, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and speech language pathology.

In 2014, NOSM established a collaboration between the University of Waterloo to educate doctor of pharmacy learners in northern Ontario. NOSM provides hundreds of hours of continuing education each year across the north. Thanks to NOSM, physicians and other health care professionals—again, the gamut from dentists to chiropractors to massage therapists to physio—don't have to leave the north in order to maintain their licence to practise.

I could go on and on, Speaker, but I want people to realize that the Northern Ontario School of Medicine's core mandate is to graduate physicians to come and help us, and I will talk to some of the differences that the physicians trained at NOSM have done in northern Ontario. But again, the schedule put forward by the government puts all of that at risk. Schedule 16 has to go.

Let me quote from Geoff Tesson. Mr. Tesson was the executive director of health initiatives at Laurentian University. He was responsible for developing the university's initial proposal on the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. He's also the co-editor of *The Making of the Northern Ontario School of Medicine*. He is the one who wrote the proposal that was accepted by the Harris government, and that was funded and gave us our university.

Here's what he has to say:

"The government of Ontario has announced its intention to grant university degree-granting status to the Northern Ontario School of Medicine...."

"While Ross Romano, the Minister of Colleges and Universities, presents this move as a natural evolution to a state of maturity, it is anything but that."

He won't comment on Hearst.

"I am, however, qualified to comment on the proposed decision for NOSM. From 1999 to 2002, I served as Laurentian University's executive director of health initiatives and was the university's lead in developing the proposal for a new school of medicine devoted to meeting the needs of the northern and rural residents of Ontario, who were poorly served by the existing medical schools."

This idea from the member, that we are one Ontario and that if you form a physician in Toronto they will come and work in Atikokan, is a dream. It is not true. That's why we need NOSM.

"The proposal was a team effort bringing together the two northern universities, Lakehead and Laurentian, the physician community in the north, many of whom were already involved and experienced in medical education, and municipal and community leaders from across northern Ontario." It was a team effort.

"Nobody in the north should be celebrating this proposal to divorce NOSM from its two university hosts." Northern Ontario School of Medicine "has a unique structure." It is a legally distinct entity, which means "it receives its funding directly from the government, but academically its programs are approved by the two university senates, which also grant MD degrees to its graduates.

"No medical school in Canada exists in isolation from a host university, nor are we aware of a medical school in" all of "the United States that is not associated with a university." The reason is quite simple, Speaker: "All medical education programs in Canada and the United States are accredited by two parallel bodies, the Committee on Accreditation of Canadian Medical Schools and, in the US, the Liaison Committee on Medical Education.

"The aim of these bodies is to ensure that the same high standards of medical education apply across the" entire "whole of North America. One core requirement of this strict accreditation process is that schools of medicine" must "be affiliated with a university. To split NOSM off from its university hosts puts at risk its continuing accreditation, which is fundamental to its success."

If our school of medicine is not accredited or is not linked or affiliated with a university, Lakehead or Laurentian, it will not be able to continue to be accredited. It will not be a medical school anymore.

"Several reasons exist for this linkage to universities beyond the legal requirement of degree-granting status. Modern medicine draws extensively on new developments in the biomedical sciences and depends on the expertise available in its host university's science departments.

"The NOSM proposal, based on the best medical education advice available, respected this synergy between medical education and its scientific base and gave a key academic role to the joint academic sponsors: Lakehead and Laurentian.

"Both northern universities had considerable expertise in the challenges of delivering health care in rural and northern environments. They each had well-respected nursing programs"—in French and English at Laurentian—"widely recognized research centres doing much-needed work on health care delivery in underserved areas, and housed family medicine residency programs that had proven very successful in placing their graduates in the northern communities where they were so desperately needed.

"The proposal linking the school of medicine with its two northern university hosts was endorsed by all the community stakeholders, by the government of the day, and subsequently by the Canadian accreditation process.

"It is hard to see what might have convinced this government to propose severing this vital connection to the two universities that was such a fundamental feature of its origins. I can only assume they have received bad advice.

"I can see that the current crisis at Laurentian might be a contributing factor. The devastating program and faculty cuts that we recently witnessed would give anyone pause.

"Laurentian has no doubt tried to be too many things for too many different constituents, leading into a credit-financed mode of growth that was too ambitious to be sustainable. But it has not been an academic failure, just the opposite: It has been a dynamic force for change in the community, playing a leading role with Lakehead University in developing NOSM and fuelling the growth of a knowledge-based economy in Sudbury.

"It has also provided a broad-based university education to generations of northerners who now fill many cultural and professional positions in the community. Whatever damage might have been done to some areas of the university, the academic programs that contribute to NOSM and to ongoing transformation in the community are intact and thriving."

1630

I could go on, but I see that the time is running. When you vote for this bill that includes schedule 16, I want you to understand the damage that you are doing to the people of northern Ontario. We waited a long time to have a school of medicine. We finally got a school of medicine, and I could read you good story after good story about what it means to have alumnae. I can tell you that the doctor shortage in Atikokan is solved. They now have five graduates of the Northern Ontario School of Medicine as full-time physicians. They have never had a full complement of physicians in Atikokan—never, ever. They always

had rotating physicians coming in and out—no more. Since we've had the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, they have a full complement.

Congratulations to Dr. Mitchell. This one is in Chapleau for the Chapleau Cree First Nation. She started the Sacred Tree Wellness Centre—again, a graduate of the school of medicine. I could go on and on. All of this is at risk, and I cannot just sit there and let it happen.

It is not too late. You have to take section 16 out of this bill. The Northern Ontario School of Medicine cannot become an independent school. It has to be affiliated to a university. It has to continue to serve the people of the north.

Sur une note un peu plus joyeuse, je voulais vous parler également de l'annexe 28. Ça c'est pour l'Université de Hearst. Ici, on parle de quelque chose de complètement différent. Autant qu'on ne puisse trouver personne dans le nord de l'Ontario qui appuie ce qui se passe pour la faculté de médecine du nord de l'Ontario, pour l'Université de Hearst, c'est une histoire complètement différente. L'Université de Hearst demande depuis longtemps de devenir une université indépendante, et ça, c'est une bonne nouvelle.

« L'Université de Hearst se définit comme un écosystème d'apprentissage francophone, à la fois innovant et engageant. Elle se veut une pépinière d'actrices, d'acteurs et de talents contribuant positivement à l'amélioration de leur milieu, dans un monde complexe où la valorisation de l'inclusion de toutes et de tous est essentielle. En ce sens, elle accorde la priorité :

« —à l'accompagnement dans le développement de chaque personne;

« —au développement de compétences humaines et professionnelles;

« —à une quête personnelle et collective; » et

« —à la pratique d'une pensée de plus en plus indépendante. »

Un petit historique de l'Université de Hearst :

« Lors de sa fondation en 1953 »—ça fait un temps de ça—« l'Université de Hearst portait le nom Séminaire de Hearst. Cette institution a été fondée par monseigneur Louis Levesque et financée par la population du diocèse de Hearst dans le but de rendre les études secondaires accessibles à la jeunesse francophone du nord-est de l'Ontario.

« Le Séminaire de Hearst a été incorporé sous le nom Collège de Hearst en 1959 afin de permettre la poursuite d'études universitaires; il est devenu le Collège universitaire de Hearst en 1972 après avoir été reconnu par la province de l'Ontario comme institution universitaire publique en 1971. Il a alors cessé d'offrir des programmes d'études secondaires puisqu'elles étaient devenues accessibles dans toute la région avec la création des écoles secondaires de langue française. En mai 2014, après plusieurs années de démarches politiques, la province a accordé son consentement au Collège de Hearst pour qu'il se présente et se fasse connaître sous le nom Université de Hearst.

« Affiliée à l'Université de Sudbury en 1957 et par la suite à l'Université Laurentienne en 1963, l'Université de Hearst offre des programmes de baccalauréat » en arts, en « arts spécialisé et ... administration des affaires. Depuis que le premier groupe de diplômés a été promu en 1961, plus de 1 000 étudiantes et étudiants ont reçu leur grade après avoir complété leurs études à l'Université de Hearst.

« Jusqu'en 1996, il était possible de poursuivre des études à plein temps à Hearst ou à temps partiel dans ... des communautés de la région » comme « Longlac/Geraldton jusqu'à Timmins. Depuis ... 1996, on peut également s'inscrire à plein temps dans les programmes qu'offre l'Université de Hearst sur les campus de Kapuskasing et de Timmins.

« À Hearst, l'Université était d'abord installée dans un édifice qui appartenait au diocèse de Hearst; cet édifice » a été « acheté par l'Université en 1970. » Et, « au campus de Kapuskasing, les services de l'Université de Hearst sont offerts dans des installations qu'elle loue » et « il en était de même pour le campus de Timmins... En janvier 2010, l'Université de Hearst, campus de Timmins, s'est installée dans son nouvel édifice ... qu'elle partage avec le Collège Boréal.

« Fière de ses racines franco-ontariennes et consciente de son caractère unique, l'Université de Hearst devient la première université ontarienne désignée sous la Loi sur les services en français en juillet 2013. L'Université s'engage ainsi auprès de la communauté francophone et francophile du Nord-Est et de la province à leur assurer des services dans leur langue. »

So a little bit of good news in this bill, with schedule 28, about Université de Hearst.

But schedule 16—let me make this clear, Speaker: We worked a long time to get a faculty of medicine in northern Ontario. It has proven to be very effective in improving access to health services and physician services throughout the northeast and the northwest. It doesn't matter which community you go to, the new physicians that come to the north come from the Northern Ontario School of Medicine.

Schedule 16 puts the survival of our school of medicine in jeopardy. Every other school of medicine is associated with a university. You cannot cut the ties from a faculty of medicine and turn it into a university because they won't be able to get accredited, and if they are not accredited, the physicians who will graduate from this university won't be able to practise in Ontario or in Canada or in the States.

This is a huge mistake. People have come to tell you that you're making a huge mistake. I went through all of my network in health care, and believe me, Speaker, I know a ton of people in health care in northern Ontario. Not one of them has been consulted about this. Not one of them supports this. They're all wondering, "Where did this idea come from and how do we shut this idea down?"

You have to vote no to schedule 16. The health care of the people of northern Ontario hangs in the balance.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

M^{me} Natalia Kusendova: J'ai une question pour ma collègue.

This bill, with schedule 9, will create favourable conditions to protect and increase access to French-language services in the health sector, including in long-term care. I know that this is something that the member is very passionate about: increasing the number of long-term-care beds for our francophone community. I'm very pleased that our government has recently announced a strategy, with 777 new beds designated for francophones in Ontario.

Legally enabling the voluntary French-language services designation for municipal and joint long-term-care homes will be an important tool to increase and protect services in French in the health sector. Is the opposition against increasing the French-language services designation in health care?

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'imagine que je pourrais juste répondre « non », mais je vais répondre un petit plus longtemps que ça. Par rapport à l'annexe 9, de pouvoir désigner des maisons de soins de longue durée sous la gouverne des municipalités, sous la Loi sur les services en français, c'est quelque chose de positif. C'est sûr qu'on aimerait voir une refonte de la Loi sur les services en français. Mon collègue de Mushkegowuk—Baie James a mis de l'avant un projet de loi qui nous permettrait d'en faire beaucoup plus.

Ça, c'est un petit pas dans la bonne direction. Moi, je n'ai aucun problème à dire merci pour les petits pas qui vont dans la bonne direction, mais j'aimerais ça que l'on prenne la Loi sur les services en français au sérieux, qu'on regarde le projet de loi qui a été déposé et qu'on fasse une mise à jour de la Loi sur les services en français. Cette loi-là date de plus de 30 ans; elle a besoin d'être mise à jour. Les choses ont changé en 30 ans.

1640

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I talked earlier on a question about poison pills in the bill; schedule 16 is another one, just like OW and ODSP.

I'm going to ask the question to the member, who has done an incredible job here in the Legislature for a number of years. She has been here a lot longer than I have. I think she has the respect of the entire House. Quite frankly, I think she has a lot of respect in northern Ontario and knows northern Ontario like the back of her hand. Why is it that the Northern Ontario School of Medicine university is so important to the north, and why does this government not support the north?

M^{me} France Gélinas: This is a question we ask ourselves as northerners every day. Life is different in northern Ontario. Not only is it colder—we all know this—but the infrastructure to meet people's needs is also very different. We know that for years and years and years there was one physician for 5,000 northern Ontarians, versus one physician for 320 southern Ontarians—a huge difference. How do we attract physicians to northern Ontario? They tried paying them; they tried bringing them; they tried fishing trips. None of this worked.

But do you know what worked, Speaker? Having a school of medicine in northern Ontario, where people from

northern Ontario—francophones, Aboriginals, Natives of northern Ontario—go to school in northern Ontario and then go back to the community that they love. It works, Speaker, it works. We have over 600 extra physicians in northern Ontario—from northern Ontario, trained in northern Ontario. We need to keep that school of medicine.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I just want to ask the member across here—this bill streamlines and harmonizes regulations with other provinces to make life better for the people and smarter for business while still maintaining health and safety standards. Are you against simplifying and harmonizing regulations?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I know that the title of the bill is the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act, and that it is pushed as a red tape reduction bill. It's because there is a whole bunch of other schedules in the bill that have nothing to do with COVID, that have nothing to do with the recovery, that have nothing to do with competitiveness, but that will do a lot of damage to the people of northern Ontario.

I've talked a lot about schedule 16 and how you cannot continue to sever the ties between the school of medicine and Laurentian University and Lakehead. No other university in Canada, no other faculty of medicine in the States—it does not exist. Faculties of medicine need to be part of a university in order to be accredited. You need to be accredited in order for physicians to graduate and get a licence. This is what we are opposed to in your bill: the poison pills that you put in.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

M. Guy Bourgoïn: J'apprécie tout le temps ma collègue de Nickel Belt quand elle parle, et aussi je dois admettre, l'annexe 28—après 20 ans de survie, avoir une indépendance, je pense que c'est important.

Mais je veux revenir sur l'annexe 16 et la Northern Ontario School of Medicine et comment cela affecte les communautés du Nord. Je sais que vous avez de l'expérience, je sais que vous avez parlé—vous avez tellement de contacts. Puis, même mois, dans mon comté, j'ai cherché, et j'ai parlé au monde, puis ils ne comprennent pas la logique. D'où est-ce que la consultation est venue? Parce que la consultation dit de retirer l'annexe 16. Encore, on maintient le cap là-dessus, et ça va affecter—et je pense que c'est bon que les députés du sud de l'Ontario, qui ne sont pas affectés par ça, comprennent comment ça va impacter nos communautés du Nord et combien qu'on a besoin de médecins et de chiros—et la liste est tellement longue—pour avoir des services que l'on est obligé de se déplacer dans le Sud. J'aimerais entendre votre expertise là-dessus.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Absolutely. I mean, we—je devrais te répondre en français, hein? Absolument. On a travaillé longtemps avant d'avoir une faculté de médecine dans le nord de l'Ontario. On a essayé de recruter des médecins en leur donnant des primes, des bonus, des

voyages, toutes sortes de choses. Ça ne fonctionnait pas. Ça ne fonctionnait pas. On avait un médecin pour 5 000 résidents du Nord, puis un médecin pour 320 résidents du Sud. Ça ne marchait pas, mais on a trouvé ce qui fonctionnait. Ce qui fonctionnait bien, c'est d'avoir une école de médecine dans le nord de l'Ontario. Des jeunes autochtones francophones qui viennent du Nord s'inscrivent à l'École de médecine du Nord de l'Ontario, font leur formation là, font leur formation clinique dans le nord de l'Ontario et reviennent dans leurs communautés comme médecins pour offrir des services.

Mais l'école de médecine fait plus que ça. Non seulement elle aide à la formation des médecins, mais elle aide à la formation des pharmaciens, elle aide à la formation des diététistes, et elle aide à la formation des physios, des ergos, des orthophonistes. Elle aide beaucoup pour s'assurer qu'on a la main-d'oeuvre dont on a besoin. On a une solution qui fonctionne, et avec l'annexe 16, tout ça est à risque. Vous allez mettre tout ça à risque. Il faut voter non.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions? Further questions?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): So what I'm going to do is, I'm going to follow the order, going back and forth as we have been. You were just a little slow standing up. But I will recognize the member from Mississauga–Malton for his question.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thanks for that consideration. It has been a long day, but again, as the whip said, the end of the tunnel is coming. The light is here.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, our bill is modernizing the direct deposit rules. Our government is eliminating an outdated requirement that an employer must get employees' written agreement in cases where wages are deposited to an employee's account at a financial institution, if an office or facility of this institution is not located within a reasonable distance of the employee's usual workplace.

To the member opposite: Do you support Bill 276 simplifying the requirements for Ontarians so that they can get paid easier?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I want to be absolutely clear that there are schedules within Bill 276 that make sense, but there are schedules like schedule 16—which would sever the ties between the Northern Ontario School of Medicine and Laurentian University and Lakehead University—that make no sense, that will do a ton of damage to the people I represent, to the people who have waited a long time to finally have a family physician of their own. There are still 30,000 people in my riding who do not have a family physician. The Northern Ontario School of Medicine helps us, and you're putting this in jeopardy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I rise to speak on Bill 276, an omnibus bill with 28 schedules dealing with a number of unrelated items, so I'm going to focus in on what I believe are the most egregious aspects of this bill, starting with

schedule 16. If there was ever a schedule in an omnibus bill that should be a stand-alone, separate piece of legislation, it is the schedule creating the divorce between the Northern Ontario School of Medicine and Laurentian and Lakehead universities.

Speaker, there is a history in this province that when you establish a university, you have stand-alone legislation. Many experts—academic experts, faculty, student associations, community, business and Indigenous leaders—all came to committee, wrote to committee and have raised serious and significant concerns about the government's proposal to make NOSM a stand-alone medical school. As a matter of fact, it would be the only unaffiliated, stand-alone medical school in all of Canada.

There are three reasons I believe this schedule should be removed from the bill and, if for no other reason, the government members should vote against the bill. First is the lack of consultation and due process with people in the north around the design of this schedule. I can't tell you how many people came to committee and said how disrespectful it was for the government to include this schedule in this bill, given how critically important NOSM is to the north—the north's economy, the north's health care system, the north's academic systems.

1650

As a matter of fact, Dr. Arnold Aberman, who was one of the architects establishing NOSM, said that this bill—and this is my second concern—presents serious, serious challenges to the potential accreditation and quality of NOSM. According to Dr. Aberman, NOSM has been incredibly successful, which we all know. But according to him, it actually exceeded his wildest dreams about how successful it would be in improving health care in the north. So why fix something that is not broken, especially when it could result in accreditation concerns?

I want to quote Angie Maltese, the chair of the board of governors of Lakehead University: "The proposed legislation creates accreditation risk for NOSM and financial risk for the taxpayers of Ontario. The foundation provided by NOSM's host universities (Lakehead and Laurentian) ensures that required quality assurance and accreditation outcomes. There is no assurance that the medical degree (MD) would satisfy the provincial quality assurance criteria or retain accreditation as a stand-alone" medical school.

Speaker, every medical school in Canada is affiliated with an accredited university for a reason. It improves education. It improves outcomes. It improves the ability to recruit and retain faculty. It improves the ability to recruit and retain students and attract international students. Especially in the north, it is critically important—and we heard this from Indigenous leaders—to have the seamless connection between Lakehead and Laurentian and NOSM.

So I don't understand why the government is doing it. It's not even going to save them money.

Everybody who came to committee—and this is my third point—talked about the financial risk associated with doing this, because now you're creating duplicate administration, you're creating duplication in terms of

provision of student services, and you're undermining the collective bargaining agreements of faculty at the university.

I implore the government members, do your homework on this. As a matter of fact, I think your own candidate in, I think, one of the Thunder Bay ridings actually said, "I don't even want to run for you if you're going to bring this schedule forward." Do your homework. This bill should be defeated for this schedule alone.

Secondly, I now want to turn my attention to schedules 5 and 19, which essentially put the final nail in the coffin of the Green Energy Act and basically say to the world that Ontario is closed for business when it comes to renewable energy. This is going to undermine our climate goals, it's going to increase energy prices, and it's going to undermine economic recovery and job creation. When the government cancelled renewable energy contracts, it cost the province over \$200 million. A study showed that it cost the province an additional 6,000 jobs and it cost the province \$500 million in direct investment.

So what's the government's climate plan when it comes to energy? Ramp up gas plants—a 300% increase in pollution over the next decade, 500% over the next two decades, undermining 40% of the reductions Ontario achieved through the coal phase-out.

Is it going to save us money? No. The government acts as if we're in 2010, not 2021. The price of renewable energy—the price of solar energy has dropped by 90% since 2010, and 71% for wind energy. They're now the lowest-cost forms of energy.

The government wants to ramp up gas, which costs about 11.8 to 12 cents a kilowatt hour and increases climate pollution, and they're saying no to commercial-grade solar, for which the latest contractual prices have ranged between 3.8 and 5.5 cents a kilowatt hour; saying no to on-shore wind, 3.4 to seven cents a kilowatt hour; and offshore wind, 11.2 cents a kilowatt hour—to say yes to gas, 11.8 to 12 cents a kilowatt hour, or SMRs, 16.3 cents a kilowatt hour. In my books, when you have an investment strategy, you want to buy low and sell high. What Ontario is doing is—the Liberals bought high, and now the Conservatives are selling low. It makes absolutely no sense, and it's going to cost us jobs.

Right now, 11 million people around the world work in clean energy. Over the last five years, 77% of global investment has gone into renewable energy. By 2050, there will be \$8 trillion invested in renewable energy globally. If Canada would take advantage of this opportunity, Simon Fraser University estimates we would create 560,000 jobs in Canada. But the government is saying no to jobs, saying no to investment, and saying yes to pollution and high energy costs.

That finally brings me to a point I want to make about schedule 21. This is a red tape reduction bill, but it actually increases red tape on the most vulnerable in our society: people on social assistance. It makes changes to the way in which Ontario Works works that actually creates more invasive procedures and coercive actions in people's lives. I want this schedule gone, but I tried to move some

amendments in committee to at least mitigate the worst aspects of how this schedule is going to create more red tape and create more barriers to benefits for the most vulnerable in our society.

If the government truly wants to help people on social assistance, then raise the rates. It's pretty simple. Raise the rates. Who can survive on \$733 a month? Especially when the average apartment in most places is well over \$1,000, who can survive on \$733 a month?

Speaker, I want to close with what small business has asked for. Many businesses came to committee and said, "We want a third round of funding in the Ontario business support grant. Just get it done." It doesn't get done in this bill.

I encourage every member of this House to vote against Bill 276.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Aris Babikian: It is always a pleasure to listen to my colleague from Guelph.

Recently, there have been incidents of individuals 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.

Is the member opposite against protecting the integrity of tribunal hearings and the privacy of hearing participants?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member opposite's question. It gives me an opportunity to address schedule 27.

If the government was serious about dealing with the challenges with the Landlord and Tenant Board:

(1) They would ensure that we close the digital divide and make sure everyone, especially the most vulnerable tenants, have access to the Landlord and Tenant Board.

(2) They would hire more adjudicators so both tenants and landlords could have easier and quicker access to justice.

I don't think it's right, quite frankly, to deny people the ability to be transparent about how dysfunctional the Landlord and Tenant Board is right now through its digital hearings.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I always like listening to my colleague.

There are always poison pills in everything they bring forward, then they say, "Well, you people didn't vote for it." Section 16 is one of them. It should be a stand-alone bill. OW and ODSP, again, are problems with this bill.

I agree with you, and I've raised it a number of times already today: Business needs a third round of help, without a doubt. So many are struggling. It's not in the bill.

1700

My question is—and I've already asked this, but I think it's important to hear it from you—why is it that the Northern Ontario School of Medicine is so important, and why does this government not support the north?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question.

The bottom line is that there is a shortage of health care professionals, especially doctors, in rural and remote communities. NOSM was set up to address that, and according to the person who literally helped design NOSM, it has exceeded expectations beyond anyone's beliefs. This same person said that what the government is doing with this bill is threatening both the accreditation of the school of medicine and the quality, which I think I outlined in my remarks. I think it's dangerous and disrespectful to people in the north to do this in a bill with 28 schedules, and without any consultation, or very minimal consultation, with the very people in the north whom NOSM serves.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Mr. Speaker, as you know, with the vaccines going up and the cases going down,

wonderful days are ahead as we safely reopen our province.

One thing that I've learned through COVID-19 is that more than ever, we need investments; more than ever, we need growth; more than ever, we need to support recovery and be competitive to unleash Ontario's opportunities.

To the member opposite: What are the things that you like in Bill 276?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the question.

One of the components of this bill makes some changes to the Mining Act which are connected to the Critical Minerals Strategy the government is putting forward. I think we need a critical minerals strategy for Ontario. Critical minerals are going to be vital to the renewable energy sector, because they're going to play a vital role in battery storage, to make renewables less expensive and more efficient.

So one of the things that frustrates me—and I wish I had time in my comments—is that your schedules attacking renewable energy actually undermine the government's efforts for a critical minerals strategy, unfortunately. I'm happy to talk about it with the member opposite more when we have time.

Report continues in volume B.

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Rasheed, Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie, du Développement du Nord et des Mines Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Roberts, Jeremy (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa- Ouest—Nepean	
Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associé délégué au dossier des Petites Entreprises et de la Réduction des formalités administratives Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Associate Minister of Transportation (GTA) / Ministre associée des Transports (RGT) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Walker, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Associate Minister of Energy / Ministre associé de l'Énergie Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakubski, Hon. / L'hon. John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
Yurek, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Donna Skelly
Teresa J. Armstrong, Toby Barrett
Lorne Coe, Rudy Cuzzetto
Randy Hillier, Jane McKenna
Judith Monteith-Farrell, Michael Parsa
Randy Pettapiece, Donna Skelly
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Amarjot Sandhu
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeremy Roberts
Ian Arthur, Stan Cho
Catherine Fife, Mitzie Hunter
Logan Kanapathi, Sol Mamakwa
David Piccini, Jeremy Roberts
Amarjot Sandhu, Dave Smith
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Julia Douglas

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Présidente: Goldie Ghamari
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Mike Schreiner
Jill Andrew, Robert Bailey
Guy Bourgouin, Stephen Crawford
Goldie Ghamari, Chris Glover
Mike Harris, Sheref Sabawy
Amarjot Sandhu, Mike Schreiner
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

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Aris Babikian, Gilles Bisson
Will Bouma, Lorne Coe
Wayne Gates, Robin Martin
Norman Miller, Rick Nicholls
Billy Pang, Amanda Simard
Marit Stiles
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Will Bouma, Lucille Collard
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Lindsey Park, Gurratan Singh
Nina Tangri, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Kevin Yarde
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

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permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vijay Thanigasalam
Rima Berns-McGown, Michael Coteau
Faisal Hassan, Logan Kanapathi
Michael Mantha, Jim McDonell
Christina Maria Mitas, Sam Oosterhoff
Kaleed Rasheed, Donna Skelly
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Bhutila Karpoche
Deepak Anand, Aris Babikian
Jeff Burch, Amy Fee
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Belinda C. Karahalios, Bhutila Karpoche
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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