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Samedi
12 juin 2021

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Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
Greffier : Todd Decker

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Saturday 12 June 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Samedi 12 juin 2021

The House met at 0001.

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

Prayers.

ISLAMOPHOBIA

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Mississauga East–Cooksville has a point of order.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: I am seeking unanimous consent to move a motion without notice respecting condemning acts of violence and terrorism against people of the Muslim faith and all forms of Islamophobia, and for the House to reaffirm its support for the Anti-Racism Directorate.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Mississauga East–Cooksville is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion without notice respecting condemning acts of violence and terrorism against people of the Muslim faith and all forms of Islamophobia, and for the House to reaffirm its support for the Anti-Racism Directorate. Agreed? Agreed.

Once again, I'll recognize the member for Mississauga East–Cooksville.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: I move that, in the opinion of the House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario condemns all acts of violence and terrorism against people of the Muslim faith and reaffirms its condemnation of all forms of Islamophobia and its support for the Anti-Racism Directorate.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Rasheed has moved that, in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario condemns all acts of violence and terrorism against people of the Muslim faith and reaffirms its condemnation of all forms of Islamophobia and its support for the Anti-Racism Directorate.

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

Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECTING ELECTIONS
AND DEFENDING DEMOCRACY ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021
VISANT À PROTÉGER LES ÉLECTIONS
ET À DÉFENDRE LA DÉMOCRATIE

Mr. Downey moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill 307, An Act to amend the Election Finances Act /
Projet de loi 307, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le financement
des élections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the Attorney General care to lead off the debate?

Hon. Doug Downey: I rise in the House today to begin debate and to speak in favour of the Protecting Elections and Defending Democracy Act, 2021, which I had the honour to introduce yesterday. It is a bill that builds on the important safeguards passed by this Legislature to defend the essential voice of Ontarians in their own elections through the Protecting Ontario Elections Act, 2021. I would like to thank the diligent and dedicated teams at the Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs and my own ministry, the Ministry of the Attorney General, for their valuable and vital work on this legislation.

In Ontario, we are fortunate to choose our governments at the ballot box. There are so many places around the world where that is simply not the case. It is imperative that this Legislature do everything it can to protect that privilege and keep our elections accessible, fair and open to a balanced and meaningful conversation that includes everyone who wishes to participate and have their voices heard.

Each and every Ontarian is a driving force of our democratic life and its institutions, and we have clearly stated in this House that individual voters should be the ones determining the outcomes of Ontario elections, and not American-style political action groups or unaccountable pop-up organizations operating with unlimited money and no accountability.

Speaker, the Protecting Elections and Defending Democracy Act would restore responsible guardrails to ensure wealthy elites, special interest groups and corporations don't drown out the voices of individuals. This proposed legislation would indeed defend the central role of individuals in our democracy, individuals who must follow clear and transparent election rules when they put their name on a ballot or when they make the decision to support a party or a candidate. Ontario's elections belong to the people of our province, and we are determined, through this important legislation, to protect and defend the democratic process and its institutions.

Speaker, there is a lot at stake with this legislation, and it's why we took extraordinary action to recall the Legislature this week. It was this Legislature, with the support of both the government and the official opposition, that, in 2016, made history by banning corporate and union donations. That was an important step forward, and we built on that this year.

At that time in 2016, the Ontario Legislature also voted to establish important safeguards surrounding the unregulated and growing influences of pop-up organizations and

American-style political action committees, as we see in other countries. The 2016 changes began to address concerns that Ontarians had about seeing their own voice and influence drowned out by third parties who were spending unlimited amounts of money on political advertising between writ periods.

I would like to illustrate that just for a moment: In 2018, third parties spent over \$5 million during the election period and the six months preceding, and that was only because of the imposition of a pre-writ party spending limit in 2016. In the 2007, 2011 and 2014 elections—many of you ran in those elections; many have first-hand knowledge and memories of this—\$16.4 million was spent on unregulated third-party advertising, and that number comes from the *Globe and Mail*, on August 9, in a report that they did.

Ontario's Chief Electoral Officer warned a legislative committee, in 2016, "The primary risk of collusion in respect of third-party advertising, especially when there are contribution and spending limits for parties and candidates, is collusion between those running for office and third parties. For example, a candidate may be tempted to coordinate his or her activities with a sympathetic third-party advertiser in order to circumvent contribution and spending limits. I think that Bill 201 should have more stringent anti-collusion provisions." Bill 201 was the bill at the time that was putting in place those guardrails.

The Chief Electoral Officer has also stated that the scale of third-party advertising in Ontario was greater than at the federal level, and suggested that third-party election ads be monitored between elections, not just in the immediate lead-up to and during a writ.

This week, again, the scale of third-party advertising in Ontario was echoed by National Post columnist Colby Cosh, who wrote that the electoral landscape in Ontario features "an unusually lively ecosystem of 'third party' (i.e., technically non-partisan) advocacy groups that purchase political advertising." In fact, Ontario is the only province in Canada where third-party spending is measured in the millions rather than in the thousands.

Like other Parliaments before us, we see it as our responsibility to ensure that the electoral system and the laws that govern it continue to evolve to promote fairness and access to the democratic processes for everyone. We should all be prepared to defend our democracy and its institutions on behalf of the voters who voted each of us into this Legislature. The enduring health of these institutions is a testament to the work that has been accomplished over generations by parliamentarians and elections officials to uphold the integrity, accessibility and transparency of Ontario's elections system.

The Protecting Elections and Defending Democracy Act is about ensuring there are balanced safeguards to protect the important electoral conversation that must take place to allow Ontarians to fully participate in their own democracy. That means voters need to be able to participate in a conversation that meaningfully includes the individuals and parties who put their names on the ballot and follow transparent rules.

0010

These are among the important reasons that this act proposes to re-establish pre-writ third-party advertising spending limits in Ontario. But before I say more about this important legislation, I would like to outline how the Protecting Ontario Elections Act made it safer and easier for Ontarians to participate in their elections while re-asserting their central role in the democratic process.

The Protecting Ontario Elections Act included responsible changes designed to ensure the province's electoral process is equipped for urgent and evolving challenges, including COVID-19. It was passed by this Legislature to protect Ontarians' essential voice and to strengthen the integrity of the election process.

Bill 254 promoted fair and equitable access to the democratic process for everyone. The balanced legislation notably made it easier and safer to vote on election day and at advance polls. We know advance polls have been a growing trend in Ontario elections and have become the preferred practice in several other provinces, especially as COVID came on.

It provided new enforcement tools to the Chief Electoral Officer that included administrative monetary penalties. The legislation maintained per-vote subsidies to parties and riding associations at 2018 levels until 2024 to defend vigorous democratic debate in response to the impacts of COVID-19. It moved Ontario to the middle of the pack in Canada in terms of personal contributions to parties and candidates.

The Protecting Ontario Elections Act included changes to increase fairness for independent members and candidates. The legislation also provided new safeguards against irregular campaign spending and collusion in order to reassert the essential role of individuals at the centre of Ontario's electoral process.

It was a bill that could not have been accomplished without the engagement and contributions of Ontario's Chief Electoral Officer and this Legislature's Integrity Commissioner, both of whom provided their insights and expertise in the committee process. Both made unique contributions.

The Chief Electoral Officer brought forward a special report on election administration. It was released in November 2020, in response to the risks of COVID-19. We also relied on his report on Ontario's 42nd general election, entitled *Modernizing Ontario's Electoral Process*. Both of these reports were instrumental in developing the bill.

We continue to work with the Integrity Commissioner and his office in relation to the Members' Integrity Act and any legislative rules that may develop around social media. I'll take a moment to note that Bill 254 was the first express recognition in Ontario law—or even in Canadian law, for that matter—that members of the assembly use social media in the exercise of their duties. To ensure the legislation governing the conduct of members of the Legislature is clear and relevant to our world today, we included amendments to the Members' Integrity Act,

1994, in the Protecting Ontario Elections Act that addressed social media use.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I mentioned how critical input from the Chief Electoral Officer was for the development of the Protecting Ontario Elections Act, and a major element of that was how we were able to update the use of administrative monetary penalties to drive compliance with election rules. That input also helped us successfully boost the Chief Electoral Officer's enforcement powers and discretion.

As a result of the changes included in the Protecting Ontario Elections Act, the Chief Electoral Officer will continue to be able to report election infractions to criminal prosecutors. It also provides the CEO with new options and more discretion to drive compliance. These options would include new powers to impose administrative monetary penalties for contraventions of the Election Finances Act. Administrative monetary penalties could be applied for third-party advertising with no authorization, failing to register as a third party and exceeding spending limits, among other things.

For nomination contestants and leadership contestants, these penalties could be applied for failure to register, and all political actors could be given an AMP—they're called AMPs, administrative monetary penalties—for exceeding spending limits.

Most contraventions would be subject to a maximum penalty of \$1,500 for individuals and \$5,000 for entities, with some exemptions. In the event that a contribution in excess of the limit imposed by the Election Finances Act is made, the maximum amount of the AMP is an amount equal to twice the amount that was contributed in contravention of that section, plus the \$1,500 or \$5,000.

For any political party or third-party advertising appearing during a blackout period, and any third-party advertising that does not disclose the source or lacks authorization, the penalty could be up to \$10,000 for an individual and \$100,000 for an organization. Failure to register as a third party would lead to a maximum penalty of \$10,000.

It's important to stress that each of these contraventions could still be prosecuted at the discretion of the prosecutors, as is currently the case right now. We know that the Commissioner of Canada Elections federally, within the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, is authorized to use AMPs in this manner, and Ontario has followed suit, using that precedent set at the federal level as well as in British Columbia and Alberta. And with respect to the AMPs for third parties, Ontario has adopted a model similar to Alberta's, with higher maximum penalties: \$10,000 for individuals and \$100,000 for organizations.

Speaker, a recent Superior Court of Justice decision struck down a number of provisions of the Election Finances Act, including provisions enacted as part of the Protecting Ontario Elections Act. These include changes that were enacted to protect and reassert the essential role of individuals in the democratic process by guarding against collusion and unregulated third-party advertising. The Protecting Elections and Defending Democracy Act

before us proposes to re-enact these important provisions to restore these safeguards, including amendments to:

- subject registered third parties to a spending limit for political advertising 12 months in advance of the general election and for the 2022 general election, starting upon royal assent;

- establish rules on collusion that address prohibited activities that could enable third parties to exceed spending limits;

- define considerations that the chief electoral office may use to make a determination on whether an advertisement is a political advertisement; and

- provide interim political advertising reporting requirements for third parties during pre-election and election periods.

The Protecting Ontario Elections Act was groundbreaking in the solutions it provided to strengthen enforcement around collusion. The legislation included rules to address collusion that focus on sharing of resources and not simply sharing a message. Previous to the passage of Bill 254, the bar for establishing collusion was where it could be proven that a third party's advertising had been done with the knowledge and consent of a candidate or party. The Protecting Ontario Elections Act clearly outlined what collusion entails to help guard against it, based in part on the federal definition.

We believed, and we continue to believe, that protecting elections requires significant clarity around sharing information, common vendors, common contributors, and the use of funds obtained from foreign sources. It's why we've introduced, and why we're debating, the Protecting Elections and Defending Democracy Act. We see it as a fundamental duty of this assembly to ensure Ontarians can rely on the most effective safeguards against collusion to protect our elections from outside influence and interference. We see no reason to fall short of ensuring Ontario is home to the strongest anti-collusion framework in Canada.

It is worth noting that the passage of the bill we are debating today would once again require that third parties who donate funds to other third parties must disclose those donations and count those donations against their spending limits. Speaker, it would be irresponsible to allow third parties to circumvent these spending limits because they donated and they weren't captured in the reporting. I urge the members of this House to vote in favour of enacting these essential provisions that would address the threat of collusion in Ontario elections.

Speaker, I opened my remarks today speaking about the importance of guarding against unchecked and unregulated third-party advertising spending that threatens to drown out the voice of individual voters. The aforementioned court decision struck down the third-party pre-writ spending limits that were established by the Ontario Legislature in 2016 and amended by the Protecting Ontario Elections Act. This means that, as we stand here today, there are no pre-writ spending limits that would prevent pop-up organizations or American-style PACs or groups; it would just overshadow individual Ontarians, as well as candidates and the parties they choose to support.

The Protecting Ontario Elections Act extended the pre-writ period from six months to 12 months, and while it introduced new safeguards, it maintained ample opportunity for third parties to participate in the electoral conversation alongside actual candidates and parties whose names are on the ballot. The Protecting Elections and Defending Democracy Act would restore these crucial safeguards to protect the essential role of individuals at the heart of Ontario's democracy.

Speaker, I challenge anyone in this House to stand up and deny that the level of advertising activity and spending of pop-up organizations in Ontario is significant and needs guardrails. I challenge anyone to deny that unchecked and unregulated third-party spending between writ periods doesn't contribute to American-style politics and attack ads that overpower the voices of individuals and small organizations. In fact, we've seen members of the Liberals and NDP speak strongly in support of limits to the influence of big money political action groups and third-party special interests on our elections, to protect the voice of the individual by ensuring there are reasonable limits on big spending from third parties and special interest groups.

The former Attorney General in the previous Liberal government, speaking about election finance, said that we need a system that "ensures that the people are being represented first and foremost in a democracy and in our democratic institutions, not just well-funded special interests." I agree.

0020

And when the former Attorney General was speaking about his government's then-proposed third-party advertising limits, which we are building on, he said, "Disproportionate financial resources among some of these interests have the potential to distort the conversation, potentially allowing some opinions to be heard louder or more frequently than others." And I totally agree with that.

Speaker, official opposition members who still sit as honourable members in this chamber have previously supported our calls to protect Ontario elections from American-style big-money third-party influence. The member from Niagara Falls has said:

"Big money should never rule politics—never...."

"Let's be serious here. Let's seriously remove the influence of big money on politics. Let's get back to what politics should be about, and quite frankly, that's serving all the people of this great province." And I agree with you.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't want to leave out the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition said, "Ontario's New Democrats, and I as leader, welcome changes that will limit the influence that big money has on politics in Ontario."

The NDP and the Liberals have been clear on this issue in the past, and I call on them to stand with us as we continue the important work of ensuring individual voices remain at the centre of our elections and are not overshadowed by big-money special interest groups coming from any direction.

The influence of third parties in our elections is disproportionately significant in Ontario compared to other

provinces, and even the federal context, on a dollar-for-dollar basis. This is not spending by actual political parties or candidates who raise funds from transparent and accountable donations made by individuals. This is spending by outside organizations that can be funded by a very wide variety of sources.

Mr. Speaker, our government has been very clear that we believe Ontarians should be the ones deciding elections, not those big-money conglomerates, wealthy elites or special interest groups. We've never denied that there needs to be room for third parties to participate alongside candidates and parties in the electoral process. Their voice is important too. But what we cannot allow is for their voice to be louder than Ontarians themselves. This bill will help provide a balance to ensure the voice of individual Ontarians is not drowned out.

We know the Chief Electoral Officer has raised concerns over the level of third-party spending in Ontario and has encouraged more regulation between writ periods, and not less. The Protecting Ontario Elections Act built on the Ontario Legislature's 2016 decision to ban corporate and union donations by requiring third-party advertising spending limits to begin 12 months before an election instead of six months before. The idea was to protect the essential voice of individuals and ensure they, and not pop-up political action committees, remain the driving force of our elections.

Speaker, the spending limit did not change for 2021; it remained at \$637,000. That amount is in addition to the \$106,000 each third-party group is permitted to spend during the official writ period itself. Now, though, with these advertising spending limits struck down, there are no guardrails as we stand here to protect the voice and relative influence of individual Ontarians in their elections—individuals who must follow clear and transparent rules. Restoring this 12-month limit of \$637,200, in addition to the \$106,200 during the official writ period, would protect the essential voice of individuals in our elections.

When you consider the three years of unregulated spending that these organizations can engage in between elections, we see this as striking a responsible balance. This is why we have proposed to restore these provisions in the bill we are discussing today. We're proposing changes to re-establish the responsible regulation of third-party advertising between elections, balancing the ability of third parties to continue to participate in elections and the need to ensure individual voters have the loudest voice in our elections.

Ontarians don't want their politics and their elections to mirror the adversarial nature of what we've all witnessed on the news emanating from our neighbours to the south. This is one more reason why we urge members to support the important legislation we have proposed to protect our elections in Ontario.

Speaker, we're here today in extraordinary circumstances. We've recalled the House and we have introduced legislation which, if passed, will invoke section 33 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to protect the individual rights of Ontario voters and protect our elections from American-style super-PACs and unaccountable

pop-up organizations that can currently operate with unlimited money and no rules.

Section 33, commonly referred to as the “notwithstanding” clause, allows democratically-elected governments to declare that legislation applies, notwithstanding certain limited sections of the charter, for a renewable five-year term. This entrusts the ultimate responsibility with the elected representatives of the people. The “notwithstanding” clause has been used by other provinces previously, as all of us know. Our government sees the defence of our democracy, the protection of the electoral process and the right for voters to be informed in a balanced way as fundamental responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker, prior to my service as Attorney General, I’ve had the great privilege of studying the law, teaching the law and working in Ontario’s justice system from a number of perspectives: as a professor, an academic, a court clerk, a registrar, a litigation barrister and a certified specialist solicitor. I fell in love with the law many years ago. I have studied and taught; I’ve participated in constitutional debates and advocated through Meech Lake and the Charlottetown Accord. Beyond my avid interest in Canadian political history, I had the fortune to start a law firm with the Honourable Doug Lewis, who was there when the charter was negotiated, and he later became the Attorney General and Minister of Justice.

The use of section 33 needs to be intentional and it needs to be principled. What could be more principled than protecting the rights of voters to be free from big-money influence so they can hear from the members of all parties and independents who put their names on a ballot and not be swamped with special interests with no accountability?

Now, we can go back to 1982, when we started this journey with the charter. There seems to be some confusion by others that section 33 is some outside force overwhelming the charter. Let me be clear: If you’re looking for it, section 33 is in the charter. The charter, by definition, can’t override itself, as it would cease to exist. There is connectivity and interplay between the sections. Just as section 1 moderates some other sections so they are not absolute in isolation, section 33 governs responsibilities between branches of government. It was built that way on purpose. No one can even suggest that the charter would exist without the inclusion of section 33. It was intentional and principled in its inclusion. The final say needs to lay with democracy, and the vote of the people needs to be respected.

Speaker, we will hear critics say section 33 is sacrosanct and should be left in its glass case. They think it is the chesterfield covered in plastic you can’t sit on at your grandparents’ house. And all the while, these last 40 years, the rest of the charter has been interpreted as a living tree that has been encouraged to bloom. It is inconsistent that section 33 should wilt. The provinces were clear at the time that the charter would not have been ratified without it. And never during the 1988 Meech Lake Accord discussions was it ever proposed that it should be plucked out. Never once during the Charlottetown discussions was

it proposed to be plucked out. That is because it is core to the balance that was struck in favour of democracy and the special role the Legislatures play in our federation as the embodiment of the will of the people.

What more appropriate time to use section 33 than to safeguard the voices of those to be heard and elected to the Legislature? There has to be a balance, and where that balance is, is a policy decision ultimately entrusted to the Legislature through section 33.

Mr. Speaker, I introduced the Protecting Ontario Elections Act, which was passed by this Legislature and received royal assent in April. I have spoken at length today on the reasons we took action to protect elections, as I’ve done in the past, and those comments are a matter of public record in the news media and Hansard.

During this unprecedented time of challenge, our province is moving in the right direction, and yesterday, we began to see some public health measures carefully begin to lift so we can get back to the things we value so much. As politicians, one of those things is travelling this province and engaging with people. It’s what we love to do. We have been able to do so over the past many months through technology, but we all look forward to the chance to eventually gather again safely.

When I speak with people around the province, it is clear that people want to engage in a balanced and accessible debate. They want to be part of a meaningful discussion and they want to make an impact on elections and on the decisions that ultimately shape their communities. It is unfair for elite special interest groups and American-style political action groups to stomp out that debate with million-dollar boots that only the rich fit in.

Ultimately, Speaker, Ontario voters deserve to make decisions based on balanced political conversation that they can find accessible ways to participate in. They should not be blocked from that conversation because it is dominated by unregulated and unaccountable pop-up organizations backed by big money and powerful elites.

0030

I urge the members of this House to stand up for their constituents, stand with our government, and to pass the Protecting Elections and Defending Democracy Act. Thank you. Merci. Meegwetch.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I’ll now invite questions to the Attorney General related to his presentation. Questions?

Mr. John Vanthof: I listened intently to the Attorney General. The one question I think we should ask is, when the Ontario Superior Court ruled against the government, why didn’t the government simply appeal the ruling instead of going directly to the nuclear option?

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you for the question. There are different tools in the tool box. I don’t think anybody in this House would know me as anything except moving quickly on things. That’s how we got the justice system back on track. It’s how we moved it forward decades in a matter of a year, Mr. Speaker.

Look, we cannot have an ability for pop-up organizations to have a complete free-for-all in the Wild West, with

no accountability, with no limits, with no guardrails. That's where we were left, and we cannot let that hang out there while we go through a lengthy process. It is too fundamental to protect the importance of elections in Ontario.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: First, let me just congratulate the Attorney General on taking an historic and, really, a bold step in order to ensure that our elections are fair. I congratulate him on that.

I just want to actually follow up on the question from the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane, the NDP whip, with respect to appealing the decision that was made. My understanding is, as you've highlighted in your speech, that the decision made by the Superior Court, in fact, removed all of the accountability measures that were in place. I'm assuming that an appeal would take some time. In the interim, that would mean that third-party spending would be left ungoverned in the province of Ontario. As you highlighted in your speech, Ontario really was the Wild West for many, many, many years.

I wonder if you could highlight some of the dangers of leaving Ontario elections unprotected in that manner.

Hon. Doug Downey: Absolutely. The decision itself, if you read it, struck down and stripped out all of the safeguards and specifically said that they would be effective immediately, so that there is no law in the land, there are no guardrails, there is no accountability, there is no reporting—that it can be a free-for-all while we go through a lengthy process.

Mr. Speaker, the question is, what could happen? Well, we just have to look backwards. Before the law, what was then Bill 2, in the sitting that the Liberals brought in, that Attorney General Naqvi brought in—before that, all you have to do is look down at the end of the chamber and see the results of wanton and unrestrained rules. We just can't have the Wild West.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch to the Attorney General. Good morning, everyone. Sometimes I bring issues to the House, to this place. To invoke the “notwithstanding” clause—I'm just wondering, how can we bring water to children who are nine years old in far, northern Ontario? I wish we were debating that. Can we have a discussion on that? What are your thoughts on giving water to everyone else, everybody in Ontario?

Hon. Doug Downey: Through you, Mr. Speaker, chi meegwetch. Look, we sometimes have to stand on principle. If you're a student of history, you can go back to Meech Lake in 1998 and, whether you agree with him or not, the courageous stands that Ovide Mercredi took in his time. We can all stand on principle, Mr. Speaker. There are many important issues, but the importance of elections and the importance of how we elect people and the foreign and big-money influence that can happen—that can twist everything. That can set the whole province in the wrong direction. We have to protect the core, the base, the foundation of how we get here. Regardless of who is here, we have to do that. That is why it's so important: so that

we can get the important issues, so we can take care of the most vulnerable.

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

Mr. John Fraser: It's hard to follow the member from Kiiwetinoong's question, because he hit the nail on the head. We've got a five-alarm-fire debate tonight. It's all hands on deck. We're here. Why aren't we there for what the member asked for? Why aren't we there for children with autism who haven't got what they need? Why aren't we there for a plan for schools? Why aren't we there for the iron ring that never appeared around long-term care? Why aren't we there, instead of giving a two-month extension for the PSW wage raise, debating that and making it permanent? That's the question. What are we doing here not talking about things that are critical and important to Ontarians?

Hon. Doug Downey: I appreciate the member's indignance, but after 15 years of watching the building burn and only at the last minute, after so much fundraising—and I wasn't going to get into this and be partisan, Mr. Speaker—that's why we need to fix this. Because the kinds of things the Liberals were doing up until they got caught with their hands in the cookie jar—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Government side, come to order. I can't hear the Attorney General. He's only a few feet away from me.

The Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When they got their hands caught in the cookie jar and luckily their principled Attorney General—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Attorney General will withdraw.

Hon. Doug Downey: Withdraw.

Hon. Todd Smith: But it's true.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services will withdraw.

Hon. Todd Smith: Withdraw.

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

Mr. David Piccini: Speaker, we strongly believe that it's—

Interjection.

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

I recognize the member again to place his question.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you, Speaker. I, like many in this place, recall vividly going up and down Second and Third Line roads. I, like many, certainly on this side of the House, recall vividly having constituents say “Dave, this is the first time a politician has ever knocked on my door.” I looked them in the eye—the dignity of looking them in the eye and speaking to them about why I'm seeking the honour to represent them at Queen's Park.

Speaker, I got a note from Conrad today, a constituent. He's torn. He doesn't want American-style politics, but he also pays dues to a third party. Speaker, my question, through you to the minister, is, will the minister please explain how this change will address concerns that third

parties are having an oversize influence on everyday Ontarians?

Hon. Doug Downey: This is about right-sizing the voices in Ontario. We can have small organizations that we want to hear from. They don't all agree with us. But if we allow big money, unfettered, with no accountability, those voices will not get heard. The people with their name on a ballot will not get heard. The parties that are putting forward platforms and that will ultimately—one of them—be the government of the day will not get heard.

If you want to talk about other issues, they should be coming from the people who are brave enough to put their name on a ballot, get elected to this place and run on principle. That's where the ideas should be coming from.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last quick question.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, everyone. The Attorney General just stood in his place and said we have to preserve the foundation—the foundation. Well, what I would ask the Attorney General, Mr. Speaker—

Interjections.

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

Restart the clock. The member from Davenport has the floor.

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Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the Attorney General says something like that, I think to myself, "What is more fundamental, what is more foundational than protecting our children and giving our children clean drinking water; than protecting the most vulnerable in this province; than giving the most vulnerable workers in this province paid sick days?" The only thing this government is preserving is their political bacon.

When will this government bring the same urgency, a midnight sitting, to allow our children to go back to school for the first time in months?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Attorney General to reply, quickly.

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you to the member from Davenport. I had to check my notes because I wasn't sure if she was wanting them in school or out of school today, because it keeps changing, Mr. Speaker, and it's really hard to keep up.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Member for Davenport, come to order. I recognize the member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you very much, Speaker. Before I begin, I want to let you know that I will be sharing my time with the member for Niagara Falls, the member for Brampton Centre, the member for Thunder Bay, the member for York South–Weston and the member for Davenport.

And, Speaker, I would like to seek unanimous consent of the House to wear a green and purple ribbon as I deliver my remarks.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for London West is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to wear a green and purple ribbon as she delivers her remarks. Agreed? Agreed.

The member for London West can continue.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you very much, Speaker. I appreciate the unanimous consent. The green ribbon signifies the green carpet of the Quebec City mosque where six worshippers were murdered on January 29, 2017, and the purple is Yumna Afzaal's favourite colour.

I rise today to participate in this debate with a heavy heart. I travelled in tonight from London, where thousands of people of good conscience joined together in a multi-faith walk against hate. I come from a community where on Tuesday, 10,000 people gathered at a vigil to mourn the loss of four members of our London family and to grieve for the little boy, Fayez, who still lies in hospital inconsolable over the loss of his mother, Madiha; his father, Salman; his sister, Yumna; and his grandmother Talat.

I come from a community where tomorrow a funeral service will be held at the Islamic Centre of Southwest Ontario, and it is expected that thousands more Londoners and people across the province will attend.

Speaker, the grief and the pain and the anger in London is palpable. The wound is still fresh and raw. The family lived in London West. They lost their lives in London West because of an act of anti-Muslim terror. They were targeted because of their Islamic faith. They were described as the best kind of family: a family that was always smiling, a kind family with hearts of gold.

Yumna was a student at Oakridge Secondary School. She was a bright and shining star, a gifted artist and a generous friend with a seemingly limitless future. Her mother, Madiha, was a PhD student in civil engineering at Western on the path to joining the ranks of so many London Muslim professional engineers. Her father was a physiotherapist, a valued member of London's health care community, where so many health care heroes are Muslims serving as ER physicians, pharmacists, psychiatrists and more. Her grandmother was beloved by her 20 grandchildren. The meaning of this loss is incalculable.

Dr. Javeed Sukhera is a respected voice in London. He's a child psychiatrist and chair of the London police board, and he has been outspoken about the mental health consequences of this government's failure to reduce waitlists to support children. He knew the family. They were his friends and his children's friends. Like many Muslim parents, however, he is struggling with what to tell his children, how to explain to them that their friends were murdered because of their faith.

Some people in London have asked how this could have happened. They are refusing to accept the reality that racism and discrimination is all too pervasive in our city and in our province, and they're finding comfort in the notion that it was an isolated act of a hateful man. But this vicious act of terror has brought us face to face with some ugly truths about our city.

Dr. Sukhera speaks of the culture of denialism and avoidance that has characterized our approach to dealing

with racism and Islamophobia and has, in fact, contributed to upholding and entrenching hateful ideas and rhetoric.

Speaker, if we are to do the work that is necessary to be done in London, we need to understand how this could have happened. We need to understand the public policy consequences of a governing party accepting political donations from bigots who publicly express hateful views toward Muslims, and then the government returns the favour by passing legislation to allow the institution founded by Charles McVety degree-granting status. We need to understand the public policy consequences of vilifying asylum seekers as illegal border crossers who are nothing more than a drain on the public purse. We need to understand the public policy consequences of gutting the Anti-Racism Directorate, starving it of funding to prevent it from doing the work that so desperately needs to get done in our schools, in our workplaces and in our communities.

Speaker, this bill will silence the voices of people who want to engage in that debate on the public policy consequences of actions that this government and all governments have taken. That is why this bill is so dangerous, Speaker: because it silences public debate that is so critical at this moment in our city, in our province, in our country. The bill that is before us today will muzzle people who want to have this honest discussion about how public policy entrenches and stokes Islamophobia.

I have to say that we will do everything we can to fight this legislation. We cannot play politics with people's lives, Speaker. Four people have died in London. We cannot do this anymore.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next, we have the member for Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak tonight. If anyone is still watching at home, they'll recognize that I'm speaking after midnight right now, a time that the government chose. As many of you know, this doesn't really bother me a lot. I worked steady midnights for 20 years in the plant at General Motors. I'm used to being awake at this hour, so I'm happy to stand.

The fact that I worked steady midnights in a manufacturing plant is also the reason I want to speak tonight. As many of you know, I didn't run for elected office after being a lawyer or a high-paid CEO. I worked in a manufacturing plant. I ran for office after working on the shop floor for 30 years. I'm proud of the fact that I'm here tonight to represent the voice of just people like me: working people who've had enough of being let down by politicians who care more about winning elections than representing their constituents.

Tonight, what we're seeing with Bill 307 and the use of the "notwithstanding" clause to silence critics of this government, the reason we are here is that it's very clear that this Conservative government is afraid of the voices of working people, families of seniors in long-term care and every other Ontarian who doesn't subscribe to the government's policies. They are afraid that the people who have been left behind, the people who are discounted and disregarded will raise their voices and tell other people what the Ford government has done to them.

Speaker, the PCs say this bill silences the voices of the elite. Do you know who the elites are that they're talking about? It's about our parents who have kids with autism; it's about our teachers, our education workers; auto-workers; parents of students struggling with online learning. It's the thousands of families who lost loved ones who died in long-term care as the government refused to act to protect them from COVID-19: our parents, our grandparents, our aunts, our uncles and also the workers in those facilities. It's the hard-working families and members of the unions they belong to.

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This government thinks the elites are people with disabilities living in deep poverty because this government refuses to invest in supporting them.

It's the adults with developmental disabilities this government has left to languish in intensive care units in hospitals because the wait-list for supportive housing is over two decades long. They think the families of those people are elites too.

It's the essential front-line workers, like nurses, PSWs in long-term-care homes and retirement homes and group homes—food processing plants and factories.

Speaker, that is who the PC Party is afraid of. That's who they want to silence. I have to ask you: Why?

They're afraid that these voices will come together and tell the people of Ontario to just simply look at what Premier Ford and his PC Party have done to the province of Ontario—how they created a situation where Ontario's schools are closed. Kids are struggling with online learning longer than anywhere else in the country.

They're afraid that the families of long-term-care residents will tell their stories about how this government knew private corporations were letting our seniors live in filth, some of them dying from dehydration because they couldn't get a glass of water, and how this government did nothing except pass legislation to protect those corporations from being sued.

They're worried that parents of children with autism will join together and say this government didn't lift a finger to help their beautiful kids.

Speaker, this is one of those bills that shows the priorities of this government.

When long-term-care-home residents were living through summers without air conditioning, which is still the case, by the way, Premier Ford didn't call back the Legislature.

He didn't call it back when teachers and public health experts were warning him that not making classroom sizes safe and more supportive would cause a second wave. We all remember February 11. He left schools as they were and closed the Legislature for a month in December.

He calls nurses and PSWs heroes but refuses to eliminate Bill 124, which suppresses their wages—a bill that targets a workforce that is largely made up of women.

He promised he'd use the last year to ensure all long-term-care residents would have air conditioning before the temperatures rose this year—for our seniors, our moms, our dads, our grandparents. Yet those seniors are still

without air conditioning. We've already seen temperatures over 30 degrees. I had a number of calls last weekend about this.

But the Premier called back the Legislature within hours of a court ruling against his previous legislation to silence critics, in order to once again stop his critics from being allowed to speak in the upcoming election. If that doesn't say he's more worried about his political future than anything else, I simply don't know what does.

In Niagara, we have businesses that will still be closed for another two months. Some 4,200 casino workers have been out work for 15 months. Gyms, dance studios—our kids can't get on the playing fields to play baseball and do all those things outside. They need support and they need it now—not next week, not next month. They need us to pass financial support right now for any businesses still closed. Why don't we have a vote on that tonight? I've talked to this party a number of times about businesses in Niagara Falls that are closing. Some 40,000 people lost their job in Niagara through COVID-19.

We need more business support for our workers. We're here, so why don't we vote on giving businesses an immediate third round of business funding so they don't go bankrupt? They keep people working.

Speaker, the PC Party won't allow a vote on that, but they'll get every MPP here to force a vote to suspend the free speech rights of their critics before our next election.

So if you're a struggling business, that's not a priority, but if you're the PC Party worried about the next election, you have to pass legislation to protect yourself right away.

This is coming from the same party that doubled the donation limit in the province of Ontario. Think about that.

They claim to be the party of the little guy. Well, go ask how many of the little guys like myself—I'm five foot nothing—have almost \$4,000 to donate to a political party, or go to a Zoom for \$1,000 so you could see the Premier. None of my friends have \$1,000. I'd be happy if they gave me \$20 to come on a Zoom meeting to talk to me.

Come on guys, what are we doing here?

In fact, businesses probably can't donate anything, because they're trying to survive the fact that Premier Ford's decisions have left our province in the longest lockdown in the country.

So they're making it easier for big donors to donate, and yet they rush a bill to silence their critics. That tells you everything you need to know about the PC Party and Premier Ford.

Speaker, the government needs to hear this: Enough is enough.

You lost in court—and being a lawyer, sir, you should respect the courts and move along. Don't use this time to try and tip the scales of an election in your favour. Listen to the people of Ontario; listen to what they want. They want help. They want help, guys. They don't want us sitting here at 12 o'clock. Help for businesses—

Interjections.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: We can do that tonight. If you table a bill, without any of the usual poison pills, that will truly

and directly support small business, you can find support from the opposition. I'm saying to the government, focus on the things that matter to all Ontarians, not just trying to win an election. If you had done your job for four years, you would win the election easy. You wouldn't have to put a bill like this forward.

Sorry, guys, I've got one page left, and I'll sit down.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm just going to ask the member to make his comments through the Chair.

Mr. Wayne Gates: People out there are really struggling right now, and they need you to use this time to pass laws that actually help them, help Ontarians and help my constituents in Niagara Falls that are crying for help in the business community.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: Sorry.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next, the member for Brampton Centre.

Ms. Sara Singh: Good morning, Speaker. It's always an honour to rise here in the House to contribute to the debate, and a historic debate at that today.

I think many of us are very concerned with what the government is seeking to do here. Under the guise of helping ensure that the democratic process is respected and that freedom of speech is respected, the government is really taking advantage and weaponizing the “notwithstanding” clause for their own political purpose and gain. That is extremely troubling to people across the province of Ontario and, frankly, the country, Speaker.

It's unfortunate that we are here tonight debating changes to the Election Finances Act when people in this province are struggling. The government did not use any opportunity throughout this pandemic to address the crisis that we were in. Not once throughout the pandemic did the government have an emergency debate to help protect the 4,000 seniors that died in long-term care, when they knew that seniors were dying of dehydration, rotting in their own feces—no emergency debate for that.

No emergency debate when essential workers were losing their lives in our workplaces and the government refused for over a year to implement paid sick days. They could have used extraordinary powers throughout this pandemic to actually help people in the province of Ontario, but they chose not to do that. They chose not to do that, Speaker.

As we heard from the member of Niagara Falls, and I know in every single one of our ridings, the small businesses are struggling, many of them closing their doors, losing, potentially, their homes and their livelihoods. No emergency debate to ensure that they were getting supports—none.

But we're here tonight because the government feels that it is absolutely, exceptionally important that we debate this bill and their use of the “notwithstanding” clause in order to silence the voices of the people that they hurt the most throughout this pandemic, Speaker: the front-line workers that they applaud as heroes; folks like the Ontario

Nurses' Association, who have called this an extreme abuse of power and an absolute disrespect for our courts and a violation of their freedom of expression, which is exactly what the courts have ruled here. Rather than respect that decision, this government has invoked the "notwithstanding" clause in order to ensure that whatever their political interest is, is being protected, rather than the people of this province.

This government failed children with autism. None of them have even moved off the wait-lists and they have not received the funding and supports that they need throughout this pandemic and prior to that, despite the Minister of Community and Social Services promising that he was going to deliver on this for children with autism. But there was no emergency debate for those children, no consideration being made. In fact, what this government wants to do is actually silence those parents and families from speaking up, and speaking up against this government and the lack of action that they've taken.

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You know, Speaker, I think as legislators, we all know we have a unique responsibility here in this Legislature to ensure that the policies we're creating will have positive impacts and outcomes in our community. The member from Kiiwetinoong earlier asked this government, asked the Attorney General why we aren't here debating things like making sure that children in his community have access to clean drinking water. There was no response. The government felt that their own political interests outweighed the need to debate providing clean water to First Nations people and children in this province. That shows you the lack of priorities from this Conservative government.

At a time when we should be debating how we're going to be effectively reopening this province, how we are going to be recovering our economy and ensuring that people have the supports they need, and at a time when we should be preparing to get our children back in the classrooms, we are standing here in this Legislature debating changes to the Election Finances Act. No one in Ontario is asking the government for this. What they are asking for is a safe restart for our children in September. They are asking to ensure that we are getting for-profit corporations out of long-term care and protecting our seniors. They are asking this government to ensure that small businesses have the supports they need. That is what we should be debating here today, Speaker.

It is unfortunate that this government does not seem to understand the point of time we are at in history right now, and that this is what they would like to use their moment in history to do. I want to urge this government to think critically about the path forward, to think critically about what the priorities of this province should be and the work that we need to be doing here as legislators.

Speaker, the last few weeks, we as a province and country have dealt with tremendous amounts of grief: uncovering Indigenous children in residential schools; battling Islamophobia, with acts of terror being committed against families. These should be the things that we are

dealing with as legislators here in this House, not protecting the political interests of Conservative insiders and big-money donors. Because at the end of the day, Speaker, that's what this debate is all about.

I understand that my time is done, and there's a lot more to say, but I really wish that this government would get its priorities straight and start fighting for the people of Ontario, rather than protecting their own political interests.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Thunder Bay—Atikokan is next.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: It's always a pleasure to stand in this House and represent the people of Thunder Bay—Atikokan, to bring their voices to this House on this important day, because there are many issues that are affecting our communities.

I want to put on the record something that has affected us in Thunder Bay as I attended two vigils in the last week. One was important to bear witness to the 215 children that were discovered and the painful reminder of how they did not make it home and that many did not make it home. It was a call to action once again to save all the children affected by racism and hate. The other vigil, two days ago, was an outpouring of grief and support for our Muslim community—a recognition of the tragedy of the Afzaal family. Again, in the speeches and the prayers, there was a call to action that we need to do more to eradicate anti-Muslim hate and make the world better.

Speaker, we're here tonight on night shift, and I'm happy to stand in solidarity with the shift workers everywhere, especially people like my daughter, who is working tonight in an ICU in Thunder Bay, taking care of people from Winnipeg, and the many others: the police officers, firefighters, paramedics, those who work in factories, and all the essential industries. We owe them a debt of gratitude because they carried on during this pandemic.

What is unfortunate is, we're not debating ways to stop racism here tonight or improving health care, but looking at ways to stifle free speech a year out from an election. I've had emails sent to me and I'd like to share them, because constituents' voices should be heard here in the House.

Carlos Santander-Maturana is the president of the Thunder Bay and District Labour Council. His organization represents 15,000 or more workers in our area. He says, "I was astounded to hear that Mr. Ford"—Premier Ford; sorry—"and his PC government decided to recall the Legislature to introduce legislation that will enable the government to invoke the 'notwithstanding' clause to avoid implementing the judicious ruling of Justice Morgan of the Ontario Superior Court regarding his attack on democracy.... The 'notwithstanding' clause was never intended to be used in a frivolous partisan manner, truly directed to undermine democracy. It is interesting to note that" Premier "Ford during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic was adamant against calling back the Legislature to deal with the serious matter of paid sick" leave "for essential workers."

I received another email from a constituent, Jules Tupker, who is a representative of the Ontario Health

Coalition and also a representative of the injured workers association. He writes, “Attacking our democracy to silence public debate, reduce public participation, and ultimately protect his party from potentially devastating criticisms ahead of an election. He has ignored the concerns of community members and organizations and now that a court agrees with these concerns, he is ignoring the law. No one is above the charter. Now more than ever, we need to hear from the people and organizations that have been on the ground getting us through COVID-19. We are in full support of elected representatives who intend to resist this attack on our rights by voting against this. All Ontarians need to know that we will stand up against this attack on our rights.”

There are so many important things we could be debating. Many came forward and are worried. One group that came forward was the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce. They don't know what their role will be after this legislation is passed, and they felt it was important to get on the record their recent correspondence. They wanted it brought to the attention of the government that they are unhappy with the Roadmap to Reopen. They write:

“Ontario's Roadmap to Reopen is a significant disappointment to the local business community, and we firmly believe the plan should be reconsidered for a number of reasons:

—Ontario's plan is regressive, setting out operating measures that for many sectors are more restrictive than those implemented in the previous grey lockdown measures despite high vaccination rates that will greatly reduce COVID transmission.

—The plan's one-size approach is based on province-wide health indicators that do not consider the regional realities of Ontario's northern and rural communities where transmission is low and hospital capacity” can be “high.

“The plan is inflexible and does not encourage innovative approaches such as outdoor commerce, customer scheduling/capacity limits and rapid testing that could allow all businesses to operate safely.

“The plan is out of step with the reopening plans of many other provinces and will delay Ontario's economic recovery and deter interprovincial tourism opportunities.

“We strongly” urge the government “to immediately revise the Roadmap to Reopen to ensure that it offers:

—measures that allow all businesses to reopen with appropriate safety measures and capacity limits;

—consideration of regional health indicators;

—flexibility for businesses to innovate to increase sales opportunities while ensuring staff and customer safety; and

—alignment with Canada-wide best practices for reopening.”

That is from Charla Robinson, the president of the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce.

0110

The OSSTF, which is the organization that represents secondary school teachers, felt it was important to get on the record their concerns. They wrote:

“In Thunder Bay at the Lakehead District School Board, due to the ... government's refusal to provide sufficient funding for programming as well as safety in our schools, at the high school level the board was forced to adopt the so-called ‘hybrid learning’ model, where teachers simultaneously taught students face to face and remotely. As a result, students in either situation were provided with far less attention from the classroom teachers, who had to juggle between the two distinct groups of students at the same time. The student experience was significantly degraded, and the excessive workload on teachers drove many very close to their limits, causing some excellent educators to seriously consider leaving the profession. Had there been sufficient funding, the board could have offered dedicated remote classrooms for those students whose families chose to keep them home for learning, as well as dedicated teachers in physical classrooms for those students who were able to be in the schools. Instead, thanks to this government's purposeful neglect of public education during this pandemic, everyone in these classrooms, students and staff alike, was shortchanged, leaving gaps in learning that will take years to repair.”

And we are heading back to that hybrid model—I hope not, but in September, that will be something that will be an option—without the supports that we need. That would be something worth debating.

The final email I received, which is very heartbreaking, is from a group, Northern Autism Families Matter. They said:

“For a group that already experiences a lack of inclusion, Northern Autism Families Matter feels that Premier Doug Ford's proposed new election law will further marginalize the autism community. The law will make it impossible for us to educate the public about our realities both as autism families and as residents of northwestern Ontario. How else will we bring to light the horrible policy decisions, lack of ministry leadership and communication that have traumatized our communities for nearly three years?

“Is the Premier afraid for the public to know the truth of how his government has mishandled the Ontario Autism Program, particularly in NWO? If there were no problems with the job they were doing, Premier Ford and” the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services “would happily discuss the wait-list numbers, openly disclose policy to the community, and answer families' questions in a meaningful and respectful way. But they don't. They hide in silence, they ignore families, they send copy-pasted answers taken directly from the MCCSS website. This is exactly why groups like Northern Autism Families Matter came into existence. We amplify the voices of autism families in northwestern Ontario.

“Northern families are done being silenced at Queen's Park.

“The ‘notwithstanding’ clause is meant for urgent issues, emergency situations, not for the whims of a government intent on stacking the deck in their favour in an election year by silencing legitimate criticism.

“Criticisms such as:

“—After two-plus years there is still no functioning OAP.

“—Service capacity is still a massive issue in northern Ontario.

“—Core services, the therapy part of the OAP, is still years away for the vast majority of families.

“—In almost three years now not a single child has come off the OAP wait-list and into service, in fact the wait-list has doubled.

“Autism families have been living through prolonged trauma and crises for years due to repeated delays by this government, yet Premier Ford’s urgency is clearly focused inward. Because of this an entire generation of autistic children is being completely left behind, is being silenced.”

She adds, “Please, stop this law, let us be heard.”

I urge this government to withdraw this legislation and this attack on working people and this attack on our democracy.

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

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise on behalf of the decent, hard-working people of York South–Weston. I rise this morning to ask the assembly, and particularly our friends across the aisle, to do something all too rare in this chamber: to listen, to reflect and then to reconsider. I’m appealing to their better angels, to their capacity to pause and reflect, and to change their minds on matters much too important to be rammed through in haste.

As legislators, we must ask ourselves: Is this why Ontarians have sent us here? Are we to give their blessings to an override of their Charter of Rights and Freedoms?

The minister reintroduced this bill after a ruling by Justice Morgan of the Ontario Superior Court that the government’s law to limit the electoral expression of Ontarians during a general election was a violation under the charter. He ruled the government’s law was a denial of citizens’ freedom of expression and, as such, was not a reasonable limit on our charter rights and freedoms.

The government says the purpose of this reintroduced legislation is to prevent American-style suppression by wealthy and powerful individuals and interests from unfairly influencing the democratic process. One might ask if the denial of our freedom of expression achieves that very outcome—but I get ahead of myself, Mr. Speaker. Let us put that aside for now. How is it even possible that the government expects legislators to approve its override of a Superior Court decision to protect the people’s charter rights in the first place?

On November 5, 1981, Canadian Premiers, including the widely respected Conservative Premier of Ontario, joined the Prime Minister to finalize an agreement that gave us the charter. Some provinces—not Ontario—had called for a legal mechanism in the Constitution to protect their power to pass any law over the people’s basic freedoms and rights. They came up with section 33, which allows Parliament and provincial Legislatures to set aside

or override charter rights, suspending the rights in sections 2 and 7 to 15 of the charter, including our fundamental freedoms, legal rights and our cherished equality rights.

But they all understood that the “notwithstanding” clause was an exceptional mechanism, a last resort. It has even been called the nuclear option—to be used only in the rarest of circumstances. For the nearly over 40 years since then, seven provinces and two territories have never once used the override power, nor have successive Liberal and Conservative federal governments. In Ontario, not a single government, Conservative, Liberal or NDP, has ever actually implemented this kind of constitutional exceptionalism—never.

Mr. Speaker, the reason the exercise of the “notwithstanding” clause is so often referred to as the nuclear option is because, as with nuclear weapons, its value, if it works at all, is precisely because its potential use is so catastrophic that it will hopefully incent legislators to find a pathway to their goals that does not offend the charter. Has this government even attempted to find such a legitimate pathway? No, sadly, Mr. Speaker, they have not. Instead, this government prefers to use an extreme measure, the “notwithstanding” clause, to achieve an outcome that it was never intended to reach.

Ontario Conservative Premier Bill Davis, who helped frame the charter, said, “The sole purpose of the ‘notwithstanding’ clause was only for those exceptionally rare circumstances when a province wanted to bring in a specific benefit or program provision for a part of their population—people of a certain age, for example—that might have seemed discriminatory under the charter.” In other words, this bill abuses the spirit of section 33 by using it in a manner never intended.

0120

Bill 307 provides no specific benefit or program to Ontarians. On the contrary, it takes freedoms away from Ontarians and offers nothing in return. The framers of the Constitution, like Premier Davis, drew a line in the sand and decided that section 33 could not apply to certain underlying rights:

—democratic rights to vote and run in federal and provincial elections;

—our mobility rights to move, live and work anywhere in the country;

—our precious language rights; and

—the enforcement provision or the sexual equality clause.

The exclusion of democratic electoral rights, among others, recognizes that the democratic and free exercise of the voting decision was sacrosanct and democracy was not to be interfered with for partisan purposes. To quote the Supreme Court of Canada, “The Canadian tradition is one of evolutionary democracy moving in uneven steps toward the goal of universal suffrage and more effective representation.”

Since Confederation, efforts to extend the franchise to those unjustly excluded from participation in our political system—women, racialized minorities and Indigenous peoples—have continued, with some success, to the

present day. Yet exclusion is exactly what this bill does, by improperly using one part of the Constitution to silence under-represented voices from full participation in the next election. This government, through a constitutional back door, is attempting to do what it cannot do through the front door.

Let us remember that this government tried to convince the Superior Court that its law was constitutional. Having failed at that, they now revert to the back door of a never-used option in Ontario to reduce our democratic rights to free expression during an election. The Attorney General's office may know how to technically manipulate the Constitution, but in doing so they demonstrate that they either know nothing or care nothing about its values.

I ask myself, what is the purpose of this Orwellian-named bill, the Protecting Elections and Defending Democracy Act, 2021, for the very purpose the government says it wishes to avoid: undermining Canadian democracy and the Americanization of our elections law?

This government seeks to suspend the constitutional rights of those people it views as its opponents. It wants to put its hands on the scales of the next election to blunt the voices of workers, racialized Canadians, women and other vulnerable groups that unions represent, by stopping their free expression of views. Surely it is our birthright to speak out about our doubts and fears at election time without the government heavy-handedly saying who may speak freely and who may not. Is not that the very essence of democracy itself?

The court has ruled and said that charter law prevents the government from silencing these voices during our most sacred democratic process: an election. Yet this government wishes to set aside our highest law by abusing the Constitution itself. If the government does not take rights seriously, then it does not take the law seriously. It does not, I submit, take democracy seriously.

America's Republican Party has gone down the path of attempting to limit the voices of those viewed as political enemies. We have all seen the disastrous effect of that effort. Mr. Speaker, Bill 307 is a dangerous step in that Republican-style departure from Canada's democratic path, abusing the Constitution to silence this government's democratic critics.

Democracy is fragile and exists as much by convention as by law. Bill 307 is no less than a legislative gag order and it deserves to be deposited in the ash bin of history, not in our statute books. The overriding of our charter rights is a totalitarian remedy, akin to using a hammer to kill a fly. It is more American than Canadian and it is a restriction of the free and universal character of our elections. Ontarians deserve better. In fact, they are entitled to it by the charter. Do not put your party over our great province by abusing democracy in order to help Progressive Conservatives win the next election.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Order.

Next, we have the member for Davenport.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to stand here, as always, in the House and represent the great

people of my riding of Davenport. I am always humbled by the privilege of being here.

As others have mentioned already, there are a lot of people in my community as well who work night shifts: health care workers, transit workers, PSWs in long-term-care facilities, packers in distribution centres, factory workers. They work long, hard hours. They've worked throughout the pandemic: parents juggling more than one job and shifts; their teenagers working in grocery stores, using the money they earn to supplement the family's income—sometimes it's a really important and essential part of family income—and often kids at home helping other kids, especially over the last year when so many kids were unable to be in school in person and were struggling.

So I don't think any of us here hesitated to come in during the early hours of this morning. That was certainly never a question for me or my colleagues here. Many of us have also worked night shifts in our time. I wanted to say, though, over the last few days, I've received so many emails and calls from people in my community; many of those people are absolutely furious at the reason why we are here this evening, and what this government is about to do. Because the government is going to sit through the weekend, including overnight tonight, to get this bill passed, people are wondering what would merit such urgency, something that we haven't seen frankly at all from this government throughout the entire pandemic, for more than a year.

Is it to help children struggling with school shutdowns? Is it improving the quality of life of the survivors in long-term care? Is it supporting the small businesses that have been in the longest shutdown in the country? Is it ramping up vaccinations, supporting families, bringing justice and a public inquiry to families of the victims of this government's failure to protect residents of long-term care, addressing rampant Islamophobia and the tragedy in London, or centring children and youth in the pandemic recovery? Is it supporting Indigenous communities in locating the remains of children who were victims of residential schools?

No, the reason we are here tonight is simple: We are here so this government can muzzle their critics, can stop families of long-term-care victims from taking out ads that criticize this government, and we're here because the Premier lost another court case—again. This government is so desperate to hold on to power—and I have to say, every one of the members opposite must be just so desperate—that they would do something that actually puts at risk the democratic and charter rights of Ontarians. It is a blatant and egregious manipulation of the system to favour a governing party, Mr. Speaker, and there is no other rationale or reason.

I wonder if that's what the people who voted for this government thought they were electing: a bunch of MPPs who would do anything, firing a nuclear missile right into the heart of their charter rights, just so they can settle some scores, just so they can muzzle anyone who disagrees with them. Let's be very clear, because the members opposite have talked quite a lot today already about making this a

more democratic process and preventing the big corporations and the elites from running the system—but this is a government that made sure that when they changed the laws, they would slip in some extra high-flying donors at the very same time. Now, their wealthy corporate friends can make sure that they give even bigger donations to pad the party coffers, with higher and higher donations.

0130

What the Attorney General left out in his speech recently—just tonight—about the bill is that this government actually cleared a special path—my goodness, a highway; a highway, Mr. Speaker—so that the wealthy and the powerful who profited in this pandemic, when so many others suffered, could roll right on up to the Conservative trough. They have a virtual assembly line going—an assembly line of failed Conservative Party candidates, friends of the Premier, who are getting paid appointments here, there, everywhere.

I sit on the committee that's supposed to vet those appointments, and this government is constantly just rubber-stamping one after another after another. We have pulled out so many of those candidates for those appointments who are Conservative donors, who are Conservative Party members, who are friends of the members opposite. We've pulled them and asked them to appear before the committee, and this government rushes it all through and rubber-stamps them all. It's outrageous.

This is the kind of politics that this government plays. It's a comfortable place, let's just be clear, for many governments that want to take advantage of their time in power to help their wealthy and their powerful friends. But it's not a great place for regular people. It's not a place where tenants can count on fair hearings at a tribunal. It's not a place where small businesses can hope for fair treatment in a pandemic or where kids who are struggling with online learning can hope that their government has prioritized them.

Speaker, on Thursday, when we were brought back originally for a couple of hours, I asked the government to use that opportunity to do something truly useful. What I asked them to do—and many of my colleagues also brought forward motions or asked for unanimous consent to pass motions on also very important issues. I asked them to pass my motion to strike a committee that would help us focus on school reopening and moving that forward, but ensuring that everybody who needed to be there was at the table: the education workers and their unions, the experts, the public health care experts, the students—all of these different stakeholders, these people who are actually the experts that we should be listening to, who should be part of the discussion of how we move this forward, because the government has failed so, so terribly so far. It's no coincidence that we are the province that continues to be the only province where schools are actually still shut down and have been for the longest time.

But the government denied us that opportunity. I want to say, I'm quite deeply appalled that they did that. I really can't understand why they would oppose anything that helps get our kids back to school. You know, Speaker, I

get it; I get it. The Premier is used to getting his way. Many, many on the other side—maybe they are. They've had a taste of power. They like it. But we were not, each of us, elected with the sole purpose of clinging to power at all costs. Maybe the other side needs to be reminded of that. We were elected to do not just what's politically expedient for our party; not to help ourselves; not to save our own political skin; not to use the “notwithstanding” clause, for the first time in Ontario's history, to silence our critics; but to put the people of this province first: their priorities, their voices.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to use the opportunity I have now to read from a few letters that I've received just over the last few days. I have received hundreds, and I want to read from a few of them from my constituents while I have an opportunity here.

This one comes from Jim Boyles. He says, “I am incensed by the Premier's plan to invoke the ‘notwithstanding’ clause to override a court decision about election legislation. It overrides charter rights, is completely unnecessary and sets a dangerous precedent.” And I'll tell you, this is the first time Jim has ever written to me, actually, but he's so deeply disturbed by this Premier's actions.

I have another letter here from Nolan. Nolan said—and he has written to me and to the Premier—“I'm writing to object to the PC government's intention to override my constitutional rights regarding the 2022 election. It is unacceptable in a democracy like Ontario that a party with minority support from the people would seek to override my and every other Ontarian's right to a free and fair election. It is clear that this move is politically motivated by a party that governs in its own interests rather than the interests of Ontario.” I think Nolan nailed it there.

I want to add the final sentence that Nolan has in his letter. He said, “I assure you that this already unpopular government will pay a heavy price to honest and ordinary Ontarians in 2022 for its infidelity to democratic principles and norms.” I couldn't agree with you more, Nolan.

I want to also read a note from Della, a former neighbour of mine, actually. “There are many reasons for calling an emergency, but this is not one of them. I cannot believe they can get away with this. Unless we can take the vote to a higher power in Ontario”—the Supreme Court—“to show that this heavy-handed government wants to rule with unlimited power.”

Another person, Stephanie, said to me, “I am horrified to hear of the Premier's attempt to silence our critics, our voices, in order for him to win the next election. This email is how I am hoping my voice and vote can be heard. Democracy shouldn't be able to be shot down so quickly and so easily. Ontario is not a dictatorship, and we can't allow the Premier to turn it into one.

“Thank you for speaking up for us, and I hope this email can help your case.” Well, I think it did. Thank you.

I want to read one more here. This is from Margaret Smith, a very, very active resident in the Regal Heights community. She said, “I agree with you that the Premier should be focused on the needs of the people of Ontario,

not on shutting down democratic opposition to his government. It is obvious that he is trying to control the messaging for the full year before the next election in the vain hope that voters will forget his abysmal lack of leadership during this crisis and his catering to his business friends and their enrichment. It is a sad day for democracy in Ontario.”

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that really struck me when I was reading through these, and I pulled just a few of them together, was how many people—I think, actually, this government’s actions in bringing forward this legislation and the urgency that they suddenly feel that they haven’t felt throughout this entire pandemic—I think it has actually motivated people. It has motivated people, who, I think, to be honest, weren’t big fans of the government, maybe, but they weren’t feeling really motivated to get out there and defeat them. I think this is motivating them. I’ve seen it today, and I know from talking to my colleagues from across the province that they’re seeing it too. People who called me today said they’ve been on the phone, trying to reach the Premier, but they couldn’t get through because the phone lines were jammed, because so many people were calling to express their displeasure with this government.

Mr. Speaker, it’s now about 1:40 in the morning here in the Ontario Legislature. As I started out by saying earlier in my speech, there are a lot of things I would love to be discussing here today. But I think that we have to acknowledge that what this government has brought forward is going to have significant impact—the attempt to muzzle their critics. It is deeply anti-democratic, and it is, in that sense, deeply troubling. I think it has made a lot of Ontarians, yes, afraid—afraid for what this means for their democratic and charter rights.

I want to read one more thing that somebody wrote to me. She actually wrote to Premier Ford and c.c.’d me. Her name is Carol Gallagher. She said:

“Dear Premier Ford,

“How is it possible that you believe you have the unilateral right to overturn a court decision and impose your own will on your constituents, the people of Ontario? The charter rights of your citizens deserve the utmost respect, rather than contempt.

0140

“I am deeply dismayed and concerned about the future of democracy in our province. I am asking with the utmost urgency that you reconsider your actions and not invoke the ‘notwithstanding’ clause to override the court decision on Bill 254. Please, please do your duty to represent the people of Ontario, rather than protect your own interests.”

Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, we were elected to do not what’s politically expedient, not to just help ourselves, not to save our own political bacon; we were elected to represent our communities and, I would say—and I think it’s just this side, maybe, but I think also, to represent the most vulnerable in our communities; to try to, in the limited time, the very precious time we have here, do something that’s good and important.

What this government is attempting to do with the time they have is really reprehensible. The priorities of the

people of this province, and their voices—the government has forgotten them, but the people of Ontario have not; they aren’t going to either. They’re not going to forget, and I don’t think they’re going to forgive.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Hon. Doug Downey: I listened very intently, and I heard concern for the Ontario Nurses’ Association, the families of long-term care, the workers, racialized Ontarians, those who need services, those who need supports. I even heard about the Ontario Autism Coalition. Angela Brandt said today they don’t have that kind of money. They’re not going to spend \$700,000. We’re taking the megaphone of big money away so that those groups can be heard.

Any of them can answer, although the only member who actually addressed the issue was the member from York South–Weston—I would like to know how they expect these groups to be heard when big money is flooding the rest of the airwaves.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I think that the Attorney General should worry a little bit more about all of those individuals, all of those families of the people in long-term care, the most vulnerable in our communities who want a voice.

This government is trying to make this out to be some kind of great defence of democracy and elections, when we know that what this government is actually trying to do is to silence all of their critics.

We are bringing their voices into this Legislature. We are hearing from Ontarians, from those people who have been so deeply impacted in this pandemic by this government’s lack of a sense of urgency. They refused to take this kind of action to save the lives of Ontarians, and they’re going to pay a political price in the next election, whether they like it or not.

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

Ms. Jill Andrew: We’re here this morning at almost 2 a.m. because the government has felt that there is an urgent need to shove the “notwithstanding” clause down the throats of Ontarians, attacking democracy, challenging our charter rights, all while people are being evicted, all while people are having problems putting food on their table.

I’d like to ask this government, why the urgency today—or I’ll ask our side over here to answer the question: Why the urgency at 2 a.m. to, essentially, provide supports and gifts to your donors, to the wealthy folks of the Conservative base, as opposed to supporting people in Ontario who are in need at this time, as we try to recover from the pandemic?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Before I ask the member from Brampton Centre to reply, I want to remind the House it’s inappropriate to impute motive in debate in the Legislature.

The member for Brampton Centre.

Ms. Sara Singh: Thank you to the member from Toronto–St. Paul’s for the question. I think that’s a question we’re all asking ourselves tonight—why the urgency for this government to be debating legislation that is not

going to have a positive impact on the lives of Ontarians as we navigate a global pandemic.

I think many people across Ontario want to know why this is a priority for this government at this point in time, at this critical juncture in this province, when what we need to be debating is supports for small businesses, ensuring that children with autism are getting the supports and services they need, that seniors in long-term care are protected, and that we have a path towards economic recovery here in the province of Ontario. Those are the things that we should be debating. I think the question that everyone is asking is, why on earth is that not a priority for this Conservative government as well?

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

Hon. Doug Downey: I'm a little confused—and I think the member from Davenport can probably answer this best. We know her rotating record on students in and out of school. She's now saying, "Get big money out of politics." That's what we're trying to do. I'm very confused about why she is railing against big money in politics but she won't support this, which is doing exactly that.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you to the Attorney General for his question. I'm glad I caught his attention there for a moment.

We know what we're here for, right? What we're here for tonight is so that this government can invoke the "notwithstanding" clause to overturn a court ruling that said they were actually breaking the charter rights of Ontarians. That's why we're here.

Your legislation is not democratic. You're taking extraordinary measures that no government in Ontario has ever taken before to, at the end of the day, ultimately, we know, muzzle your critics. That's what this legislation is about, and to pretend otherwise is unfair and disrespectful, I believe, to Ontarians.

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

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: This government, in this bill, has been talking a lot about trying to get big money out of politics. But what they've been silent about is that this bill is also doubling the amount that wealthy donors can donate. Really, it is their donor base that can afford that kind of money. This government is counting on raking in millions of dollars in order to prepare for the next election.

What are you hearing from your constituents? Do they think this is a good idea? And do they support this government's actions?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I always find it very interesting that we talk about getting big money out of donations, and we watched here and debated, not that long ago, where we increased the donation up to \$3,300. We're allowing candidates to put \$5,000 into their own campaign. I've already said this once: I probably don't have \$5,000 to put into my own campaign—I wish I did—but I'm sure your

friends would. I'm sure your friends would be able to pay \$3,300 for a donation.

Interjections.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I've already said my friends wouldn't. I'm very honest. My friends would never give me \$3,300. It's very interesting to me.

But the one that drives me crazy is, you stand there and you say you want to get big money out of the election process or out of politics, yet you guys have had—put your hand up: How many have had a Zoom meeting with a \$1,000 ticket—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. The time is up for this question and this answer.

The next one?

Mr. John Fraser: The member from Toronto—St. Paul's has hit it on the head. There's a kind of a sense of urgency tonight, like this is the most important thing.

When the Premier announced the reopening, he talked about everything except schools. So we can have an emergency debate on the Premier's priorities, which are his political interests. But our kids and their families? Well, they've got to wait till September.

I guess my question is to my colleagues to the side. Why do you figure there's no plan for a safe return to schools, but we're debating the Premier's own political interests this evening?

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

0150

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you very much, member from Ottawa South, for that question. It is, without a doubt, the number one question I had this evening.

When I think about what is on the minds of families in Ontario right now, there is nothing else more important. The question I keep getting is, what has the government been doing for the last year that they were not in a position to be able to do what they had committed to doing—which is to say, schools are the first to open and the last to close.

And here we are now. It's the end of June, practically. Schools will not be reopening. It was not even mentioned in the Premier's plans.

Beyond that, what's really astonishing to me is, there seems to be no plan in place for us to reopen in September, and that, to me, is what I'm hearing from families that they're deeply concerned about—and the plans that are in place, frankly, are inadequate and very, very difficult for students.

So, Mr. Speaker, these are the kinds of issues we should be talking about tonight. These are the things we should be prioritizing. We should be prioritizing children in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further debate? The member for Northumberland—Peterborough—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm sorry; there wasn't enough time for a question and answer in 10 seconds.

Further debate?

Mr. Michael Coteau: I'll be sharing my time with the member from Orléans.

It is an honour to be at the Legislature and to be able to speak on this issue.

Mr. Speaker, I got a phone call today from a friend of mine who grew up in Flemingdon Park with me, and he asked me, “What’s going on? I can’t understand what’s going on in government right now.” We talked about it, and at the end I said, “What is actually happening”—and I think this sums up the entire situation. “The government of Ontario believes, at this moment, that they should override the Charter of Rights—the charter, our rights in Ontario, our rights in Canada—and set their priorities. They say, ‘We’ll push that document aside because we know better.’ That’s essentially what’s happening.”

But if you go a little bit deeper and you start to really look at the big picture, Mr. Speaker, what’s really happening with this government is that you have a government in decay, in a free fall. And this is a government that’s really trying to grab on to anything it can grab on to, to survive.

You start to look at the way people are reacting to this government, and it’s a big contrast from July 11, 2018. Remember, they all came in here and they were all so happy—“Promise made, promise kept.” Now they go out to the public and it’s a completely different scenario. If I were a Conservative member in the GTA, I would be very worried about 2022, because anyone I speak to out there—even Conservatives are calling me and saying, “What is going on with this government?”

This is part of a larger trend by this government. This is not the first time they’ve done this. There are so many examples of an ongoing trend by this government to just grab on to anything to hold power.

Do you remember when, Mr. Speaker, they started to get sued?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Mr. Michael Coteau: The Attorney General has—

Interjections.

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

The member for Don Valley East has the floor. I need to hear him.

Please restart the clock.

The member for Don Valley East.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Attorney General has an incredible record of losing cases in this province. And what do they do? They resort to doing this. They make it illegal to sue them. Remember that one? This is part of an ongoing trend by this government to use anything—and he actually said it: “I’ve got a tool box, and I just grab things from the tool box, and I can use them whenever I want.” He said that at the beginning of his speech. He’s got a tool box, and this is one of the things he’s reaching in to use in order to do what he has to do, to override the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, to remove our ability to have rights in the province of Ontario.

There’s more to it. This government said, basically—and this was only weeks ago—“We’re going to extend the emergency powers in this province.” I got a lot of phone

calls from Conservatives who told me they’re never voting Conservative again—never—because of what they did. They wanted to take the power out from this Legislative Assembly, from this body, and centralize it into the hands of cabinet and mainly the Premier.

They did it with the Toronto act. In the middle of an election, they said, “We’re going to change the rules really quickly. Just live with it. This is the way we’re going to do things.”

This government will just change the rules and do anything it can. It will grab on to anything in order to hold power.

Make no mistake, this comes down to one single thing: This comes down to this government holding power, doing everything they can to hold on to power.

The Attorney General is responsible for the justice system in this province. I wonder how his colleagues are looking at him, the defender of this justice system. When the justice system actually stands up and says, “You’re going too far. You’re infringing on the rights of people,” he says, “I’ll just use section 33; no problem. I’ll just tell the justice system, the system that I’m responsible for, that they’re wrong, and we’ll just use one of our tools in that big tool box.” I’m afraid to see what’s going to come out of that tool box next, to be honest.

Hon. Doug Downey: You’ll be in Ottawa, Mike; don’t worry.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Maybe. You never know.

Mr. Speaker, this government is constantly losing cases, constantly changing the rules, grabbing on to anything they possibly can to move forward. But the people of Ontario, like my friend who called me, see into this. My friend actually said—his words, not mine—once I explained everything, “Oh, now I understand. It’s politricks—a bunch of tricks that these politicians are using in order to move forward.”

I am sharing my time with the member from Orléans, and I’ll just take a few more seconds.

At the end of the day, this is a government that’s in a free fall, that’s in decay, and they’re doing everything they can to hold on to power. They’re using every trick in the book to do that.

If I was a member over there, I’d look in the mirror and ask—ask yourself this one question: Is this the legacy that you want at the end of the day, for the first time in the history of this province, to use section 33 in order to accomplish one simple task, to hold on to power in Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Orléans.

Mr. Stephen Blais: It’s shortly before 2 a.m., and the government has called us here for an emergency debate because they’ve lost yet another court case—as has been pointed out, an incredible list of continually losing in the courts.

Let’s be clear, Mr. Speaker: The government didn’t call us back here tonight, or this morning, to help move Ontario forward. We’re not here because the government is trying to improve anyone’s quality of life. We’re not

here to debate a safe return to school or to debate their economic plan for recovery. To my way of thinking and to my memory, we have yet to debate either of those two things. So if we want to speak about an emergency—it's the fact that our kids have been learning in front of tiny screens for the last year; it's the fact that small businesses are going bankrupt and people have lost their jobs and can't pay their rent and are being evicted. Those are emergencies; not the fact that this government has lost yet another court case.

Frankly, the only reason we're here is to improve the electoral chances of the government caucus next year.

We're here because this government's efforts were struck down by the courts and they're having a hissy fit. This morning, the government is moving to overturn the will of the courts just to get what they want. I think that all sounds familiar—it should, at least, because we've all lived through four years of it very recently.

0200

The Attorney General speaks of principles as the basis for overriding our fundamental rights protected in the charter. Well, Conservatives used to have principles. He has already been quoted this evening, but let me quote again Progressive Conservative Premier Bill Davis: "The sole purpose of the notwithstanding clause was only for those exceptionally rare circumstances when a province wanted to bring in a specific benefit or program provision for a part of their population—people of a certain age, for example—that might have seemed discriminatory under the charter."

Bill Davis is one of the architects of the charter. I would hope and think that people in this place would hold his opinion of the charter and the "notwithstanding" clause in high regard.

Does Bill Davis's example of when the charter should be used sound like what the government is proposing to do here today? The only segment of the population that benefits from using the "notwithstanding" clause in this legislation are the members sitting across the aisle. That's it. They're the only ones.

Bill Davis wasn't alone. He's not the only principled Conservative out there. The dean of Conservatism in Canada, Brian Mulroney, was also no fan of the "notwithstanding" clause. He called it a "fatal flaw" and that it was "not worth the paper it is written on."

Let me quote Mr. Mulroney: "For me, the backbone of our democracy, the strength of our democracy is the independence and confidence of the court system in Canada. We have one that would rival any in the world."

I agree with Prime Minister Mulroney. We have a court system that would rival any in the world. Sadly, this government's principles—the principles of the modern Conservative movement—no longer include the reverence for the value of the independence of the courts. This government is making that very clear this morning.

We also have to remember, this isn't the first time that they're trying to use the "notwithstanding" clause or threatening to do it. They've threatened to do it before, as

we all know. It seems that modern Conservative principles include the fact that your rights are subject to change.

The "notwithstanding" clause has never been used by the federal government. It has never been used by the government of Ontario. The Attorney General quite rightly points out that other provinces have used the "notwithstanding" clause. The separatist government of Quebec has used the "notwithstanding" clause. Ralph Klein's Conservative government used the "notwithstanding" clause to prohibit same-sex marriage legislation. That's the principled club this Conservative government is joining.

I want to take a moment to talk about the emergency session. There are so many important issues this government could have recalled the Legislature to debate. Remember, we were adjourned. We've been recalled, and at 2 o'clock in the morning, this is what we're debating.

We should be debating the government's safe back-to-school plan. But that plan doesn't exist. Our children have spent the better part of a year learning in front of tiny screens. That's an emergency.

We should be debating the fact that thousands of people have died in long-term care. That's an emergency.

We should be debating the rising acts of hatred and violence that are occurring in our society. That is an emergency.

The Premier being criticized on television by his opponents is not an emergency, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Hon. Doug Downey: I listened very closely to the "poli-tricks" over there. That's a new term for me. Thank you.

I would ask the member, Mr. Speaker, through you: Will you support the guardrails for third-party advertising as you did in 2016, or is the member going to reverse his position?

Mr. Michael Coteau: I will not support this abuse of power.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: I don't know if you guys can answer this from the Liberal side—both of you can. You guys were in government for 15 years, I think, right? I think it was 15 years, 16 years, whatever. My question to you is, how many court cases are you allowed to lose in three years?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know the number, but it's clear that this government is very successful at something, and it's at losing in court. They've demonstrated that over and over and over again. I don't know how many they're allowed to lose in three years, but they've certainly lost their fair share.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Hon. Doug Downey: Mr. Speaker, I heard the invocation of Bill Davis and Prime Minister Mulroney, some great Conservatives.

I'll tell the members that I was actually a page here when Mr. Davis was the Premier and Roy McMurtry was the Attorney General, so I've been paying attention for a long time.

I was going to quote some principled Liberals, but you can understand my difficulty in finding one.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to caution the Attorney General on his language.

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

My question is this: Do you believe that section 33 should ever be used for anything?

Mr. Michael Coteau: That's a hypothetical question. You can't really answer a question like that until the actual scenario is presented in front of you, as a member of provincial Parliament, as a lawmaker.

In this particular case, I would say that the majority of Ontarians would say that the government is wrong. I think the majority of members in this Legislature, who are not bound by government to just follow, would say—if it was a free vote, I think the majority of MPPs would support the position that we've taken on this side of the House.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Speaker. I've been listening for the last couple of hours to the debate. We talk about principles. We talk about democracy. But I hear back and forth about people putting each other down, and it's about who wins or whatnot. That's your system.

Speaker, I know I always talk about water. I talk to kids who are eight years old, 12 years old, who get emotional about—they just want clean drinking water. We go outside and go have water, and communities don't have the pleasure of doing that.

If communities don't have access to clean drinking water for 27 years—would you sit here and debate if that was an emergency?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Not only is it a fact that too many communities in Ontario and Canada don't have access to clean drinking water; it is an emergency, it is a tragedy, and the fact that it hasn't been debated or hasn't been substantially debated in my time here yet is a shame and something that should be corrected.

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

Mr. John Fraser: The Attorney General mentioned his tool box. When he reached into this tool box so aptly, he grabbed the hammer.

I really don't understand why the government didn't look for a stay first, which would be a normal thing to do, and why we've just set our hair on fire, debating the Premier's priority, when in fact what the member from Kiiwetinoong mentioned is a far more important priority.

I could sit here for the next six hours and list off the priorities that people in Ontario have.

0210

Mr. Stephen Blais: The government is proposing that their legislation is about taking big money out of politics. I think what it is, Mr. Speaker, is taking some money out of politics while keeping other parts of big money in politics. That's why they raised the contribution limit a couple of months ago.

Certainly, losing a court case is not an emergency. Communities that don't have safe drinking water is an emergency. Seniors dying in long-term care is an emergency. Kids going back to school in a safe environment in September is an emergency. That's what we should be debating at 2 o'clock in the morning, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. Doug Downey: I've heard now a couple of times about the donor limit increase, which is in the middle of the pack for Canada—very modest, middle of the pack. But the most important part about that is that it's transparent, accountable and regulated.

Why would the members not support third-party advertising that is transparent, measured, accountable and regulated?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Mr. Speaker, I support the rule of law, and I support the value of an independent court system.

What I don't support is the government, willy-nilly, on the back sheet of a napkin, at 2 o'clock in the morning, without any kind of public discourse, arbitrarily deciding to use section 33 and overruling fundamental rights that are protected in the charter.

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

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you to the Liberal independent member for your presentation.

The Liberals were in government for 15 years. We know that they received hundreds of thousands of dollars of donations from for-profit long-term-care establishments, as has the Conservative government; the NDP has not.

I'm wondering, what have you learned in your time as independents—that you would have done differently, if you could redo your 15 years of government?

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you to the member from St. Paul's for the question.

I've been in this House for three years now as an independent, and obviously, you reflect on past governments and what you could have done differently. But I also reflect on many of the things that we were successful at. We found an education system with one third of the young people not graduating high school. We moved that up drastically. We built the strongest economy in the history of this province, as Liberals. We put in place priorities that focused on families, like full-day kindergarten. And we invested into education—where the Conservatives are actually pulling money away from education and post-secondary.

So, yes, you reflect on the record and what you were able to accomplish, but you also think about some of the things that changed Ontario.

I've always said I'm very proud to be a Liberal, and I'll continue to be proud of that record.

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

Hon. Doug Downey: I'll be quick.

I know math is hard. We've heard this before. Supporting education by closing 700 schools—I'm not quite sure how that math works.

I wonder if the member would be able to tell me how much more time he thinks his party should stay in the penalty box to do that kind of reflection?

Mr. Michael Coteau: Ontarians spoke in 2018. They said that they were done with the Ontario Liberal Party. In 2022, they're going to do the same thing to the Conservative Party.

You speak to anyone out there—publicly, they'll tell you, even Conservatives, that they're done with these guys.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It gives me great pleasure to add the voices, the concerns, the shock and, quite frankly, the disgust many of my constituents in London North Centre have for this government's very self-serving abuse of power.

Interjections.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I know they're in a shift change right now.

This government is concerned only with themselves. I—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Please stop the clock.

There are always members coming in and out of the chamber, but I'd ask you to please be quiet while you do so, if you need to leave the chamber or come in.

Please start the clock.

The member for London North Centre has the floor.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Speaker, it's precisely that kind of behaviour which speaks to the level of respect they have for tradition, for institutions, for processes. The fact that they can't even keep their mouths closed as they wander out of the chamber—that's really unfortunate behaviour.

Failure can be our—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you for your help. I really appreciate it.

The member needs to be reminded that you don't make reference to the absence of any member at any time.

The member for London North Centre.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Failure can be our greatest teacher, if the people who have failed are both mature and responsible. This government failed in its objective to influence election laws. They should be able to take their lumps. They should be able to rub some dirt in it and get on with it. But adulating doesn't seem to be one of their strengths. This government failed in its bid to manipulate election finance laws and muzzle its critics. Instead of respecting the process, instead of appealing, they instead threw a tantrum and went for the nuclear option.

Just like the Liberals before them, the Conservative-Liberal consortium don't like to own their mistakes. I swear that this government should have a ministry of finger-pointing, with what we've heard in the last number of months, during the COVID-19 pandemic. They finger-point, blame, never own their missteps and misjudgments.

And this government stretches reality to the point that it reminds me very much of the last government and their promises, which, miraculously, when they weren't kept—miraculously, har har—were called stretch goals.

We're here in the middle of the night with this sense of urgency, not because this government is intent on doing the right thing, not because they're standing up for folks in long-term care, not because they're fighting for families of children with autism, not because we're talking about a permanent wage increase for PSWs or treating nurses with the fairness and respect that they have been lacking for the last 10 years. We're not here to talk about improving education or providing more supports for small businesses that have been so decimated by this pandemic and by this government's inaction. Instead, we're here because of poll numbers. This is nothing more than a brazen attempt to hide the many messes that this government has made, to shut down voices, and Ontarians see right through it.

People in Ontario are hurting right now. They've lost loved ones in long-term care. In many cases, nobody was there to hold people's hands while they breathed their final moments. People without water, people without basic care, people left without basic human contact, left to suffer before they died—and this government wants them to be quiet. It wants them to be silent. It wants to muzzle them, to make sure that they are not going to speak about the experience that they endured as a result of this government not stepping up and doing the right thing in time to save them.

Where was the urgency to protect seniors? We know that the Minister of Long-Term Care recommended that the army come in, and it was a full week before they were actually brought in.

We've heard chapter and verse about an iron ring but we know from the evidence that the iron ring has been forged around the owner-operators of long-term care. It has been forged around this government denying families justice, denying them the right to honour their loved ones by taking this government and long-term-care owner-operators to court.

0220

We see families of children with autism being silenced. This again is not new in this chamber. It's not new in this Conservative-Liberal consortium. This House remembers quite well that autism doesn't end at five. I believe it was former Conservative leader Patrick Brown who was quite fond of saying that. But also, Speaker, it doesn't end at 18.

This government ripped supports away from families and all the while told them that a new program was going to be the cat's whiskers and the bee's knees, while people, children, did not get the supports that they needed and they required. It's been a worse disaster than the Liberals before them. Congratulations on the human right crisis that you've created for these families, government.

Quite frankly, moving the funding for autism from the Ministry of Health into the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services was a despicable and crass manoeuvre, and while it's not on this government, it was something done to deny folks the funding that they

needed. Making sure individuals with autism and children with autism get the funding and get the supports that they require when they need them can make all the difference for their entire life. It can be the difference between having language, being self-sufficient, being self-reliant, understanding social cues and having valuable relationships. Yet people were left without funding. Helping children should be first and foremost for everyone in this chamber, and yet it's become a business decision.

COVID-19 has shown us so many gaps in our social safety net. So many more people are falling through the cracks, and yet this government is more concerned, through this legislation, with controlling the script, muzzling their critics and silencing their opponents.

The Premier and this government are so concerned with poll numbers and their desperate need to be liked, but this is not going to do it. Doing it in the middle of the night doesn't mean that people aren't going to notice. In fact, quite the opposite.

The Liberal government before this government froze nurses' wages. They haven't had a raise for over 10 years. It's embarrassing that we've seen this government say—and say with a straight face—that nurses are heroes, and then treat them in this way. Providing them with a 1% raise when the cost of living is 2%—that is a cut. You are reaching your hands into nurses' pockets and you are taking money out because you're not treating them with the respect that they deserve. Nurses are the glue that has held up our health care system for so very many years, but that's a health care system that's been decimated by Liberals and Conservatives alike. The NDP, however, is committed to treating nurses with the respect they deserve, through words and through actions.

As we discuss the “notwithstanding” clause that is being enacted—this move that is opening up the floodgates to some abuses of power in the future which are quite frightening, which are really quite scary—there's a reason this has not been enacted in the past: because nobody needed to. They shouldn't have had to.

We've seen some of the headlines that have come out. The Canadian Press reported—this is the headline—“‘Doug Ford Will Do Anything to Cling to Power’: Premier Invokes ‘Notwithstanding’ Clause.”

We heard the Attorney General talk about how they're wanting to get the megaphone of big money out of politics. I would suggest that's because their ears hurt. Instead, they should really consider how many lobbyists who work for long-term care have also worked for the Conservative government. How many lobbyists had the government's ear, advocating on behalf of Walmart, so that Walmart didn't have to cordon off major sections of their store with non-essential goods, while our small businesses were forced to close without supports and could have sold those very same things?

We see with this government that they're saying one thing and they're doing something completely different. With Bill 254, increasing the donation limits, they were very much helping themselves. They are the party of elites. All of their friends have deep pockets. Increasing donation

limits during a pandemic so an individual can donate \$10,000—I don't think anyone was sitting at home during the worst crisis the world has seen and considering how to donate \$10,000. But maybe that's entirely what their people are concerned about. I don't know. Maybe I'm not talking to their people.

At the same time they say they're removing big money from politics, they're having \$1,500 Zoom events. That does not seem as though they're removing big money from politics at all. Instead, they want to make sure that people who might want to show some truth to their record, who might want to shine a spotlight on their missteps, who might want to show how people did not have to die, children did not have to be denied funding for autism, nurses did not have to be treated poorly and PSWs should be treated with the dignity and respect they deserve with a permanent wage increase—instead, they don't want that narrative coming in. They want to control the script. They want to make sure that they're able to cling to power, because poll numbers are showing that they are not doing well.

People I spoke to in the beginning of the pandemic said, “I'm surprised. I didn't think that this government was going to handle the pandemic well.” We saw that with the poll numbers. But we've seen that they have gone off the cliff completely, because we saw that the Premier marched us into the third wave, not having learned from wave 1, not having learned from wave 2, not listening to the science table. Instead, we ended up with wave 3.

During the ruling—the sense of urgency, the reason why we're here in the middle of the night, is because this government does not like to accept the ruling of a court—Ontario Superior Court Justice Edward Morgan wrote that the government did not provide any justification for doubling their spending limit time frame. That's one of the key pieces that we're here to pass tonight. At that time, during that case, they did not provide justification. It's almost as though they weren't ready, or they knew that no matter what, they were ready, willing and able to invoke section 33, the “notwithstanding” clause.

To me, Speaker, this speaks to an appalling lack of accountability. If this government were sure of itself, if it were sure of the decisions that it had made, it would not be afraid of people who might have an alternate viewpoint, people who might want to expose their shortcomings. They'd be able to own that. They'd be able to say that if they made a mistake, they made a mistake.

But instead, we see something very different, where this government seems very concerned about how their accountability is going to lie. For instance, when we consider the OPP: appointing a friend to be the commissioner of the OPP, the OPP overseeing the Legislative Assembly. Independent officers of the Legislature, people who did not answer to any political power and instead could criticize the government for their mistakes, we saw them dismissed, whether it was the office of the environment or the child advocate. We saw a government that was first willing to invoke the “notwithstanding” clause to meddle in the Toronto municipal election. We saw that they also meddled in London's electoral process, getting rid of

ranked balloting when everyone in London declared it a resounding success.

0230

Speaker, we're here because this government is urgent—they want to flip the script. They want people to not notice that, in the middle of night, they're passing legislation with a clause that no other government has ever seen fit to invoke—has never needed to; has never felt this urgent, burning necessity to do so. Quite frankly, it is shocking. It speaks volumes about what their priorities truly are.

From where I stand, we should be ensuring that folks who have had loved ones pass away in long-term care have the opportunity to seek justice, have the opportunity to honour their loved ones and to make sure they did not die in vain.

We should be making sure that families with autism receive the funding and receive needs-based therapy and are not ignored and brushed aside and told, "Don't worry. There's a shiny new program coming."

We should be ensuring that PSWs have a permanent increase that coincides with their level of care, their level of training, and their respect, and the way which they have held the long-term-care system up for years and years. And the same is true of nurses. Ten years without a raise is unbelievable.

We could be here discussing education. We could be here discussing how schools have now ballooned, under this government—to an additional \$1 billion, in a backlog of school repairs. We could be discussing how we can ensure that this entire cohort of students—that next year we can ensure we provide them with additional supports so they can catch up. Online learning is not the best mode of learning; we know that to be true. We know there are going to be many students who have fallen through the cracks, who simply haven't been able to be engaged and have not achieved the goals that they could have.

We could also be here discussing an entirely new Ontario Small Business Support Grant. It doesn't matter what side of the House you are on; you have had people calling your office, I'm certain, saying that they were denied and that they were not given reasons why, and that they attempted to call and that they attempted to email, and they were left hanging.

In short, we are here discussing, with great urgency, this government's need to silence, this government's need to muzzle its critics, this government's need to not own up to its mistakes, its failures and its missteps. Quite frankly, that is a shame. We could be here doing so much more. We could be here doing the right thing. We could be here being sure we leave a lasting legacy—not being concerned about who's saying bad things about you and what is in your pocket. On the one hand, we have a government that is rewarding itself by increasing donation limits and making sure that others can't spend any money criticizing them—how can those two things be argued with one point? They simply can't.

I look forward to a time when this government considers its priorities, when it thinks about not just the way

they're being perceived, not just what people are saying about them in the public, but it considers what motivates them from the inside—doing the right thing, standing up for people, making sure that people who need supports are receiving them. Quite frankly, if that were true, then we would not need to go through the laundry list of what they have not been doing—including long-term care, children with autism, not standing up for PSWs, not standing up for nurses, not ensuring students have the best opportunities within our educational system, and not making sure that people who own and operate small businesses are not losing their businesses at this time.

I look forward to this government doing the right thing.

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

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member from London North Centre. I just wanted to remind you that it was this government that doubled the autism funding from \$300 million to \$600 million, and we're implementing our new needs-based autism program, which is a system that was built by the autism community.

But for the debate here tonight, Speaker, I simply do not understand why the opposition is defending unregulated political spending from wealthy activists. So my question to the member is simple: Why is the opposition allying themselves with these groups, who use their money to have an outsized influence in our elections?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: On this side of the House, we do not align ourselves with big-money groups, unlike this government. We see that Walmart lobbyists and lobbyists for long-term care continually have this government's ear.

We've seen legislation passed where this government has inoculated long-term-care owner-operators from having any legal liability for all the people who passed away on their watch: people who did not receive water, people who did not receive the basic human care and dignity that they deserved.

We saw a government that, in their new autism program, cleared the wait-list and started yet another. We see children who are losing out on precious moments. We see children who are not getting the needs-based supports that they require.

Quite frankly, Speaker, I'm surprised that there would even be that question. If this government would listen, they would hear from autism families who are deeply concerned about what this government has done. It's time to listen.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I appreciated the remarks from my colleague the member for London North Centre about this unprecedented emergency debate that we are having tonight on the use of the "notwithstanding" clause to silence critics, and how it completely ignores the real priorities of the people of this province.

I wondered, as a fellow Londoner, if my colleague would like to comment on how this bill addresses the pain and the grief that our community is experiencing because of an act of anti-Muslim terror.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It's been such an incredibly devastating time for Muslim families in London. The horrific murder of the Afzaal-Salman family should be addressed by this Legislature. It is what we should be debating. It's how we're addressing—

Interjection.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I can't believe someone from the government's side would actually heckle me when I'm talking about Islamophobia.

As the National Council of Canadian Muslims has indicated, we should be conducting a summit. We should be making sure that we listen to people who have experienced Islamophobia. We should be hearing their voices and taking their recommendations. We should make sure that we are not just listening and nodding our heads, not listening and making up a report, but that we're listening with open hearts and seeing how we can change.

But yet we've had a government that, instead of calling people "refugees," was fond of calling them "illegal border crossers."

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's an honour to rise and ask the member from London North Centre a question. The member talked about the importance of getting big money out of politics. As a matter of fact, the government has mentioned that as well.

Do you think the fact that, since this government has come into power, they've raised donation limits from \$1,200 to \$1,600 to \$3,300, and then when you take that \$3,300 and give some to a constituency association, some to a campaign and to the central party, it's actually \$9,900—does the member think that's actually getting big money out of politics?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I would like to thank the member from Guelph for his comment.

It was funny, Speaker: When I was making my presentation and talking about how individuals could donate \$10,000, I heard people heckling me from the Conservative side. They must have not realized that the member from Guelph is absolutely right: When you donate to the member, the riding association and to the central party, 33 times three is 99, so that's \$9,900, almost \$10,000.

So really, it's not at all removing big money from politics. In fact, it's making it far worse. They want to make sure that people who might have an alternate viewpoint to theirs are not able to spend money, but they are going to rake in as much money as they can. Quite frankly, that's disturbing, Speaker.

0240

Again, if this government was willing to own their mistakes, if they were willing to live up to their mistakes and willing to admit their mistakes in the way that mature and responsible people should, they shouldn't be worried about people who might not like everything that they've done. Again, they should take their lumps, rub some dirt in it, and get on with it.

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

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member from London North Centre. The member talked a lot about the priorities of this government and legislation that he obviously hasn't read because he seems to have misconstrued a lot of it.

This government, I would say, has the right priorities. Today we're here trying to protect our democracy and the voice of the people, which is something we will always defend.

Interjections.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you. The Leader of the Opposition—your leader—in 2016 said, "Ontario's New Democrats and I as leader welcome changes that will limit the influence that big money has on politics."

My question is, what has changed? Do you not think we should limit big money in politics? Because if we don't put this legislation through, there will be no limits, no guardrails, as the Attorney General said, on big money in politics.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Eglinton—Lawrence for her question. This government says how urgent it is that they protect democracy, and that's why we have this midnight sitting. What I would have loved to have seen is this government urgently wanting to protect seniors. I would have loved to have sat here in midnight sittings making sure we actually got an iron ring around long-term care and that people did not die in the thousands because of inaction. I would have loved to have seen that. I would have loved to have made sure that people actually got a chance to hold their loved one's hand when they passed away, and I would have loved to have made sure that people were actually treated with the dignity and respect that they deserve in long-term care.

This government has the opportunity. It has had the federal funding to make sure that seniors were treated with dignity and respect, but that was not a priority, was it? We did not have midnight sittings for that. Instead, we have midnight sittings for this, trying to sneak this through while Ontario sleeps.

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I listened intently to what the member had to say and I would like to suggest the member maybe revisit their math skills, because, as I understand it, you can only donate to a candidate or to a riding association during a year where there's an election happening. If the NDP is donating to both in non-election years, then there's some funny business going on there.

Having said that, though, Mr. Speaker, I just want to review what is going on in BC. In British Columbia, which has an NDP majority party, only residents of British Columbia can donate to a registered third party. Corporations, unions and organizations are prohibited from making sponsorship contributions. They're also prohibited from reimbursing individuals for making sponsorship contributions. Furthermore, the maximum that an individual in BC can donate to a registered third party is \$1,268.07.

My question to the member is: Do you disagree with what the NDP are doing in British Columbia?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to the member from Carleton for the question. And thank you for heckling me earlier when I was discussing the Salman-Afzaal family.

The cash-for-access scandal this government should recall is one that this House knows well. This government should recall that when they talk about removing big money from politics, they should not be hosting \$1,500 Zoom meetings.

It's just disappointing, Speaker. It's incredibly disappointing that when I'm speaking about—

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock, please. I recognize the member from Carleton on a point of order.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I find it quite offensive that the member is accusing me of heckling based on the tragedy that happened, given that I come from a Muslim-majority country and this has impacted—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): That is not a point of order, so I have to return to the member.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: This government would be wise to remind themselves of what happened before, in the cash-for-access scandal. They would be wise to remind themselves that the optics of hosting \$1,500 Zoom parties clearly show that they are allowing people to buy access to the government. That's something that's a concern, and I don't think Ontarians are going to go for it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you.

Before we move on, I have to ask the member from London North Centre to withdraw the comment that he just made.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Withdrawn.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I rise with a heavy heart, at 2:45 a.m., to debate Bill 307. When I heard the Legislature was being recalled for an emergency special session, a midnight sitting, I thought for sure it was for us to come together to pass anti-Islamophobia, anti-hate and anti-white-supremacy legislation. In a week when Ontarians are grieving and looking for leadership to combat white supremacy, the Premier throws a constitutional fit because he lost in court once again, bringing the House back for an emergency debate to use the “notwithstanding” clause for the first time in Ontario's history, in a move that puts political self-interest ahead of people's charter rights.

What is occurring in this House tonight will go down in the history books as a dark day. Our history books will show that on the weekend following a deadly terrorist attack that took the lives of a mother, a father, a grandmother and a daughter, at the hands of white supremacists; our history books will show that on the first day the province is beginning to reopen, after a year of lockdowns due to a global pandemic; our history books will show that while our children sat at home, not able to go to schools safely because the government didn't make the investments needed to open them safely—our history books will show that on this weekend in June 2021, while a global

pandemic is still raging, this House sat in a midnight sitting, not to implement a strategy to fight Islamophobia; not to provide a third round of funding for small businesses; not to end boil-water advisories, as the member from Kiiwetinoong has so eloquently talked about tonight; not to immediately increase staff to care for our elders in long-term care; not to put in place a back-to-school plan so our children can learn in class safely; not a plan to make pandemic pay permanent for front-line health care heroes. No, Speaker; the history books will show that this government, for the first time in Ontario's history, invoked the “notwithstanding” clause and rushed through legislation overriding people's charter rights, all in the name of electoral self-interest. This is a shocking, shocking move that reveals the government's true priorities.

The “notwithstanding” clause is supposed to be used in extraordinary circumstances. The Canadian Civil Liberties Association stated, “Changing the election rules to favour an incumbent government is unconstitutional, and undemocratic. The more constitutional, less political, way of disagreeing with a court decision would be to seek a stay, and file an appeal, which is what happened the last time the Premier threatened the ‘notwithstanding’ clause.”

“The ‘notwithstanding’ clause was designed to be a democratic safety valve, not a brazen power grab to tilt election rules in a government's favour.”

Speaker, this isn't an extraordinary circumstance; this is an abuse of power. It's an attack on our democracy. It's an attack on our charter rights.

0250

The Attorney General earlier tonight argued that the government's goal is to get big money out of politics. I want to get big money out of politics, but this is the same government that raised donation limits, first from \$1,200 to \$1,600, and then to \$3,300. In an election year, so next year, you can donate to a candidate, to a constituency association and to a central party. That's \$9,900. That's not getting big money out of politics; that's putting big money back into politics. If we want to keep big money out of politics, why don't we lower donation limits to \$1,000 or less, maybe even a little bit lower? I think in Quebec, what is it, \$100 or \$200?

Anyway, the Attorney General has also argued tonight that we have to place limits on third-party spending during the pre-election period. Speaker, I'm not opposed to placing limits on third-party spending, but those limits must be designed in a way that complies with our charter rights. Justin Morgan made exactly this point in his decision—and I want to quote from it—when he asked this question: “At what point do rules that protect democracy drown out civil society voices protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms?” What Justice Morgan decided was that the government had reached and exceeded that point with Bill 254. Justice Morgan reiterated, “The freedom to speak one's mind is not only essential to human fulfillment, but essential to Canada's way of government.”

Justice Morgan found that the caps were unreasonable. The 12-month cap on third-party spending he found to be

unreasonable and unconstitutional. Some caps on third-party spending might be justifiable, but these, he ruled, were unconstitutional because they disproportionately affect people's charter rights.

The government could have taken action. They could have asked for a stay. They could have appealed. They could have come back and worked with opposition parties, maybe found an all-party solution around how to place limits on third-party spending. As a matter of fact, in 2017, when the previous government, in response to their own cash-for-access scandals, changed election finance laws, they did it with all-party support. As a matter of fact, they asked me. I wasn't even a member of the Legislature at the time, but I was leading a political party. They asked me to come and be one of the—I was the second witness at committee, because they thought it was important to have even parties that didn't have seats in the Legislature be part of the conversation.

You know why, Speaker? Because elections are the foundation of our democracy. Free and fair elections, the integrity of our elections, are critically important. That's why it's important to have all-party conversations, all-party decisions, all-party participation in decisions around electoral laws, especially when it comes to things like how campaign finance works.

Twice now—twice now—this government has threatened to use the “notwithstanding” clause to interfere with election rules. The first time, it was to interfere with the municipal election in the city of Toronto. Now, it is to place what the courts have decided are unreasonable limits on our charter rights. The government needs to decide what kind of legacy they want to leave, what kind of history is going to be written about them. Do they really want to be the first government in Ontario's history to invoke the “notwithstanding” clause on an election financing issue—an issue that we really should be working towards broad societal consensus on, not violating people's charter rights?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Questions?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: First of all, I'd like to congratulate the Attorney General on this strong piece of legislation. I don't think anyone here has been able to debate him on the merits of his legislation. He has spent an incredible amount of his life dedicated to the legal system here in the province of Ontario. Unfortunately, no one has risen to the occasion on the other side.

I want to ask the member opposite, does he agree with collusion of political parties and third-party entities? Does he agree that all three political parties in 2014 had a maximum spend that was regulated and were required to report—that one entity, a third-party interest group, was able to spend more than those three political parties combined? Does he agree with collusion, and does he agree with the ability for third-party groups to spend more than all of the political parties in here combined can spend? Answer—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Back to the member from Guelph for a response.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question. It raises an interesting issue, because one of the changes the government made to election financing laws was—there used to be provisions that would require you to verify your name, your address, your employer, to avoid things like getting around collusion. And this government changed that law—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I said in my response, Speaker, that I support—and I want to be very clear—limitations around third-party spending, but not when they violate the charter. That is the issue tonight. The changes the government brought in, the courts have determined, violate our charter rights. So let's do this right, Speaker—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Further questions? I recognize the member from—

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thunder Bay—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thunder Bay—Atikokan.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you, Speaker. It's been a while. It's nice to see you.

Thanks to the member from Guelph for his presentation. I was just thinking about your comments about how we could have been spending this time in such a more productive way to really be helping the people of Ontario, because no one that I know has asked for these changes. In Thunder Bay—Atikokan, we're not a very affluent riding. There have been cash-for-access kinds of events happening in our riding. What I want to know is, in your riding of Guelph, are people really able to afford this increase of personal donations? Is that something that's common?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'd say, first of all, I appreciate the member's question. A lot of Ontarians don't have \$3,300 to give to a candidate, to a constituency association and to a central party—not a lot of people have \$9,900. I do want to say—and I'll probably upset my Liberal colleagues here—that the previous government was wrong to do pay-to-play politics and the cash-for-access scandals, but they did the right thing by changing the laws in the face of criticism. This government, since they've come into power, has slowly been moving us in the wrong direction. Instead of lowering limits even further, they've been increasing donation limits.

Politics should be about people: all people, not just people with deep pockets. I would be willing to work with any and every party and any and every member in this House to lower donation limits to political parties.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Unfortunately, there isn't enough time for an additional question, but there is time for further debate. Therefore, further debate?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: On behalf of the people of Parkdale—High Park, I stand in the House today to oppose Premier Ford and his Conservative government's abuse of power through this legislation.

0300

Speaker, let me explain what is happening right now, and I want to explain through an example. During the last election campaign, Premier Ford promised that autistic children would receive the supports they needed in order to succeed in life. He promised that kids and families wouldn't have to protest their government in front of Queen's Park like they had to do with the previous Liberal government. Not only did the Premier break his promise, he cut funding so deeply that families were left with even less support for their children than before. The wait-lists doubled to 46,000.

The autism community, being sick and tired of this government's broken promises, and being done with talking and waiting, took action. They put up a billboard in the riding of the minister responsible for this file, exposing the Ford government's failures. Hours after the billboard went up, it was abruptly taken down. Subsequently, it was reported that the owner of the billboard happened to be the father of that minister's former chief of staff.

Think about this now: Here is a community who were cheated by this government. Within their rights, they put up a billboard to hold their government accountable. That billboard was taken down through shady dealings. The billboard was the community's way to have their concerns heard, but even that attempt was silenced.

It's this kind of suppression that is going to become law tonight. The government wants to muzzle every group on every issue come election time: families of long-term-care residents; teachers and school communities; working-class people; tenants; environmental advocates; even front-line health care workers, the very people Premier Ford and this government called heroes. All of these people will be silenced and prevented from expressing themselves in an organized way with this law. That's why the Superior Court ruled this law unconstitutional.

Speaker, Premier Ford has seen the writing on the wall. He knows that people across this province are motivated to vote him and his government out. In a desperate attempt to cling to power, he has shown he is willing to take the most extreme measures, disregarding what the courts have to say, disregarding what the people want, to muzzle anyone who dares say something against this government.

Bypassing court decisions for political gain is an abuse of power. Only dictators do that. At the same time, in this very bill, Premier Ford is doubling the amount of donations that can be made by wealthy donors, increasing the influence of deep pockets on our political process.

Speaker, this Conservative government knows that what they're doing is wrong. That is why the Premier and this government have chosen the middle of the night, as if it wouldn't be noticed, to pass this law that everyone knows is wrong. That is why this legislation is being debated under the cover of darkness. What are you afraid of, Premier Ford? Why does the voice of the people scare you so much?

It is 3 a.m. on a Saturday right now. Just because you're doing this at 3 a.m. doesn't mean that the people aren't

watching. It doesn't mean that we won't show up to hold you accountable. That is why I am here and that is why my colleagues from the NDP are here. I'm here for the people of Parkdale–High Park, because we believe in free and fair elections. We believe in standing up for the rights and freedoms of all Ontarians.

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

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member opposite. I listened intently to your comments, and I found them very troubling, not least because you suggested that we had somehow cut autism funding when we have more than doubled the autism funding to historic numbers. I just don't even understand how you got the impression that you did.

But going back to what we're talking about here today, you're complaining about the silencing of the voices of nurses and—who else did you say? I don't know—individuals, but those people are able to donate \$3,300, maximum, whereas what we're talking about is \$600,000 donated during 12 months. I don't know many nurses or individuals who can donate \$600,000 during 12 months and \$100,000 in the writ period. Do you?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: First of all, let it be very clear—and it is known by the people of Ontario and the families who are part of the Ontario Autism Coalition—that this government has cut funding, this government taken away supports and services from children, and that under this government, the wait-list has doubled to 46,000 children. Speaker, if the member recalls, we had numerous protests inside and outside the Legislature. We had parents, we had children in this House, crying, begging this government to not cut the services. But yet they still cut them, and children are suffering as a result. The member can deny it—

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to thank the member from Parkdale–High Park for her comments. I know that coming here tonight, we all have heard from many members in our ridings, from our constituents, about the issues that they would rather we were prioritizing in this House. I wondered if the member would share with us some of the issues that the people of Parkdale–High Park would like to see prioritized in this Legislature.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Thank you to my colleague from Davenport for the question. She's absolutely right: Our constituents want us to be debating the most urgent issues that they're experiencing in their lives through this pandemic. And what I'm hearing from my constituents in Parkdale–High Park is, why is it that we have evictions being allowed during the pandemic? This government did not ban COVID evictions. Under this government, eviction notices and eviction hearings online continued, and the moment the enforcement of evictions was lifted, we started to see mass evictions. We are going to see the homelessness crisis in this city and in this province get much worse.

As well, parents, students, everybody wants to know what this government's plan is for the safe reopening of

schools in the fall. That's what we should be working on. That's our priority.

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

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member across for her remarks today.

I want to read a statement from former US President Barack Obama about the US Supreme Court ruling that allowed big corporations, including foreign corporations, to spend unlimited amounts of money to influence elections. President Obama said, "The Citizens United decision was wrong, and it has caused real harm to our democracy. With each new campaign season ... dark money floods our airwaves with more and more political ads that pull our politics into the gutter."

Speaker, through you, can the member opposite—why don't you agree with us to stop American-style politics here in Ontario?

0310

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Despite this government's claim, what is actually in this legislation is not about the reasonable limits of third-party activities; what is in the legislation is this government's attempts to completely crush any critic who's against their record. That is why the Superior Court ruled that this law, Premier Ford's law, goes way too far, that it infringes on the charter rights of the people of this province.

Speaker, if we truly want to have a discussion and a debate and have legislation on reasonable limits of third-party activities, then let us all work together to make that happen; let us not come up with a piece of legislation that is only going to silence the voices of the people.

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

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I would like to thank my colleague and neighbour to my riding of York South–Weston, the member from Parkdale–High Park.

I know tonight we are talking about the "notwithstanding" clause, but you talked about the importance of issues affecting your community and many communities across the province—long-term care, banning evictions and so forth.

Why is it important that we talk about the issues affecting communities now rather than just talk about the re-election of the Progressive Conservatives?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I thank my colleague from York South–Weston for his question. He's absolutely right. Earlier, in response to another question, I talked about evictions and I talked about the safe reopening of schools in September. Right now, I'd like to use my time to talk about the experiences of small businesses across this province.

In my riding, we have not one, not two, but tens of businesses that were approved funding by this government under the Ontario Small Business Support Grant program and which still, months and months and months later, have not received the money in their accounts. Forget the second round. This is the first round we're talking about. I have to say, the businesses contacted our office. We raised

it in the House. The minister promised some sort of action. We follow up. We work with the ministry liaison. We work with everybody. This government simply does not engage. They don't provide answers. Businesses don't know—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Further questions?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: On this side of the House, we believe in ensuring that our system of electoral finances is both accountable and regulated. That's why we're bringing in these measures today through Bill 307. We don't want to see a situation like in the United States, where they have dark money, unaccountable money, permeating their election system.

During the course of this debate, I found three examples right off the bat in the United States of individuals who use this dark-money super PAC system to try to influence election decisions and government decisions. I don't think that's right.

The member opposite spoke a little bit about what is actually in this bill. If you go to page 3 of Bill 307, it clearly lays out how our government is seeking to make third-party spending more accountable and regulated.

So I would ask the member opposite: Would she like a system like the United States, with dark money—unregulated, unaccountable—or a system like the one—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Back to the member from Parkdale–High Park for your final response.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I have to say, what the member just said is utter nonsense.

Interjections.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: It is. In fact, I am quoting a constitutional law expert who looked at the bill and said that the connections this government is trying to make to make it seem like we have an American-style system here are utter nonsense.

Speaker, if I could rephrase that question, what the member is really asking me is why I don't support the muzzling of critics, why I don't support bypassing the courts, why I don't support disregarding the people of this province. So I would like to know: How does that member sleep at night, knowing that they are abusing power and they are betraying the trust of the people of this province?

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

Mr. John Fraser: This debate is actually really a paradigm of this government. It's about priorities. We're here—it's the middle of the night—because the Premier has decided to use the "notwithstanding" clause. The "notwithstanding" clause is not some sort of get-out-of-jail-free card because you don't like the courts telling you you've gone too far. It's not like when you were 12 and played football on the field, and you didn't like how it was going, so you picked up the ball and went home. The Attorney General says, "I use the tools in my tool box." Well, he should have looked before he reached in. He didn't even go for a stay. It's crazy that this is such an urgency for this government. I'm going to say a bit more about that later.

But the “notwithstanding” clause is really there, as Bill Davis said, to protect people’s rights, not to take them away. That’s what you’re doing, and that’s what the courts told you. They said you’ve gone beyond what’s a reasonable limit.

In Quebec, what’s happened when they’ve used the “notwithstanding” clause—this is the group that you’re putting yourself in with. In Quebec, when they used the “notwithstanding” clause, they did it to take away minority English-language rights. In Alberta, there was a compensation act for people who had been sterilized because they were developmentally disabled. Ralph Klein put that forward, and he limited their ability to get compensation. That’s the group you’re putting yourself in with. That’s the thing that you’re doing. That’s the thing that’s going to be your legacy.

Using the “notwithstanding” clause to do anything other than protect people’s rights is simply wrong. Now—

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: That’s what we’re doing.

Mr. John Fraser: That’s what you’re doing? You’re protecting your own rights. You’re right: You’re protecting your own rights. You’re protecting yourselves.

Speaker, we’re here in the middle of the night. We’ve got this urgent debate. We all came here, and we all want to be here, but like the member from Kiiwetinoong said, why aren’t we talking about water? Why aren’t we talking about water? Why not? Why, when the Premier announced the reopening, did he not say a word about schools? He talked about reopening patios, but hey, the kids can wait until September.

And still, there’s no plan for schools. Parents are still wondering, “Where’s the plan for September?” And all the way through this year, they’ve been jerked around by this government. Literally, one day the Minister of Education is saying, “Schools are going to remain open,” and the next day they said, “Schools are going to be closed.”

There’s a news flash for everybody here: Schools are really great for kids. They help them learn. They build their future. But do you know what else they’re really good for? They’re really good for families. Do you know why? Because they allow a lot of families to have two incomes—some, one. They allow for fuller participation by having a safe place for kids during the day, and sometimes in extended care.

Do you know what full participation in the workforce is good for? Does anybody know? Can anybody guess? It’s good for the economy. The minister of—Minister Fedeli; pardon my language.

Interjection: The Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. John Fraser: The Minister of Economic Development would know that. So I don’t know why a plan for schools wasn’t included in our economic recovery, but it may say something about the Premier’s priorities.

I just spent time giving graduation certificates out for schools. I rang the doorbell and handed them to the people. The office administrator, the principal, the vice-principal: Those folks have been supporting families and communities all year, without the tools that they needed, without the support that they needed and sometimes without the

moral support that they needed from this government. That’s another reason why there should be a plan for schools. The Premier is saying, “Hey, everybody can have a graduation; we can have a big party. Just a sec, I’m going out back. I can’t help you, but it’s something we should do.” We all know people like that. We all have people like that in our lives.

0320

Here’s the other thing: Why aren’t we here tonight debating the long-term care commission? Because this government refuses to commit to the recommendations.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: That’s not true.

Mr. John Fraser: It refuses to commit to recommendation 85. Maybe in the question, the Minister of Long-Term Care will tell me that she will. Recommendation 85 is that the government reports back in one year on how they’ve done on the recommendations, and again in three years. That’s not a tough recommendation.

This government was so committed to the commission and so committed to doing these things, you’d think they would say yes almost immediately, but they’re just saying, “I hope it goes away. Let’s just not talk about it. Let’s go talk about the ‘notwithstanding’ clause and dark money.”

If I hear anyone on their side say Bernie Sanders or Thomas Walkom or, for God’s sake, Barack Obama, or “Americanization,” it’s like, “Do you want a seat over here?” You can’t tilt to the left for 20 seconds and then go back. It’s just not believable.

Hon. Steve Clark: You guys did it all the time.

Mr. John Fraser: Yes, we go left and right, but we know what we’re doing.

Speaker, why are we here? Why aren’t we here talking about permanent PSW pay raises? I know we’ve just had another two extensions.

Imagine this: The Premier says to you—oh, let me see—“Minister of Municipal Affairs, you’re doing a great job. I’m going to give you this extra money because you’re doing a great job and there’s a lot of pressure right now. You’re great. You’re a champ. You’re on our team and you’re wonderful.”

And then it comes to be August, and he says to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, “Well, that pay is ending.” The Minister of Municipal Affairs waits six weeks and then gets three quarters of what he was getting before. Maybe he’s not unhappy. And the Premier says, “You’re only going to get it until December.”

Then December comes and the Premier says, “You know, you’re doing a great job and we love you. You’re a champ. Hey, you’re part of our team. You’re great, but we’re going to give that to you until March—just till March.” And then March comes.

Come on, guys. The Minister of Municipal Affairs must be feeling kind of bad right now. He must be wondering, “Does he really want me here?” Because the Premier says, “You know what? We’re going to extend it to the end of June.” And then the end of June comes and the Premier says to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, “You know that raise? We’re going to extend it to August.” The Minister

of Municipal Affairs would probably be sitting over here with some of his colleagues.

If you want to keep people and retain them, don't treat them like that—really. A pay raise that gets decreased to 75% after a six-week gap—this is their pandemic pay. It's not like COVID got up and left from the middle of August until the middle of September.

And then four temporary extensions—four. They don't believe you. They can't believe you. They shouldn't believe you. That's what we should be debating here tonight.

Paid sick days: 14 months of screaming and kicking and just about every Ontarian saying you need paid sick days. We had to drag them screaming and kicking. They said, "We had them; they were good"—

Mrs. Robin Martin: We have paid sick days.

Mr. John Fraser: Well, you did have paid sick days. You took them away in 2018 because you were in such a hurry, and then it took you 14 months to give three back—14 months. Can anyone do the math on that? That's like 0.2 a day, a month, or something like that. That's incredible. What we should be here debating tonight is 10 paid sick days, because that's what's needed. Fourteen months, three paid six days, and an insistence by the government, "Hey, everything's okay. We don't need it. It's okay"—holy cow.

But hey, we're here tonight urgently debating this urgent, urgent matter where the future of our province hangs in the balance, that the lives of every Ontarian are dependant upon. We're not debating the things that matter most to people: their schools, long-term-care homes, PSW pay raises, the Ontario Autism Program—for God's sake, the child advocate, which the Premier cut when he got here. Who does that? But no. We're here tonight because it's so darned urgent. Nothing else can be done.

It's crazy. Why are you doing this? Why aren't you talking about the things that are important to Ontarians? Why aren't you making sure that parents know that this September, there's a plan—something in the plan, anything in the plan? Last summer, almost exactly the same thing happened here. The Premier switched to politics. He went out on a campaign-style tour around Ontario. Parents were waiting for a plan for schools. School boards were waiting for a plan for schools. They were waiting and waiting. There was no sense of urgency in this government, not even close to what's happening here right now. It's disproportionate. That's why I said—maybe it's not a paradigm, but it's a picture of this government. It's a picture of this government's priorities, which are out of whack.

Schools are a pillar of our economy. That's why we need a plan. More importantly, parents need certainty. They need to plan their lives. They need to be able to get back to work. They need to know the government has their backs. Telling them on a Monday that schools are going to stay open and then saying on Tuesday that they're going to close—that doesn't inspire confidence. But what it also tells people is that you probably haven't thought about it very much, and it's not that big of a priority for you.

I'd be happy to take any questions.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'd love to do a question. First of all, I've been here for three and a half hours now, I guess, and I've got to agree. I always listen to you, but I've got to agree: What the hell are we doing? Really. I'm sorry; we've got people dying every day in the province of Ontario. We have businesses going under every day. We don't have enough PSWs in our long-term-care facilities. They're still getting sick in all our long-term care—and what do we do? We come in here on a midnight shift, for what? Because you lost a court case? Get a new lawyer. Do whatever you have to do. We've got issues here in the province of Ontario.

I want to ask my member real quick—well, you're not my member, but you could be some day, I guess. Who knows? Why do you think we're having this debate at 3:30 in the morning, on the same night—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Back to the member from Ottawa South for your response.

Mr. John Fraser: Look, there is no discernible reason for us to be here debating this matter. There are dozens and dozens of other things that matter to Ontario families more that aren't happening, and the biggest one is schools. It is so incredible that we are debating this tonight, and there is no plan for schools in the fall—no plan, none, nada.

So if you have school-aged kids, you're out of luck. But if you've got enough money to contribute \$3,300 or \$9,600—

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's \$9,900.

Mr. John Fraser: —\$9,900, thank you—then you're good, or if your employer gives you a bonus so you can make that donation. I wonder who that favours?

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

Mr. Michael Coteau: The member from Ottawa South has said a lot of things tonight. He's criticized the government with regard to their plans for education and long-term care. I would like to ask the member what he would do differently.

0330

Mr. John Fraser: Wow. Well, there would be a cabinet shuffle, but I think that the people who would be shuffled out maybe aren't usually the ones who are shuffled out.

In all honesty, we should be talking about schools. That should be our top priority. It should have been our top priority through the year, apart from the things that we had to do in our hospitals and public health, because it's about our economy, it's about families and it's what matters to them. To not have a plan and to literally jerk them around is unfair. The Premier should have had a command table with educators, parents and administrators to make sure that our schools were the last to close and the first to open, because it's great for families and, as importantly, it's a pillar of our economy.

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: To the member, you've suggested, "Why are we here? This isn't important." I think all the members on this side, and I think on the other side, think that the integrity of the democratic system here in

Ontario is critically important. When we have special interests, when we have corporations, when we have billionaires that have no accountability, no disclosure requirements, and they can fund without any observation, any accountability, I think it's inappropriate.

Do you not think it's inappropriate that if I have \$1 billion, I can go and spend that money and try and persuade people, based on my wealth, as to how they should vote? Do you think that's the right thing to do for this province?

Mr. John Fraser: I'm not sure why the members opposite are exaggerating and blowing things up. I think what the court said was the limitations that you put were unreasonable. There were limitations. It's a balance, just like there are limitations on how much people could donate—which, by the way, your government tripled; also, an employer can give you a bonus to give a donation.

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: Yes, well, you get a bonus, and somehow you manage to donate. That was part of a law. It's not anymore. Well, you know that.

This is really important, you guys, and that's why we're here. I'm just saying, what's more important to Ontario families are their schools, and you're letting them down. You have let them down all year long. You're letting them down.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please.

Stop the clock for a moment, please. It's early, from the way I look at the clock. By saying it's early, it also means that we need to keep the tone and the level down so that we can continue with questions and responses.

Therefore, now I will look to whoever stands next—the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane—for a question to the member from Ottawa South.

Mr. John Vanthof: I listened very intently to the member for Ottawa South. There was one comment I thought that was really appropriate for the former Liberal Party: that they tilt to the left and then rebound if they get elected.

But I did listen intently, and I share his concern. We get calls and emails about schools. We get calls and emails from small business. When we talk to small business, we get so many issues regarding what has happened to people over the last year, and not one on the Election Act—not one—until now that it has been ruled unconstitutional.

Could you expand on that? Did you get any calls before it was ruled unconstitutional?

Mr. John Fraser: No, I haven't got any calls on that, but I'll tell you what I had a lot of calls on: I had a lot of

calls on schools. Actually, in the last two weeks in Ottawa—and I was glad to hear the member from Nepean found her voice, because over the last two weeks in Ottawa, Ottawa seniors haven't been able to book a vaccine. They've been more frustrated than successful. And it's been total radio silence from Ottawa members—not a word. Their phones are ringing off the hook. How come nobody has said anything? Nobody did anything. You're in the government. You've got the power. The minister sits right there. You sit in the caucus. That's a priority for people. Go talk to those seniors. Go and talk to them. The member from Carleton knows.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to redirect to the member, talking about the dark money. I'm probably older than most other people in here, but I remember the constitutional debates of 1982, and Premier Lougheed and Premier Blakeney insisted, before they would accept the Constitution under Prime Minister Trudeau, at the time, that they had the “notwithstanding” clause so that legislators would make law, would legislate, not judges in the court, unaccountable to anybody, appointed by who knows who. That's why we're here tonight, because courts have stepped in, and in our opinion as the government, they went too far. We've got that responsibility to bring this legislation in. I think you'd agree—everybody said they don't want to see dark money in politics when the former Liberal government made some steps in that direction. We're going further, trying to keep that in place. The Prime Minister—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you.

Back to the member from Ottawa South to respond.

Mr. John Fraser: There is also something we did as legislators in this country, and it's called the Constitution, and the Charter of Rights. The courts are there to interpret that law against the other laws that we make, so that we make sure that we don't infringe on people's rights. That's why, when I say when you use it to do something other than protect people's rights and take them away, that's not the intent of that, and that's what the courts told you.

The Attorney General didn't even ask for a stay—went right to this, the nuclear option, whatever you want to call it. It's just the wrong thing to do, the wrong priority.

I just want to articulate what I was saying before in terms of what you changed in the elections law. You used to have to list your employer when you made a donation so we could track that and make sure nobody was taking advantage of that. Maybe they were; maybe they weren't. But you removed that. Why?

Report continues in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, OC, OOnt.
Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Ted Arnott
Clerk / Greffier: Todd Decker
Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffier: Trevor Day
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Tonia Grannum, Valerie Quioc Lim, William Short,
Peter Sibenik, William Wong
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergente d'armes: Jacquelyn Gordon

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Anand, Deepak (PC)	Mississauga—Malton	
Andrew, Jill (NDP)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London—Fanshawe	
Arnott, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (PC)	Wellington—Halton Hills	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Arthur, Ian (NDP)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Baber, Roman (IND)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Babikian, Aris (PC)	Scarborough—Agincourt	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia—Lambton	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand—Norfolk	
Begum, Doly (NDP)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bell, Jessica (NDP)	University—Rosedale	
Berns-McGown, Rima (NDP)	Beaches—East York / Beaches—East York	
Bethlenfalvy, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (PC)	Pickering—Uxbridge	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances President of the Treasury Board / Président du Conseil du Trésor
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins	
Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)	Markham—Stouffville	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC)	Scarborough North / Scarborough-Nord	Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité
Cho, Stan (PC)	Willowdale	
Clark, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby	
Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	
Coteau, Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Crawford, Stephen (PC)	Oakville	
Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC)	Mississauga—Lakeshore	
Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues / Ministre associée déléguée au dossier de l'Enfance et à la Condition féminine Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Elliott, Hon. / L'hon. Christine (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce
Fee, Amy (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Fullerton, Hon. / L'hon. Merrilee (PC)	Kanata—Carleton	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Parm (PC)	Milton	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gravelle, Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Hardeman, Hon. / L'hon. Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hassan, Faisal (NDP)	York South—Weston / York-Sud—Weston	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor—Tecumseh	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hillier, Randy (IND)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Solicitor General / Solliciteure générale
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Karahalios, Belinda C. (NBP)	Cambridge	
Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Ke, Vincent (PC)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	
Khanjin, Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Kramp, Daryl (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	
Kusendova, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre	
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
MacLeod, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa (PC)	Nepean	Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries / ministre des Industries du patrimoine, du sport, du tourisme et de la culture
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Miller, Norman (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Mitas, Christina Maria (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Morrison, Suze (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Park, Lindsey (PC)	Durham	
Parsa, Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Phillips, Rod (PC)	Ajax	
Piccini, David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie, du Développement du Nord et des Mines Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Roberts, Jeremy (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa- Ouest—Nepean	
Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associé délégué au dossier des Petites Entreprises et de la Réduction des formalités administratives Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Associate Minister of Transportation (GTA) / Ministre associée des Transports (RGT) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Walker, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Associate Minister of Energy / Ministre associé de l'Énergie Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakubski, Hon. / L'hon. John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
Yurek, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Donna Skelly
Teresa J. Armstrong, Toby Barrett
Lorne Coe, Rudy Cuzzetto
Randy Hillier, Jane McKenna
Judith Monteith-Farrell, Michael Parsa
Randy Pettapiece, Donna Skelly
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs / Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques

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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

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Mike Schreiner
Jill Andrew, Robert Bailey
Guy Bourgouin, Stephen Crawford
Goldie Ghamari, Chris Glover
Mike Harris, Sheref Sabawy
Amarjot Sandhu, Mike Schreiner
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

Chair / Président: Gilles Bisson
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Aris Babikian
Aris Babikian, Gilles Bisson
Will Bouma, Lorne Coe
Wayne Gates, Robin Martin
Norman Miller, Rick Nicholls
Billy Pang, Amanda Simard
Marit Stiles
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Julia Douglas

Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lucille Collard
Will Bouma, Lucille Collard
Parm Gill, Daryl Kramp
Natalia Kusendova, Suze Morrison
Lindsey Park, Gurratan Singh
Nina Tangri, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Kevin Yarde
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité permanent de l'Assemblée législative

Chair / Président: Kaleed Rasheed
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vijay Thanigasalam
Rima Berns-McGown, Michael Coteau
Faisal Hassan, Logan Kanapathi
Michael Mantha, Jim McDonell
Christina Maria Mitas, Sam Oosterhoff
Kaleed Rasheed, Donna Skelly
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

Chair / Président: Taras Natyshak
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Deepak Anand, Toby Barrett
Jessica Bell, Stephen Blais
Stephen Crawford, Rudy Cuzzetto
France Gélinas, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Taras Natyshak
Michael Parsa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

Chair / Président: Logan Kanapathi
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Fraser
Will Bouma, John Fraser
Logan Kanapathi, Vincent Ke
Laura Mae Lindo, Paul Miller
Billy Pang, Jeremy Roberts
Dave Smith, Daisy Wai
Jamie West
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de la politique sociale

Chair / Président: Deepak Anand
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Bhutila Karpoche
Deepak Anand, Aris Babikian
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Michael Gravelle, Joel Harden
Mike Harris, Christine Hogarth
Belinda C. Karahalios, Bhutila Karpoche
Natalia Kusendova
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tanzima Khan

Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight / Comité spécial de la surveillance de la gestion des situations d'urgence

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Tom Rakocevic
Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson
John Fraser, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Robin Martin
Sam Oosterhoff, Lindsey Park
Tom Rakocevic, Sara Singh
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell