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Lundi
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 19 October 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 19 octobre 2020

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Good morning. We begin this morning with a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Let us pray.

Prayers.

PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS

SENIORS' ADVOCATE ACT, 2020
LOI DE 2020
SUR L'INTERVENANT EN FAVEUR
DES AÎNÉS

Ms. Lindo moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill 196, An Act to establish the Seniors' Advocate /
Projet de loi 196, Loi créant le poste d'intervenant en
faveur des aînés.

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

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: I am so honoured to be standing in this House today to speak about the real creation of a circle of care around older adults in this province. Bill 196 seeks to establish a seniors' advocate who is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly. That would include advocating in the interests of older adults and their family members as well as other health professionals who act as caregivers for older adults.

In the past, I've come to Queen's Park and I've brought stories of families in Kitchener Centre who have asked my office and offices in many of our ridings to speak on behalf of older adults in their life. This time, though, with my 12 minutes, my hope is to speak to everybody about the organizations that many of these older adults, their families and caregivers have reached out to for support in order to be able to create that circle of care.

With that, I want to make sure that I begin from a place of gratitude. I've had a number of organizations speak to my office, have meetings with me and speak about long-term care in particular, as a starting point. When COVID began, we know what happened in long-term-care facilities, but they were also speaking more broadly about issues impacting older adults. So I'm just going to run through a list of stakeholders who have reached out to my office in support of Bill 196 and people who have said that this is the only way forward in order to rebuild trust between families, caregivers and older adults themselves and government institutions like ours.

I just want to first speak about the National Association of Federal Retirees. Back in August, I was able to meet with Bianca Carlone and Patrick Imbeau, as well as Carole Grieco, who is the president of Kitchener Branch 39. They spoke to me not just about the importance of having the supports readily available for older adults in the province, but also for thinking more broadly about what supporting older adults looks like. It means income security. It means support for housing—and affordable housing, not sub-par or substandard housing. It means listening to the caregivers who are coming in to see them, whether they're living at home or whether they've gone into a retirement home or a long-term-care home, and actually advocating on behalf of them, which means believing them when they say that there are issues that are happening that are negatively impacting the people in their lives.

The Advocacy Centre for the Elderly wrote to me. Jane Meadus is the institutional advocate, and she wrote, "Seniors in Ontario encounter many systemic issues in their daily lives, whether it is an inability to access a program or a complex process not designed for seniors who may not have access to computers, as well as a whole host of issues related to health care including barriers to access. The Advocacy Centre for the Elderly supports the appointment of a seniors' advocate who would be independent, report to the Legislature, and who would be able to assist Ontario's seniors in breaking down these barriers and help them to live their lives to the fullest."

I'm particularly grateful for that statement of support for this bill, because what they're talking about is looking forward, past the moment that we're in in the pandemic where we'll all in crisis mode and emergencies, and towards a future where older adults in the province can live to their fullest, to have the highest quality of life. That means, again, looking broader than just the particular circumstances that we are in right now in 2020, and recognizing that, yes, we have a system that was underfunded, under-resourced, understaffed for over 15 years, but our job right now is to create some form of an independent body that the government will listen to, so that when people do speak out, there's an assurance that what they have asked for will be listened to, and that change will be made within the system. So thank you again to Jane for the words of support.

Also, Care Watch Ontario has written to me and asked for a speedy consideration of the passage of Bill 196. They write, "The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for an independent seniors' advocate as an officer of the Legislature, to advise on systemic challenges faced by seniors, and in particular, policies and programs, services

and systems of support used by people 65 years or older that relate to health care, personal care, housing, transportation or income support.”

Again, a lot of the people who are writing to me are not focused solely on long-term care and the crisis that we have there, but they’re looking more broadly at everything that older adults deserve, for everything that they have given us in this life. Had it not been for them and their hard work, we wouldn’t be here right now having this debate, and I think that it’s one way to really show that we care and that we love them by implementing something that would have an independent nature to be able to speak back to the system on their behalf. And so, to Michèle Harding, I thank you very much for your kind words.

I’ve heard from CanAge, Canada’s national seniors’ advocacy organization. “Without question,” they’ve written, “Ontario urgently needs a seniors’ advocate to ensure that we have a champion within the province to advance the rights of older Ontarians. Bill 196 achieves that critical, important need. Ontario needs to catch up to other provinces, such as BC and others who have already implemented seniors’ advocates, to highly effective results. Never before, in the time of COVID-19, has it been more clear that seniors have special, unmet needs. Bill 196 will help Ontario become not just age-inclusive, but a leader in the country. We have this moment in time to make things better for seniors. Now is the time to take it.”

So thank you, Laura Tamblin Watts, the CEO at CanAge, Canada’s national seniors’ advocacy organization, again, for reiterating that we need to be a leader in this way and support our older adults across the province.

Seniors for Social Action (Ontario): John Lord, who’s a researcher, and Dr. Patricia Spindel, a researcher and policy adviser, have also written to me in support of Bill 196. They have strongly shown their support for the creation of a seniors’ advocate office, and again, they pointed to having this independent body that would represent the interests and the needs of families, and the fact that for many of these families who are already undergoing so much stress at the time where they have to participate in their advocacy, it’s so important for them to have a body that they can rely on, that they can be assured will respect what it is that they’re saying and the reality of their experience.

0910

Mr. Speaker, I have had family members contact my office, after losing loved ones, who still want to carry on their advocacy, and they do that in the name of the people they have lost. So when they go to organizations like this and these organizations say, “You know, what we need is an independent body,” it’s an indication that many of these organizations also feel unheard, also feel ignored in this system. Despite their expertise, it seems as though it’s difficult to get government institutions to move in the direction that they need to to ensure that older adults have the support, the care and the love that they so deserve.

Again, John Lord, the researcher, has written, “Seniors’ issues are under scrutiny across the province because of how poorly the government has handled the crisis in long-

term care. Significant changes are needed, and a seniors’ advocate office would be an important part of the changes we need.”

Dr. Patricia Spindel, also from Seniors for Social Action, has written, “Advocacy is needed within and outside government to address serious systemic issues in the long-term-care system. A seniors’ advocate would provide an important vehicle for seniors’ issues, especially if it is independent and reports to the Ontario Legislature.”

Again, the Seniors for Social Action (Ontario) has indicated that it’s complementary to have an independent seniors’ advocate as well as the advocacy that happens right here within the Legislature.

I’ve also been contacted by the Alzheimer Society of Ontario. This one is dear to my heart. As I’ve spoken about before, my father has early onset dementia, so I understand how difficult it is to try and keep your family member at home as long as possible so that they have something that they recognize around them. They too have written and explained that there are over 240,000 Ontarians who live with dementia today, a number that’s expected to double within the next 20 years. Social isolation, caregiver burn-out, overstretched community supports: Those are just some of the issues that Ontario families affected by dementia are confronted with in their day-to-day lives. A seniors’ advocate has the ability to draw attention to those challenges faced by Ontarians living with dementia and their care partners, and serve as a catalyst for meaningful change.

I would argue that everybody in this House wants meaningful change. I think asking for somebody to be independent of us, somebody else to be able to help us outside of the system to do better within the system is so hugely important. So thank you to Cathy Barrick, the chief executive officer from the Alzheimer Society of Ontario, for writing into my office and supporting Bill 196.

The Older Women’s Network housing committee, of which Kate Chung is the chair, as well as the Accessible Housing Network—and Kate Chung is the co-chair of that organization—have also written to me in support of Bill 196. One of the things they’ve said is, did you know that seniors’ apartments are not required to be accessible? Hundreds of seniors who could otherwise remain at home end up in long-term-care facilities simply because they need accessibility. Again, it goes back to the point that this particular advocate would be able to look at a long range of parts of the system that are not working for older adults, and they would advocate in a meaningful way to the system to make those changes.

The other piece that people have said to me about Bill 196 that they are particularly pleased about is that there would be a report out to the public. We would be able to keep an eye on, what changes have happened? What are some of the barriers to those changes? How can we move forward? And by keeping that report out and the public involved in the movement of what the system is doing to support older adults, we end up rebuilding the trust. I think it’s hugely important for us to do that.

I also just want to say a big thank you to the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition. Rabbi Shalom

Schachter wrote to me, “The voice of seniors must be heard in the halls of policy development. Given their heavier impact of COVID-19 and especially those in long-term-care homes, the need for this advocate is clear.”

And the Waterloo Region Health Coalition has also provided their support. Their support has also come with a reminder that we need a minimum of four hours of care for older adults. If we don't start doing this work, we're not going to be able to show them the gratitude that they so clearly deserve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate? I recognize the member for Markham–Thornhill.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Good morning, Speaker. Thank you for that introduction. I want to take this opportunity to welcome all my fellow MPPs back to the Legislature.

It is an honour to rise to speak on the bill introduced by my colleague the MPP from Kitchener Centre, Bill 196, An Act to establish the Seniors' Advocate.

Last week was Thanksgiving, and I am very thankful for the opportunity to serve the people of Markham–Thornhill and to serve with the caucus, with this Premier, and being part of a government that truly is for the people. As many of you know, Markham–Thornhill is a wonderfully diverse riding, with folks from many cultures choosing to call our region of the province their home. Something that connects all of the people in my riding, not only their background, their religious practice or the language they speak, is respect for our elders in Ontario.

I've had to deal with two seniors in my life. My mother is 93. She's dying with dementia. She's been bedridden for the last three years. My mother-in-law is 89. She's been living with me for the last 26 years. These are the issues nearest and dearest to my heart, Mr. Speaker.

The health and well-being of our seniors is the top priority for our government. We believe that it's fundamentally important for seniors to have a seat or voice at the cabinet table in Ontario. This is why our Premier was proud to establish a separate Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility to help ensure that the needs of seniors have representation at the highest level of decision-making in our government. Our government is committed to providing seniors with the services and support they need to stay healthy, active and socially engaged in our communities.

As a former municipal councillor, I know first-hand the benefits to the community as a whole when it's diverse and inclusive. Enabling our seniors to stay in our communities is good for them and for everyone who gets to share in their wisdom, their experience and the insights they have to offer.

I was proud to see our government move quickly earlier this year to help our seniors who were living at home when COVID-19 first struck our province. Our government stepped up with an \$11-million commitment in the Ontario Community Support Program. This program provided deliveries of food, medicine and other essentials to seniors and others who had to self-isolate because of COVID-19. This has allowed over 230,000 deliveries by the end of

September, helping our seniors to stay safe and healthy in the face of this pandemic.

This program is but one example of how our government is serving the needs of seniors. It is a privilege to serve with this Premier and this government as we continue to provide the support and services needed by seniors, and we will continue to keep their health and well-being as a top priority as we continue to include their needs at the highest level of this government.

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

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Good morning. I'd like to thank my colleague Laura Mae Lindo from Kitchener Centre for this important bill. When I approached my 93-year-old aunt, who is the matriarch of our family, about this bill, she said, “Go get 'em,” because she is tired of the way that seniors' voices are being sidelined in our society.

I also had the privilege of belonging to the National Association of Federal Retirees as a survivor, as my husband was part of the federal public service. In that group I've met many people and I've represented them in my former roles. People approached me, and I'd like to mention them: Terry Marcon, Murray Haywood, Rick Bevilacqua, Lori Appelt and Glen Ball. They approached me to highlight the voice of the National Association of Federal Retirees. In their letter and in their voices, it said, “It is time that older adults and caregivers in Ontario have a non-partisan advocate looking out for their best interests, making sure their needs are being met, and ensuring their rights are being respected.”

“The need for a dedicated advocate to protect the rights and interests of older adults and their caregivers has never been greater. Ontarians aged 60 and older as well as those living in long-term and other congregate care settings—many of whom are older individuals—have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and the measures put in place to limit its spread. The treatment of these groups during the pandemic is unacceptable and has led to tragic circumstances in long-term-care homes across the province.”

0920

The need for an advocate has been demonstrated in other provinces, and it's time for Ontario to adopt this proven and effective approach to protect the interests and rights of older adults. Ontario has failed its seniors, and we cannot continue to do so. We need to pass Bill 196.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I rise to contribute to the debate on Bill 196, establishing a seniors' advocate as an independent officer of the Legislature. I want to thank the member for Kitchener Centre for bringing forward this critically important bill.

Speaker, this pandemic has highlighted the need to completely rethink the way we care for elders in Ontario. The heartbreaking loss of life in long-term-care homes was a wake-up call that we have a moral obligation to treat elders with the dignity and respect they deserve.

Research shows that BC was better-prepared and responded in a more coordinated and decisive way than Ontario did when it came to protecting elders during the first wave of COVID-19. There are many reasons for this, but one of them is surely that BC has a seniors' advocate and Ontario does not.

I also want to be clear that the neglect and poor treatment of elders did not begin with COVID-19. I worry that our society has moved away from the respect and care that we used to show elders and that many societies still do. One example of this is the shocking rise of elder abuse in Ontario. The Ontario Human Rights Commission reports that over 60,000 older adults in our province experience abuse each and every year, and according to the human rights commission, these statistics are likely grossly underreported.

Speaker, I know we can do better. We must do better. We owe it to elders to provide them with an independent advocate to report abuse, to identify systemic barriers and to advocate for changes so that elders receive the care, dignity and respect that they have earned and that they deserve.

So I will be supporting Bill 196, and I encourage all members of this House to stand up for our elders and vote in favour of Bill 196.

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I want to thank the member for Kitchener Centre for introducing this really important bill here today. I'm privileged to rise on behalf of the people and families of Carleton to speak to Bill 196, which was introduced by the member opposite. Our riding offers a wonderful mix of old and new. There's sprawling rural beauty and also fast-growing towns. But whether you hail from rural or urban, or whether you're from Kitchener Centre or Carleton or anywhere in between, there are many things that always hold true, and one of those is the importance of taking care of our seniors.

Mr. Speaker, this is a government that supports and believes in the power of our seniors, and that is why not only do we have a strong ministry dedicated to seniors and accessibility, but we have also implemented important programs to help seniors when and where they need them the most. I was proud to stand with Premier Ford in the last election and promise the seniors' dental program. And now I'm proud to stand again with this Premier and this government and confirm that a promise made is a promise kept. Our government has delivered the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program, a \$90-million annual investment that, when fully implemented, will serve approximately 100,000 low-income seniors every year. This is not only going to make a huge impact in my riding of Carleton but all across the province. This year, we invested an additional \$25 million in capital projects across the province, including eight mobile dental centres to help increase access to the program in underserved areas of the province.

I can understand how this could have been a shock for the people of Ontario. There was finally a government and a Premier who actually delivered on the promises they

made. Our government has continued to make the health and well-being of our seniors a top priority. We moved quickly when COVID-19 first struck our province to shore up the supports for seniors in retirement homes across the province.

In my own riding of Carleton, I was constantly in talks with various seniors' homes, including Lori Norris, who is the executive director of the Osgoode Care Centre. I'm so happy to report that, with community support and provincial support, we were able to protect our seniors during that initial first wave of the pandemic.

We also invested \$20 million in infection control measures to protect seniors in our licensed retirement homes, including those in my riding of Carleton. Our government restricted retirement home employees from working in more than one retirement home, long-term-care home or other health care setting. We also provided retirement homes with the flexibility to be able to recruit and reassign staff, helping to ensure supports continued to be available for our retirement home residents.

Our seniors are cherished members of our communities, Mr. Speaker. My experience with seniors goes way back to before I even got elected. My mother works for a non-profit organization called Community and Home Assistance to Seniors, or CHATS for short. She has been working there for over 10 years, coordinating the diversity and wellness program for seniors in the Iranian community. I'd been volunteering there for over 10 years prior to getting elected. One thing that I learned and one thing that my mother instilled in me is how important it is to respect our seniors and to give back to them, because they're the ones who made this province what it is, and it's up to us to now make sure that they are taken care of. Our seniors have stood by our province, and this government continues to stand by them.

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

Ms. Jill Andrew: We need a seniors' advocate, an independent office of the Ontario Legislature that will advocate in the interest of aging adults, their family members and other health professionals serving in the best interest of our aging adults.

Ontario's seniors' advocate will know that essential caregivers are more than just visitors. They will know the benefits to aging adults' physical and mental health when they enjoy foods and hobbies in long-term care reflective of their culture, ethnicity, faith and history. They will know that home care and long-term care have been grossly underfunded and understaffed under this Conservative and the former Liberal governments. The creation of a seniors' advocate will put an end to PSWs and family members being intimidated and silenced by the system when they speak up for aging adults.

I think of the aging adults in our community of St. Paul's in long-term care and home care. I think of their family members who often feel disoriented by this convoluted system, not always knowing who or where to turn to for help. A seniors' advocate will be their guide. At the end, 2SLGTBQ elders, aging adults who have fought all

their lives to live, to be out and proud, to love who they want to, will never have to fear going back into the closet, as all too many currently do.

Will this Conservative government support Bill 196 and create an independent seniors' advocate office? Will you make this law today? Yes or no?

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

Mr. John Fraser: Good morning. I'm pleased to support this bill, and I want to thank the member very much for bringing it forward. It is a really critical piece. What we need in this province today is an independent seniors' advocate, just like we need an independent child advocate, which we had, which has been removed, which I would like to recommend to the government would be a really good idea to reinstate. Because like the vulnerable seniors, those children, especially those children who are covered by the child advocate, are exceptionally vulnerable—and that's what the point of this bill is: to give seniors a voice, to protect seniors.

0930

With all due respect to the member from Carleton, workers are still working in more than one home. It's still happening today. There are still patients in four-bed rooms. There are still patients who are COVID-negative in a room with a resident who is COVID-positive.

We forgot to—I'll say "we" because it's the government but we're all here. We didn't include long-term-care associations when we were planning for health in the pandemic. The OHA, the hospital association, testified that to the commission. If there is no other evidence that you need this morning than that fact, that we need a seniors' advocate, then I'm afraid all is lost.

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

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I appreciate this opportunity to rise today on behalf of the people of Mississauga-Lakeshore to speak on Bill 196, the Seniors' Advocate Act, introduced by the member for Kitchener Centre. I want to thank her for this important bill and the members from Markham-Thornhill, Thunder Bay, Carleton, Guelph, Toronto-St. Paul's and Ottawa South for sharing their views on this bill.

Speaker, I'm blessed to have so many active seniors in my riding, over 20,000 in total, and so many active seniors' groups, including the Mississauga Seniors' Council, which represents over 12,000 seniors. The health and well-being of seniors is my highest priority, and it is a top priority of our government.

We know social isolation has been a major problem for our seniors during the COVID-19 crisis. This can have negative impacts on both physical and mental health, increasing the risk of serious illness. That's why I was proud to stand with my friend the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility earlier this year as we announced a \$4-million investment in the Seniors Community Grant Program for community groups across Ontario to help keep seniors connected and engaged with their local community.

When this pandemic began, our government moved quickly to support the Mississauga Seniors' Centre, the Clarkson Community Centre and senior active living centres across Ontario as they moved to offer virtual programs, like our Tuesday Coffee Talk. Through the Seniors' Centre Without Walls program, we were able to provide additional support for seniors across Ontario.

In June, as part of Seniors' Month and Italian Heritage Month, I was proud to co-host a phone-based connection for our seniors with the minister for seniors and Juno nominee Carlo Coppola. My team and I set up a website called rudyconnects.ca to ask for donations of tablets so seniors in long-term-care facilities, like the Camilla Care Community and Villa Forum long-term care, could stay socially connected with their loved ones. By helping keep our seniors socially connected, we know we can help them remain healthy while they remain physically apart or self-isolated at home.

Knowing how important it is to support our local community organizations, I was excited to hear that the minister announced additional grants to allow more community groups to offer virtual programs for our seniors. These grants will help increase the number of options available for our seniors to stay socially connected, often in languages of their choosing, as they have to self-isolate during this terrible pandemic.

Speaker, again, this is a government that believes the health and well-being of our seniors is our top priority. Through the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility, we will continue to offer innovative support to meet their unique needs. Our seniors built this province. They raised us; they took care of us. They have incredible insight and wisdom to contribute. They are our treasure. Our government will continue to support them however we can.

Again, I want to thank the member from Kitchener Centre for her work on this bill.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: This is a government that forgot seniors at the beginning of the pandemic. The story just broke an hour ago: The Ontario Hospital Association reported to the secret long-term-care commission that at the beginning of the pandemic, seniors were an afterthought. That is why we need a seniors' advocate. That is why I am so grateful that the member from Kitchener Centre has brought this forward.

I was speaking to Jim MacLeod last week during constituency week. You'll remember him because he came here two and a half years because he has been separated from his wife, Joan, for three years. They have been married for almost 60 years. If anybody thinks that that is okay, then you are in the wrong place.

This province needs someone, an independent advocate, who looks at policy, who looks at legislation and who measures how this is going to affect seniors.

The member from Kitchener Centre mentioned that accessibility continues to be an issue in this province. Seniors don't want to leave their homes. They don't want to end up in a long-term-care facility. For one, they can't afford it because it's been completely privatized.

We actually need an independent officer of the Legislature to look at all laws through the lens of a seniors' advocate. We fought in 2015 to get the Financial Accountability Officer into this Legislature. He is independent, he is non-partisan, and we value that information. That is why this must happen. We also had a conversation last week with a constituent. It didn't go well for the constituent because he said to me, "Seniors are going to die anyway." If we have that mindset out in the community in the province of Ontario, then we need a strong, independent advocate for seniors in Ontario.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: I want to thank my friend the member from Kitchener Centre for proposing this legislation. I want to ask a rhetorical question: Why do we need a seniors' advocate?

We need a seniors' advocate for Christine Collins, Speaker, someone who has been outspoken back at home because her brother, Peter Collins, lives in one of the epicentres of our city's outbreak of COVID-19: Carlingview Manor, a home with hundreds of people with disabilities and seniors where there has now been two outbreaks. Peter is living with dementia. He has people wandering in and out of his room because they do not have appropriate staff to keep him safe. That's the reality. We need a seniors' advocate to speak out for Peter and for Christine and against the for-profit operator that will not invest in appropriate staff to keep Peter and Christine safe.

We need a seniors' advocate for Mary Sardelis, who has appealed to this government to stop the practice of retirement homes issuing trespass orders to caregivers who complain about the living conditions of their loved ones. What has this government done to Mary's plea for help, Speaker? Nothing. In fact, the minister involved, in this government, has insulted Mary and alluded to the fact that perhaps she is responsible for her own problems. We need a non-partisan advocate to stand up for Mary.

Last, Speaker, I'll say this, because I come from Ottawa Centre and I take advice from great people like Evelyn Gigantes, who was a Minister of Health in this place, and Ed Broadbent, who is one of our countries absolutely important elders, who tells us: To whom does a government listen? If they won't listen to the official opposition, if they tell absolute stories of fiction about what they have done for seniors in this place, we need an independent advocate and we need it now.

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

M^{me} France G linas: I too strongly support the creation of a seniors' advocate, an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly.

They could start by looking at the body of evidence that is there from decades of reports showing us how you fix the quality of care in long-term care: You make PSW jobs careers. You give them full-time work. You pay them a salary that will allow them to survive. You make sure that they have a few benefits so that if they are sick and have to isolate, they actually get sick days. Maybe throw in a

pension so that you make it a career, and you give them a workload that a human being can handle. We've had this on record for a long time. A seniors' advocate would make sure that we push this forward and that it becomes a reality. It's as simple as this.

Many steps could be taken right now. With a seniors' advocate that reports directly to the Legislative Assembly, we have an opportunity to change things for the better, Speaker. We can't let this opportunity go by.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: Mr. Speaker, if COVID-19 has taught us anything—and I hope it has taught us many lessons, but one lesson is that the care of people, the care of our seniors especially, cannot be about profit. It cannot be about profit and this is something that our government needs to understand.

I also want to thank all the family councils and all the advocates across this province who have been fighting for our seniors, who have been fighting for the care of our elders and our grandparents and parents.

It's so important to really emphasize the point that, by the time it was July, about 96% of the deaths—96% of the lives that we lost during COVID by July—were people over the age of 60. That says something. But what I'm hearing from the other side makes me feel like some of the government members were sleeping. It is astounding that we are in this House providing lip service at a time when people are dying, people are literally dying, because of neglect, because of lack of care. These people are our parents, our grandparents, the people who went to war for us, people who saved all of this province, people who built the foundation of this province, Mr. Speaker.

0940

We have to make sure that we do the best. Clearly we have government after government that has forgotten that. We have to make sure that we have an independent advocate who will represent the needs of our seniors, and this is why we need to pass this bill now.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to first start off by congratulating the member from Kitchener Centre. What a wonderful bill; long overdue. If we can imagine what this bill does, it's an independent officer of the Legislature who is actually encouraged to have an advisory council of family members and workers to provide input into what they envision seniors' care would look like.

Now, saying that, we've heard for decades what seniors' care should look like. We've heard it from workers and we've heard it from families. This needs to change now, not later. We are behind in providing an adequate, respectful and dignified way seniors are cared for. We all want this, so I urge this government: We're here right now. We have the power to make decisions for the people who are in long-term care, in home care, in hospitals, in their homes; healthy seniors and seniors who have health issues. We have that privilege and we have that power. We can do that and make that decision for the people who need help now.

Most importantly, Speaker, let's not let these tragedies continue to happen over again. Let's make these decisions for the future for our seniors.

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

The member for Kitchener Centre has two minutes to reply.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you for all of the words of support for Bill 196. I want to use the two minutes that I have to speak about one thing that came from the government side in the debate. There were a lot of positive words of gratitude to me as the member for Kitchener Centre for putting forward this bill, but I just want to be very clear, in this moment, that voting for Bill 196 is not voting for me; voting for Bill 196 is voting for our elders. Voting for Bill 196 is voting for the people who have held it down and made sure that we are able to be here in this House right now.

We will be them, and the way that we treat them is going to be the way that we are treated. That's what my family have taught me. That's what my elders have taught me in my life, both within my immediate family—my mom and dad; giving them a shout-out because I know they're watching this morning—as well as folks who are elders in my spiritual community. What they tell me is that I have to stand with integrity and fight to make change in systems that are hurting people.

This independent advocate is not going to be there to provide piecemeal ideas about what to do for elders. This advocate is going to say the system needs to change. We have heard for too long that the system needs to change, and nothing has happened. Their role will be to ensure that it happens. And if it's not, they will tell us why it's not, and they will keep fighting alongside the families, the elders, their caregivers, everybody who are experts on the ground, health professionals who are telling us exactly what we need to do.

This isn't about throwing little bits of money to do a music program in a long-term-care home. This is about making sure that PSWs are paid what they're worth. This is about making sure that elders can stay at home for as long as they possibly can, and that means increasing the amount of money that they get as elders in the community. This is about systemic change.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Ms. Lindo has moved second reading of Bill 196, An Act to establish the Seniors' Advocate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Pursuant to standing order 101(d), the recorded division on this item of private members' public business will be deferred until after question period later this morning.

Second reading vote deferred.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I recognize the member from Nickel Belt on a point of order.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Speaker. A short point of order: On September 21, I was talking about the Capreol Legion and I said they had to use some of the money that they had been collecting. I meant to say that they might have to use some of the money they had been collecting.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I recognize the member for Waterloo on a point of order.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to correct my record. During my speaking to Bill 196, I said that we negotiated the FAO in 2015; it was actually 2013.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): It's always appropriate to correct your record.

REPORT, FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I beg to inform the House that during the adjournment the following document has been tabled: a report entitled Economic and Budget Outlook: An Updated Assessment of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Fall 2020, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario.

Orders of the day? I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: No further business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): There being no further business, this House is in recess until 10:15 this morning.

The House recessed from 0946 to 1015.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HOME CARE

Ms. Jill Andrew: I do not yet know the experience of caring for an aging and dying parent around the clock, working two jobs with chronic sciatic pain while also raising their own child and helping them navigate virtual school.

My community member Diandra is an essential worker. Her day starts at about 5:45 and, frankly, never quite ends. I don't know when or if she sleeps. She takes a series of catnaps, but most nights she sits at her mom's bedside, eyes firmly on her chest, making sure mom isn't in distress. Diandra continues to wait for a long-term-care bed for her mom and hasn't been able to secure home care yet. She is mentally and physically exhausted.

Linda was receiving palliative care for her mom, a retired soldier, a veteran, through the LHIN. She received

financial aid for 30 days to cover overnight home care. Linda's mom survived past 30 days. The LHIN revoked the funding for overnight care. Linda and her family could not afford on their own the PSWs they so desperately need. Linda's family are mentally, physically and financially exhausted without sick days at their disposal.

Premier, Diandra's and Linda's are two families in St. Paul's. There are many others, I guarantee you. They need relief. They needed it yesterday. Dying loved ones do not deserve to wait.

To the Premier: When will St. Paul's families get access to more home care supports to care for their aging loved ones?

VIOLENCE LINK TRAINING

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: On Thursday, I will be presenting a motion in the House asking for the government to incorporate violence link training for all current and future police officers, and I just wanted to take a moment to speak about that a little bit, Mr. Speaker.

The Canadian Violence Link Coalition was formed as a result of a number of issues brought forward at the 2017 National Violence Link Conference. It brings together allies engaged in anti-violence work with vulnerable people or animals who are committed to advancing awareness education and training about the link between violence against humans and violence against animals.

This issue was first brought to my attention by a constituent of mine, Sergeant Teena Stoddart, who actually teaches this course, not just for the Ottawa Police Service but also across Canada, in the United States and elsewhere. Evidence-based research shows that violence against animals and violence against people are not distinct and separate problems; rather, they are part of a larger pattern of violent crimes that often coexist. Partner abuse, gang violence, youth crimes, assaults, homicides, sexual assaults and child abuse all have high percentages where animal abuse is present.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to speaking more about this motion on Thursday, and I look forward to the debate in the House.

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Today I rise to talk about our health care heroes, who we so much hold in high regard. It has been months since both the pandemic pay for the eligibility list and the payments have gone out to these health care heroes, and yet constituents who still contact my office today are wondering why they were left off the list. I have a conversation with them and I truly struggle to explain to these health care heroes—like lab technicians, DSWs, OR aides, physiotherapists, X-ray techs, clerical staff and many more—why, for some reason, they didn't qualify; why they were left off the list; why there's ambiguity around their work and the fact they are seeing patients and are exposed, even though they do life-saving work, even though they work on the front lines and even

though their jobs were equally important to keep us all safe.

A few weeks ago, I raised a concern of front-line staff who had been asked to repay their pandemic pay because they were deemed to be no longer eligible, and that's confusing. These workers spoke to me and they said that it's like a slap in the face. There is such low morale because they were paid and then they were asked to pay it back. The clarity around this government's message was vague. There was a lot of unclarity about who's on the list and who's left off the list. Staff are left wondering why some of their colleagues qualify while they don't.

Especially now that we're in the second wave, once again, I call on the government to expand the list and make it retroactive. Give our health care workers the boost that they need.

1020

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr. Lorne Coe: Lakeridge Health and Durham Mental Health Services have taken an important and innovative step by integrating their operations. This partnership will combine Lakeridge Health's acute mental health and addiction services with Durham Mental Health Services' expertise in community-based mental health to create a Durham region mental health and addiction system.

By working together, Lakeridge Health and Durham Mental Health Services can better coordinate services in both community and acute care settings, facilitate smoother transitions and faster connections to appropriate services and create a supportive continuum of care for clients for the first time in the region of Durham.

With the integration now in place, efforts continue in earnest as both Lakeridge Health and Durham Mental Health staff work together to identify and address existing gaps and develop processes and care pathways to improve care, support and services for residents of Durham region. This is an important opportunity to create a truly integrated mental health and addiction system and, by doing so, transform the way these invaluable services are delivered and accessed across the region of Durham.

FINANCES MUNICIPALES

M. Guy Bourgouin: J'ai l'honneur de me lever aujourd'hui pour parler de la situation financière de Mattice-Val Côté, une magnifique petite municipalité franco-ontarienne à Mushkegowuk—Baie James.

Alors que le TC Énergie a pris la décision de fermer la station 92 du pipeline de gaz naturel, la municipalité perdra à peu près 500 000 \$ en impôts fonciers. C'est peut-être du petit change pour une ville comme Toronto, mais ça équivaut à 20 % du revenu pour Mattice-Val Côté. Et bien que la municipalité travaille jour et nuit pour trouver une solution à ce défi, les résidents de Mattice pourront perdre des services comme les activités pour les enfants et le déblayage des trottoirs.

La municipalité doit présenter un budget équilibré et offrir des services essentiels aux résidents. Il y a plusieurs défis dans le nord de la province, mais ne pas avoir de trottoirs l'hiver, ce ne devrait pas en être un. Je demande donc au ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement de me rencontrer pour que les gens de Mattice ne perdent pas des services dont tous les Ontariens méritent.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Good morning. Just a couple of things for the record this morning: I'd like the record to show the 21 doctors who wrote to the Premier on September 30 warning him of the economic and health costs of further lockdowns. They are Drs. Jane Batt, James Bain, Mahin Baqi, Marcus Bernardini, Sergio Borgia, Peter Cox, James Douketis, Philippe El-Helou, Martha Fulford, Shariq Haider, Stephen Kravcik, Nicole Le Saux, Paul MacPherson, Neil Rau, Susan Richardson, Coleman Rotstein, Rob Sargeant, Nick Vozoris, Thomas Warren, Yvonne Yau and George Yousef.

I would also like the record to show the study published in August 2020 by University of Toronto psychiatrists Roger McIntyre and Yena Lee that modelled increased suicides in Canada as a consequence of the impact of further lockdowns and unemployment, a tragic social cost not being publicly provided in data. I hope the model ends up being incorrect.

Finally, I would like the record to show that Dr. David Nabarro of the World Health Organization's Special Envoys on COVID-19 stated on October 9 that the WHO does not advocate lockdowns as the primary means of control of the virus and that they are only justified to reorganize, regroup, and rebalance resources and protect health care workers, because the consequences are that the poor are made an awful lot poorer.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I'm honoured to rise here today in the Legislature to talk about an important investment in my riding which benefits all Ontarians.

On October 8, I was pleased to welcome the Premier and the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade to Oakville to announce that our government is investing \$295 million in the Ford Motor Co. of Canada's Oakville assembly complex. The federal government has also matched our contribution, and the Ford Motor Co. is investing significant money to retool the complex for the production of battery-powered electric vehicles. The assembly complex has been a staple of my community since 1953, and I am glad to see that the Ford Motor Co. of Canada and Unifor have worked collaboratively to reach a deal which will continue the plant's production.

Electric vehicles are growing in importance as our country and province look for ways to reduce our carbon footprint. Importantly, transitioning operations in the assembly complex to manufacture green vehicles will strengthen Ontario's economy. These investments have

secured 3,000 direct jobs, as well as 63,000 indirect jobs from auto parts manufacturers in the province. Moreover, with the abundance of natural resources within Ontario, the mining industry has an additional opportunity to provide the minerals needed for car batteries.

This investment has made Oakville and Ontario a world leader in the manufacturing and innovation of electric vehicles for many years to come. It's great to work alongside my federal and municipal colleagues MP Anita Anand and Mayor Rob Burton to find ways to attract investments for Oakville to benefit the community.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Miss Monique Taylor: As we enter the second wave of COVID-19, the people in my riding of Hamilton Mountain are trying to remain safe. As the weather cools and more people spend time indoors, we are all worried about the increased risk of spreading COVID-19.

It took weeks for the Premier to finally share his second wave plan and it's already falling short. One of the major aspects of the plan was providing flu shots. Well, I have already received many calls about flu shots that have already run out in my riding. Further, we still have long wait times to book a COVID test and get your results. I have heard from many families who are out of work while they're waiting, including PSWs, early childhood educators and other essential workers. Lastly, when it comes to long-term-care homes, we're seeing cases rise once again.

We cannot allow a repeat of the first wave. We cannot allow another catastrophe in long-term care. That's why the NDP recently introduced a plan for overhauling the long-term-care system. Our plan would add more beds, end privatization of long-term care, improve care standards and provide PSWs with better working conditions.

The privatization of long-term care has been a disaster. The majority of long-term-care deaths during COVID occurred in private long-term-care homes. That's because the quality of care has eroded as private operators squeeze out profits.

I urge the government to look at our plan to see how they can ward off a second COVID disaster.

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I rise this morning with a heavy heart to report that a young man, Jagrajan Brar, was killed in my riding earlier this month after being hit by an impaired driver, a man from Orangeville with two prior convictions for impaired driving.

Jag was only 19 years of age. Like my son, he was in his final year of high school. His family described him as intelligent and hard-working, with an ambition to pursue a career in writing. The oldest of 15 grandchildren, his sister and cousins looked up to him.

Next month, MADD Canada will launch their annual Project Red Ribbon campaign to raise awareness about impaired driving, which remains the leading criminal

cause of death and injury in Canada. I encourage every member to wear a red ribbon and support this campaign, because this senseless tragedy earlier this month is a sad reminder of how much work is left to do to put an end to impaired driving.

I also want to thank the Peel Regional Police for their swift arrest, for their annual holiday RIDE checks and for everything they do to take impaired drivers off our roads. I can't stress enough how important it is for everyone to understand that choosing to drive while impaired is unacceptable.

On behalf of the members, I just want to offer my deepest condolences to Rup, Rob, Sraia and the entire Brar family, and to Jag's many friends at Lorne Park Secondary School. May he rest in peace.

FAMILY VIOLENCE

Ms. Amy Fee: This morning, I rise to honour an Ontario family who had their world shattered when their four-year-old daughter died last February. This family, despite the unbelievable heartbreak they have experienced, have been tirelessly working to try and ensure that no other family will have to suffer the way they have. I am speaking about Dr. Jennifer Kagan and Philip Viater. Their daughter, Keira, was killed in a park in Milton earlier this year in what they believe to have been a murder-suicide by her biological father.

1030

Keira was a bright, full-of-life little girl. I've seen pictures of her smiling and playing with her dolls, pictures with her and her baby brother, and one of her holding up a sign on her first day of JK. You can't see her smile because of the sign, but you can see just how bright and shining her eyes were that day.

Dr. Kagan spoke to the committee hearings on Bill 207. It is a great step forward for family law here in Ontario, the first changes in decades. As a mom, I don't even know how Keira's mom can even carry on. But while her days are still filled with pain and anger, she is finding ways to speak out in her daughter's memory. She says that Bill 207 makes some much-needed changes that, while too late to save Keira, may save another child.

Dr. Kagan's concern now is that we need to have judicial training around all forms of family violence so that judges and the judicial branch of the government understand the various forms of abuse and how to recognize them.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for London West on a point of order.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I seek the unanimous consent of the House for the official opposition to stand down our leads.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for London West is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to allow the official opposition to stand down the lead questions. Agreed? I heard a no.

QUESTION PERIOD

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question is to the Premier. For weeks, the Ford government has dismissed concerns about the impact that the second wave is having on long-term care. The Ford government seems to not at all be up to the fact that there is a crisis upon us. Last week, the government even compared the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic to last year's flu season. CTV News reports this morning that the government actually excluded long-term-care associations in their pandemic planning.

It feels like the government has learned very little from the first wave. With new cases expanding dramatically in long-term care, will the Premier admit that we are in the midst of another serious crisis in long-term care?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Long-Term Care.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. First of all, I want to make it clear that our government has worked tirelessly in conjunction with our sector and various representative groups to make sure that their voices were heard, and that takes multiple forms. We have been absolutely dedicated to making sure that not only wave 2 is addressed but that we shore up decades of neglect of this sector.

The long-term-care sector has been sadly neglected for years leading up to this, and we're addressing that. Every day we're looking at staffing, capacity, testing, infection prevention and control, PPE, and we're in touch with our homes on a regular basis every day.

To be clear, the numbers really indicate that our homes are doing much, much better. We have 58 homes that have no resident cases and we need to take that into consideration. The definition of an outbreak is such that it—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic has been gaining steam for weeks now. For weeks, we've been seeing the momentum grow, and the Ford government has been refusing to invest, refusing to listen to the alarm bells that are being sounded by long-term-care homes, and they have been refusing to listen to how devastating the results are.

Since Friday we've seen 55 new cases in long-term-care homes, and once again residents and workers on the front lines are reporting staff shortages in homes that are scrambling to deal with outbreaks. Why is the Ford government denying this crisis?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Not only are we embracing our front-line workers and our long-term-care homes to provide them with the support that they need, we are integrating long-term care into the wider health care system, coordinating efforts with hospitals, making sure that they have the support, the PPE, the staffing that they need. We are investing—not only planning, but investing—\$253 million earlier, and \$540 million just a few

weeks ago: a record amount. Almost three quarters of a billion dollars is going out to this sector as we speak.

We are repairing, rebuilding and advancing long-term care, and this government has shown over and over again its commitment: a stand-alone ministry dedicated to repairing what was neglected for many years; \$40 million to support homes impacted with the changes in COVID; \$30 million to help with IPAC; \$61.4 for minor capital repairs—as I said, three quarters of a billion dollars so far.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, in his testimony to the long-term-care commission, the head of the Ontario Hospital Association noted that he had to send a letter raising concerns about the state in long-term care and received a call back from the Minister of Long-Term Care who made quite a startling comment. The minister thanked him for “generat[ing] momentum for necessary change.”

So my question is, why was that change being blocked in the first place? Who was blocking it? Was the Premier blocking it? Was the minister of the Treasury Board blocking it? Who was blocking the need for change in long-term care?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: It’s clear to all of us the need to generate momentum for long-term care. I think if you haven’t recognized that until now, then perhaps you have not been observing what has been going on. We have a situation where the neglect of many decades has been building, and not only is this government looking to address the COVID crisis in our long-term-care homes; it’s looking to address many years of neglect and creating a 21st-century long-term-care system, where people can have a place to call home and be treated with respect and dignity, and where staff want to go and work.

This has been ongoing since the beginning of our ministry. We will continue this important work, and I appreciate the support across ministries, across government, particularly in our time of need in long-term care. I appreciate the work that the Ontario Hospital Association does, and I thank them for their interest.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier, but I have to say, the minister needs to remember that we all know that she went asking for money back in the spring and she was denied. It was blocked by somebody over there, and the question of who exactly that was has to be answered at some point, because nurses and doctors and front-line workers have seen this disaster coming for months and months. To quote one doctor, “I absolutely am very terrified and worried.”

In new testimony at the government’s long-term care commission, Ministry of Long-Term Care officials admit that they knew in the summer that the system was going to be short 6,000 PSWs—6,000—yet the government failed to implement any recommendations. Not a single recommendation has been implemented from their own staffing report that has been sitting on a shelf since July.

With COVID-19 it’s literally a matter of life or death for people in long-term care. Why is the Premier failing to act?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Long-Term Care.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you again to the member opposite. We have been acting ever since the beginning, working across ministries with the Ministry of Health on addressing the personal support worker strategy, making sure that we were shoring up our homes. You know, you just don’t snap your fingers and create people to work in long-term care. We need to do many, many things, including making it a place where people want to work.

That pipeline, the retention of personal support workers, the recruitment of nurses: All of this is being done in conjunction with the ministries, working in collaboration with our representative groups in long-term care. This is a process that we need to bring everyone together through and stay focused, and that’s exactly what we’ve been doing.

In a crisis, I’ve learned as a doctor, you keep your head, you stay focused and you will come through. That’s what we’ve been doing repeatedly, and the money is being spent.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, I’m glad the minister is coming through, because thousands of elderly people did not come through. We’re at almost 2,000 people now who have died in long-term care. So I’m glad she’s getting through.

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Talk to the family members of those people who have died in long-term care. Testimony at the government’s own long-term-care commission also indicates that there are potentially thousands of seniors right at this moment in rooms of three or four people, including people who live in facilities that are currently under outbreak. For-profit homes say that they’ll be putting up dividers. Dr. Yaffe was pretty clear last week: “They should not be having more than two to a room” is what she said.

So where’s the government’s plan?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: I appreciate the question.

It is absolutely critical that we take every measure possible and use every tool possible. That’s exactly what we’ve been doing—working with our hospitals to make sure we have proper IPAC measures in place and that the homes are reminded and the people are retrained there; looking at making sure that we keep an eye on the data and understand those four-bed ward rooms played a role. We’ve been very clear about that since wave 1, and we’ve acknowledged that. That’s one of the reasons why we have had to be very careful with admissions to long-term care. But it’s a complex problem. Every choice that we make in long-term care has the potential to have a repercussion somewhere else, so all of these have to be carefully weighed in a thoughtful way so that we coordinate, and that’s exactly what we have been doing.

My heart goes out to everyone who has been affected by this. We will get through this. There is light at the end of this. If we work together, stay focused and row at the same time instead—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the people on the front lines of long-term care—the nurses, the doctors, the PSWs, the family caregivers—are all scared. They worked relentlessly through that first wave and spent the summer ringing alarm bells about the need to prepare for a second wave. Sadly, the Ford government simply did not listen. They chose to save dollars over saving lives.

So will the Premier stop dismissing this crisis in long-term care that is currently upon us and start taking the action that is desperately needed to protect seniors and save lives?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: We have, all along, been taking action in a deliberate, focused way and putting dollars behind that.

I want to thank all my colleagues who have worked with me and the Minister of Health to address this crisis in long-term care.

We will stay dedicated. We are putting dollars behind it, three quarters of a billion dollars so far—more expert panel information on a comprehensive staffing strategy that is being worked on, and that has rolled out as well; rapid-training programs; looking at return-of-service for PSWs. We want to make sure that all our front-line workers are supported.

The numbers are indicating that our staff are much more secure in their positions. Our homes are doing well with staffing. There are no issues with staffing collapse in our homes. We are getting PPE to them. We have created certainty for our long-term-care homes. We will keep at it, and we will continue to stay focused. We will make sure that the dollars flow for the supports that our homes need, and we will be relentless—

Interjection.

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

The next question.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, with COVID-19 cases surging around the province, the risk of the virus being brought into Ontario schools is getting greater and greater. That includes York region, which is now in a modified stage 2 and saw its first school closures last week, in King City and Woodbridge. Another 34 schools in York region alone still have active cases and are under surveillance.

On Thursday, the Minister of Education held a press conference in York region and announced exactly zero new dollars to enhance our school protections, hire staff or bolster online learning. Why?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you for the question.

It was just a few weeks ago that we announced for the region of York, likewise in Peel, Toronto and Ottawa, additional investments to counter and respond to the second wave and the flu season: an investment in York region, specifically, of an additional \$8 million to support additional hiring, hundreds of more educators, more custodians; province-wide, over 2,200 more teachers, over 1,100 more custodians. We have put every layer of prevention in place to ensure our schools remain safe.

It should be noted that 90% of schools in this province have no reported cases, of 4,800 schools. There are four schools that are closed; 99.9% of schools in this province are open.

Speaker, I recognize there is more to do, but we should be proud of the work that our doctors, our front-line medical practitioners, our nurses, as well as our teachers are doing to keep every student safe in the province of Ontario.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: The minister knows perfectly well that those dollars he referred to were not new dollars; they were federal dollars that were left unspent by this government. The minister has been repeating the same funding numbers to us since the summer, and judging by the calls from panicky parents and exhausted teachers and caretakers who aren't feeling supported, that plan is not scaling up to meet the needs of the second wave.

We have Halton, eastern Ontario, Hamilton and Durham all on the verge of joining York region as higher-risk COVID hot spots. Why is the Premier waiting for the situation to get worse? Why not act now to ensure that schools in these regions have everything they need to remain safely open and to ensure that online learning meets the needs of the students, too?

Speaker, will the Premier release the remaining \$15 million in federal funds to support these regions and top it up with some actual new dollars today?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Well, Speaker, what this government announced on Thursday was that for the first time in over a decade, we are restoring a meritocracy in the hiring and promotion of new educators in the province of Ontario. After a decade under the former government of advancing seniority over merit, we are ensuring that diversity, qualification and young teacher mobility triumphs. It is an important issue that has been supported by the Ontario Principals' Council, supported by the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, supported by parents' associations—and, of course, opposed by the opposition.

What parents expect during this pandemic is safety and quality. We are ensuring both. That's why we have ensured an historic investment of \$1.3 billion. We lead the nation in contribution. But beyond the dollars, it's about doing everything we can to ensure that the parents and students have the very best teacher at the front of their class.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: My question is to the Premier. Premier, Ontario is home to the largest life sciences cluster in the entire country. We are titans of research and development. We are leading the way in the creation of life-saving medication and medical equipment. In fact, Ontario currently leads the country in critical trials for the development of the COVID-19 treatment and vaccine.

Roche Canada has also been a leader in its own right. This company has been at the forefront of developing rapid testing kits. This is absolutely critical in the fight against COVID-19, and all of this important work is happening right here in Ontario, right here in Mississauga.

Speaker, can the Premier please share with my constituents and all Ontarians about the government's continued partnership with leading life science industry leaders?

Hon. Doug Ford: Thank you so much to the great member from Mississauga–Lakeshore for the great, great question. I also want to give a shout-out to my all-star member from Mississauga–Streetsville. She was instrumental in making this happen, Mr. Speaker.

We had a great announcement with Roche on Friday; they're investing \$500 million. But what's great, Mr. Speaker, is that there was a competition throughout the world. There are 12 different countries that were vying for this great facility, and guess who won? We won. Ontario won. The people won. Life sciences won. There are going to be 500 people, local people, and they won as well because they're being hired for good-paying jobs.

This is what this government has done. We have created the environment for companies to thrive, prosper and grow, Mr. Speaker. As companies are coming in from all over the world, we welcome them.

I want to give a shout-out to the CEO, Ronnie Miller, for doing a great job and having confidence in our great government.

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

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: My supplementary question is for the Minister of Economic Development. Minister, out of all these sites around the world, from their operations in Canada, Europe, and the US, Roche picked us. Roche picked Ontario for their expansion to occur. Last Friday's announcement sends a clear signal: Ontario is the place to innovate, grow and thrive.

Since taking office, our government has been focused on listening to our partners and finding new and innovative solutions to any challenges our province faces. Working with our partners, we have taken a comprehensive and pragmatic approach to modernizing the health care system so it is organized around the needs of patients and better health outcomes. And we have streamlined regulatory processes in health care to remove unnecessary barriers and support innovation, while also making it easier to do business and create jobs.

Speaker, can the minister please share about the positive impact this announcement will have on the economy and our government helping to strengthen the advanced manufacturing and health care system sector?

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Hon. Victor Fedeli: There was also great news from Stats Canada that showed that now 17,000 more people work in manufacturing today than did pre-COVID. That's the confidence in the manufacturing sector in Ontario.

Roche's announcement is not only an important boost to our economy, but it demonstrates that businesses recognize Ontario as a willing partner with an environment that will support the business community. We're building that environment that encourages greater investment in the life sciences sector, and we appreciate Roche's milestone contribution to these efforts.

Not only is it going to create jobs for families here and now, but it's also going to position us for many future opportunities. It's going to make us even more competitive in the life sciences sector. We're so proud that Roche chose Ontario for this significant \$500-million investment.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. Testing is an integral part of any plan to contain and end this pandemic, yet the province has failed to scale up testing for COVID-19 to ensure that Ontarians are getting the testing that is required. Ontarians are having trouble accessing COVID testing, having to call multiple pharmacies to try to get an appointment. To quote one physician, "I feel like the pharmacy (plan) was kind of like chewing gum stuck on the side of something; oh, let's just add this on."

Why did the government fail to listen to physicians and medical experts when they rolled out this failing testing scheme?

Hon. Doug Ford: Mr. Speaker, I'm not too sure what province the member is talking about, but it's sure the heck not Ontario, I can tell you that.

We're leading the country, more than all the provinces combined. We're well over 4.5 million—I hear actually it's 4.7 million, very close to that number—breaking records all across the country. I just have to point out that Ontario has one of the lowest active rates of COVID cases in the country. Can you imagine that? In the entire country. Per 100,000, Ontario has 41, compared to our friends in Quebec—and I love the people in Quebec—with 104; Manitoba, 122; Alberta, 65.

From my great friend Premier Legault—and he is my great friend—his quote was: "What I'm telling you is that all the big cities and then all states in North America in the east all have a situation comparable to Quebec. So listen, there is one exception, and that's Ontario." That was October 8.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Physicians are raising alarm bells that the lack of tests and their additional cost to the health care system is leading to chaos. Today, it's reported that the pharmacy tests cost \$4 more than a test completed in a public assessment centre. The province has already

spent thousands of dollars that could have been better spent in the public health care system.

The Ontario Medical Association says physicians would have welcomed the opportunity to help test patients, but they say that the province did not consult with them. Why did the province not consult with Ontario physicians about COVID testing in medical clinics before shifting the testing to pharmacies?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker: They just cease to amaze me every single day when I come down here. All of a sudden they become a born-again fiscal conservative, which is good. They're looking fiscally for the first time ever since I've been down here.

But to carry on with Premier Legault's comment—another quote from a great Premier: "There is like an exception. It is Toronto, which has much less deaths than other big cities of anywhere in America's northeast. I have not so far found an expert who is able to give me the recipe from Toronto and from Ontario, but we're looking for it." Premier Legault, I'll give you the recipe. "Obviously, we want them to continue to go as well in Ontario." That says everything.

FLU IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Minister of Health.

It's time to get the flu shot, Mr. Speaker. That's according to the social media campaign of the front bench getting their flu shots last week. Unfortunately, regular Ontarians aren't being that lucky. Doctors' offices and pharmacies are not receiving the doses that they have requested. Some doctors' offices are receiving 20% of the doses they would normally get this time of year. People are arriving to their pharmacies, reading signs: "Come back later. We're out of the flu shot. Sorry, you're out of luck."

There has been no priority given to children, no priority given to seniors and no priority given to people with serious health conditions who are the most vulnerable. Why hasn't the government prioritized the most vulnerable members of our community for the flu shot this year?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I welcome the opportunity to set the record straight with respect to the flu shot in Ontario.

First of all, we started to receive the shipments at the end of September. They were prioritized to people in long-term care, in retirement homes and in hospitals to make sure people got the shots that they needed to have.

Secondly, the shots are coming in regularly from global manufacturers on the schedules that they were supposed to be coming. While it's unfortunate that people are having to wait, the good news is that people are getting the message that this is a fundamental principle of our fall preparedness plan, and they are going out to get the flu shot. The shots are coming in, both to primary care clinics as well as to pharmacies, and my advice to people at this point is to call ahead and make an appointment. You will be able to get your flu shot. Every Ontarian who wants a flu shot will get one. We have ordered 5.1 million doses.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: My supplementary is for the minister. While we heard that every Ontarian who wanted a COVID test could get a COVID test and that didn't turn out to be true, the flu shot takes place every single year. The government should have distributing the flu shot down to a science. Doctors' offices and pharmacies are reporting shortages and long lineups: three weeks to book an appointment—three weeks to book an appointment—for a senior with a serious health condition to get their flu shot at local pharmacies in Orléans. Residents are arriving to their local pharmacy to be denied service. One pharmacy in Orléans received 20 doses. That's barely enough to vaccinate their staff, let alone offer it to the public.

The minister pointed out that the flu vaccine is the centrepiece of their second wave plan. The Premier said that his plan was working. Why are Ontarians having such a hard time getting access to their flu shot this year?

Hon. Christine Elliott: There is no shortage of the flu shots. They are coming in on a regular basis. We receive shipments as we ordered them.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Christine Elliott: I would like to say to the member, through you, Mr. Speaker, that you're right: We had to order the flu shots last year, just after the last flu campaign ended. We ordered them.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Christine Elliott: We made sure that they were going to be in order. We have no shortages of shipments. We are receiving them from global manufacturers. So while, from time to time, pharmacies may run out for a short period of time, they are receiving shipments on a regular basis. We ordered 700,000 more shots this year than last year, and so everyone who needs a flu shot will get a flu shot, just as everyone who needs a COVID test will get a COVID test.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Allow the clock to run. I have no choice, I feel, but to start calling you to order individually if you continue to persist in interjecting when you don't have the floor. It's not only outside of the standing orders, it's very rude.

The next question.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Mike Harris: My question is for the government House leader. Before the election of 2018 and after more than a decade of Liberal and NDP policies that increased taxes, increased red tape and increased unnecessary regulation, our small, medium and large job creators were struggling. It is becoming increasingly evident that the opposition does not believe in our job creators, that they prefer red tape to tax cuts and overregulation to sound policy.

Can the government House leader commit that this government will continue to support small business, will

continue to cut red tape, will continue to reduce taxes for those who gave all they have to build a stronger Ontario?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Where's your rent support?

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

Government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Let me say very directly to the member for Kitchener–Conestoga: Yes. Yes, we will commit to continue to cut taxes. Yes, we will commit to continue to eliminate red tape. Yes, we will commit to proper regulation but not overregulation. It is very clear—and the member has hit the nail on the head—we cannot rely on the NDP or the Liberals after 15 years of failed policies that drove business and investment away from this province.

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In 2018, we started to see a change in ideology, which brought jobs, investments, record growth.

We will do everything in our power to make sure that the failed ideology of the Liberals and the NDP never makes it back to this place and that the member's riding of Kitchener–Conestoga remains one of the best places in this province to live, work, invest and raise a family.

I thank him for his question.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: Minister, while that is good news, it's obvious that Ontario job creators cannot rely on the opposition to be partners in helping to build a stronger Ontario economy.

The Liberals spent more than a decade taxing and spending, leaving our provincial economy in a mess. The NDP, who supported the Liberals every step of the way, now have an opportunity to break from the Liberals and turn the page on their job-killing past by supporting the Main Street Recovery Act in this House.

Can the minister assure me that he will do all that he can to help the NDP turn their backs on their job-killing past and secure their support for the Main Street Recovery Act?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa South will come to order. The member for Scarborough–Guildwood will come to order. The Associate Minister of Energy will come to order.

The government House leader will reply.

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member for Kitchener–Conestoga is 100% right in asking me to beg that the NDP vote in favour of the Main Street Recovery Act.

We know that we're lost—the Liberals are lost. They will never support anything that cuts red tape. They will never support anything that puts more money back into the hard-working people of the province of Ontario. But the NDP have an opportunity—

Interjection.

Hon. Paul Calandra: And the Liberals laugh, because they know that they left this province a mess. Over a decade and a half of Liberal policies left this province in

an absolute mess. Business and opportunity were fleeing this province in record numbers.

The work of this Premier and this Minister of Economic Development have highlighted just today—in a new investment from Roche of over \$500 million and hundreds of jobs.

Yes, we will continue to do all we can. And I hope the NDP do the right thing: Vote in favour of the small businesses across the main streets that you talk about. You have the opportunity. Do the right thing and vote—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Once again, the member for Ottawa South will come to order. The member for Scarborough–Guildwood will come to order. The member for Hamilton Mountain will come to order.

The next question.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Joel Harden: My question is for the Premier. Personal support workers have been speaking out about living conditions in long-term care, and that work has saved lives in this pandemic. But instead of receiving praise for their actions, they risk being punished by their employers. Advocates warn that there is a culture of secrecy at many long-term-care institutions, particularly for-profit institutions, and they fear being silenced or losing their jobs.

Ontario's Patient Ombudsman is calling for expanded whistle-blower protection, writing to this government that the PSWs who spoke out likely saved lives, encouraged the actions of our Armed Forces, and that should be commended.

Speaker, will the Premier strengthen whistle-blower protection for front-line health care workers who speak out about what they've witnessed? Yes or no?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond, the Minister of Long-Term Care.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

Again, my thanks goes out to all the front-line workers—personal support workers, nurses, pharmacists, medical directors—everyone who has been so courageous during the first wave and who can continue to bring their dedication and compassion to our long-term-care homes, supporting our residents. The most important thing is the people.

When we look at the long-term-care situation with whistle-blower protection, the Long-Term Care Homes Act has that in it. We have added extra layers. There is a protection through a phone line that family members can call, residents can call, personal support workers can call. We're making sure that we're hearing and working with the Ontario Personal Support Workers Association and continuing to develop measures so that we can have the very best care for our residents in long-term care, and supporting our personal support workers with—

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

Mr. Joel Harden: Unfortunately for PSWs watching at home, the answer was no. This government is not going to guarantee that you have whistle-blower protection, so please keep the pressure on, because we need to make sure that the people who are calling out the awful scenes in our long-term-care facilities have this Legislature's support.

One anonymous PSW wrote to the Ottawa Citizen, stating this, Speaker: "One after another of the residents started dying. I was scared to come back after a few days off, not knowing how many would be left. It is not right, so short staffed and bodies of the people I cared for piling up.... Please do something to save the workers and the residents that have survived so far."

The least this government could do is honour the courage of PSWs like this so they have real protection, Minister, not phony protection, the kind of protection the patients' ombudsperson is asking this government to implement.

It's a clear question, Minister—yes or no—are you going to protect their free speech or are you going to let them be run over by for-profit companies tied to your government?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I remind all members to make their comments through the Chair.

Minister of Long-Term Care to reply.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you for the question. Our personal support workers, again, are the backbone of our long-term-care system. There already is whistle-blower protection, but I believe in continuous improvement. We are looking at more ways that we can support our personal support workers.

We have looked at the \$3-per-hour increase for our personal support workers in long-term care, making sure that it's a place where they want to come and work.

We're looking at a staffing strategy, and we'll have that by the end of December. This has been informed through an expert panel.

We're looking at making sure that we have a culture of leadership and good governance in our long-term-care homes.

There are many layers to this, to instill a sense of pride for our personal support workers, and I am very proud of the efforts that I have made, that our ministry has made and that our government has made in working with the associations that represent long-term care and the Ontario Personal Support Workers Association. I can tell you that we have a good working relationship and we will continue to build on this—

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

The next question.

ASSISTANCE TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is to the Premier. Thousands of Ontarians who require care live in homes that are supportive and congregate care settings, such as

the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood. Residents in group homes are some of the most vulnerable people. However, group homes simply aren't receiving the same supports as those who live and work in hospitals and long-term care. There is no publicly available data about the status of COVID-19 in these settings and they lack the same transparency and oversight necessary to keep residents and staff safe.

To protect residents and staff in group homes and prevent a repeat of the outbreak and deaths that we saw at Participation House in Markham last spring—and I know, Premier, you were aware of that situation—will you commit to daily data updates and reporting of COVID-19 cases in congregate settings similar to long-term care, schools and child care centres?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I thank the honourable member for the question. First and foremost, let me just say, as the member noted, Participation House is in my riding. They do phenomenal work and have continued to do phenomenal work throughout the pandemic and today, Mr. Speaker.

I just wanted to quickly address one thing. During the pandemic, there was a lot of misinformation that was going on about the workers at Participation House. I thank the member for giving me the opportunity to say this: Those workers worked tirelessly to care for the people in Participation House and that has never stopped, despite the misinformation that was out there.

With respect to congregate care settings, I know that the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services has been working very hard with stakeholders to make sure that our homes are protected, to make sure they have the necessary PPE and to make sure that, in the Participation House instance, they are continuing to work with Markham Stouffville Hospital to make sure that the residents receive the best care possible.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Back to the Premier: I choose to believe the workers and the staff who are repeatedly reaching out to my office for support. There is something that is missing, and providing transparency in the data is a first step.

This government has treated our most vulnerable residents appallingly throughout this pandemic, including those with disabilities who rely on ODSP. For so many on ODSP, the income support is not enough to pay rent and to put food on the table. We know this because we know that food bank usage is soaring in Ontario, including in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood. The federal government has recognized this. They have provided a one-time \$600 payment to those receiving disability tax credits to offset those costs.

What is the government of Ontario doing, other than a haphazard approach where you actually have to get permission from your case worker for benefits that have now come to an end? My question is, the pandemic is not over, the second wave is just beginning—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. The Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues.

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Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member for their question. Over the last several months, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on all of our communities. I am pleased to share that more than 250,000 recipients and families received the emergency benefit that we introduced back in March as a temporary measure to help individuals who may have faced additional costs during the lockdown. ODSP and OW recipients will continue to have access to the government's discretionary benefits program to assist with one-time exceptional needs.

Our government is working to build a more responsive, efficient and person-centred social assistance system that will get people back to work and help the economy recover from COVID-19. Just recently, Minister Smith announced the first phase of the social assistance recovery and renewal plan, which is focusing on improved access to employment and training services as well as developing new digital tools.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Mr. Speaker, it's not surprising that the NDP are calling on the government to create barriers to economic growth at a time when it couldn't be more important. The member from University-Rosedale wants the government to limit the hours that essential construction projects can take place. Mr. Speaker, only the NDP would call on the government to make it even more difficult to undertake essential construction projects and keep people employed during an unprecedented global pandemic. Will the government commit to rejecting this irresponsible NDP proposal?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I want to thank the member for Carleton for this very, very important question. It is clear, as the member from Kitchener-Conestoga rightfully pointed out, that the NDP are about killing jobs and opportunity and investments. So let me say to the member for Carleton, very clearly, that we will do everything in our power to reject this job-killing proposal by the NDP.

This Premier made it very clear at the start of this pandemic that essential construction will continue. Our small, medium and large job creators across this province said that they needed our help. They didn't need obstacles to growth. The Minister of Labour has been doing everything in his power to make sure that workers are safe.

I say very clearly to the NDP, reject this motion and focus on building Ontario. Vote in favour of the main street jobs and recovery act, because it's the right thing for small businesses and it's the right thing for the province of Ontario, not killing jobs, not closing down construction.

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Through you, Mr. Speaker, what will we see from the NDP next? That's my biggest

concern. The NDP call on the government to open schools, and then they call on the government to close schools. They want us to spend without a plan and listen to them instead of the experts. Now, Mr. Speaker, they want to stop people from working when they need it most, and when the economy needs it most.

Will this government commit to supporting workers, businesses and essential construction projects: yes or no?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we will. We will continue to do everything in our power to make sure that this economy and this province move forward. We saw what will happen if we follow the policies of the NDP. In fact, we had it for 15 years under the Liberal Party. Under the Liberal Party, job-killing taxes were the order of the day. Under the Liberal Party, they increased red tape. Under the Liberal Party, they increased regulation. And what happened? They left us the most indebted sub-sovereign government in the world. And then, when they had an opportunity to go in a different direction, they chose to put a leader in place who decides to ignore all the rules.

It might be a small thing to build a pool in your backyard, but it is indicative of what the Liberals do, Mr. Speaker. It's one set of rules for them, another set of rules for the people of the province of Ontario. What we will continue to do is work for all of the people of the province of Ontario, creating jobs, creating opportunity, creating investment, because that's what the people of the province of Ontario want.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is to the Premier. Workers in Ontario have the right to know their workplace is safe, yet this Conservative government will not disclose when or where COVID outbreaks happen in workplaces. This means that if there is a workplace outbreak, workers and the public won't know. It not only puts their health and safety at risk, it increases the risk of community spread. It removes a critical piece of information. We need to find COVID hot spots and stop the spread. Nowhere was it more clear than with outbreaks and deaths on farms, in meat-packing plants and in long-term care.

My question is to the Premier: Will your government be fully transparent and tell Ontarians which workplaces have outbreaks?

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

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I thank the member opposite for that question. Mr. Speaker, we have worked every single day to protect the health and safety of every worker in this province. We have spared no expense to protect families, the public and workers in every workplace and on every job site in this province. In fact, we have increased the number of inspectors going out. I am proud to say that as of today, we have done about 24,000 investigations related to COVID-19. We've also doubled our phone line capacity. If any worker out there is afraid for his or her health, they can call the Ministry of Labour,

Training and Skills Development, and we will investigate every call that comes in.

But, Mr. Speaker, we also made a historic announcement just two weeks ago. The Premier and I announced that we're going to be hiring nearly 100 new inspectors to continue communicating health and safety guidelines to employers and to continue enforcing the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: That response had nothing to do with the question. But I will say to the minister, if there is an outbreak at Queen's Park, we're all told. Why are we any different than any other worker in the province of Ontario?

Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier: Reporting COVID outbreaks is critical to making companies accountable and to stop community spread of the virus. When we look at long-term care, home care—employers with the highest volume of compensation claims—all but four of them are private, for-profit homes that were shortchanging our seniors and putting their lives at risk just to increase their profits. Workers are going into these homes without knowing if there are infected people in their workplace. They don't know if there is a potential to be exposed.

Transparency saves lives. I'm going to repeat that: Transparency saves lives. Premier, when will your Conservative government give the people of this province full and transparent disclosure about which workplaces have ongoing outbreaks and past outbreaks?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I want to commend the employers of this province. The overwhelming majority of them stepped up during this pandemic to work with their workers and their workplaces to protect everyone.

Mr. Speaker, I think back to the very beginning of the pandemic. The very first health and safety guidance document that we put out was for construction. While the opposition wanted to shut down construction and put 550,000 people out of work, we worked with the largest labour leaders in this province, representing hundreds of thousands of workers, to keep everyone working safely. That's a record I am proud of.

We have spared no expense to protect the health and safety of every worker. Just in the next number of months, we're going to have 507 inspectors on the ground—that's the largest amount of inspectors in the history of this province—to communicate guidelines and to work with businesses. But the most important thing is to protect the health and safety of everyone.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: My question is for the Minister of Health. The rhetoric of this government in handling COVID-19 is alarming and sinister. Months ago, this government could have taken decisive action. They could have pushed the Prime Minister to shut the borders immediately. Instead, they dithered, choosing instead to campaign and pal around with the Prime Minister, while

putting in place ever-changing half measures and intermittent lockdowns without the data to back up their decisions.

They blew it, and now they blame and threaten the people of Ontario. On October 9, the minister's press release stated that regional lockdowns were necessary to, "avoid the need for harsher measures in the future." Four days ago, the Premier said he was ready to "put down the hammer" on Ontarians.

Will the minister please tell us what other hammer-like measures this government has in store for the people of Ontario?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Well, there is a lot to deal with in this question, but what I can tell you is that we have taken every step that we've needed to take throughout this pandemic. We have never faced anything like this in Ontario before. As we saw the rise in wave 1, we took the measures that we needed to take and we were able to get the numbers down under control to below 100 for several weeks in August.

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The number of cases have continued to rise and we are taking an appropriate look at how we need to deal with it—with bringing modified stage 2 levels to Ottawa, Peel, Toronto and now York region.

We don't want to lock down the entire province. Nobody wants that. People need to earn their livelihood.

We are taking the steps necessary to make sure that we can protect the public and make sure that we can also protect the economy. Those are steps that need to be taken. We are taking very careful measures based on opinions, recommendations, advice that has been given to us by many experts.

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

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Case data from the past week shows the intermittent regional lockdowns have no correlation to an increase or decrease of COVID-19 cases by region. If it worked, for the last week we should have seen the regions where lockdowns were not imposed making up for growing increase in the share of total cases.

Over the last week, Peel saw its share of total cases increase from 16% on October 9 to 23% on October 18, and Ottawa saw its share of total cases stay the same. During the same week, the total COVID-19 cases from the areas not included in the three locked-down regions decreased from 327 to 212.

Will the minister finally admit that these measures—shutting down businesses—are not controlling any increase or decrease in cases, and will this government finally end these intermittent lockdown measures?

Hon. Christine Elliott: First of all, through you, Mr. Speaker, I need to remind the member that the numbers that you see today don't necessarily reflect the actions that we took only several days ago. It is during a period of incubation that we have to receive these numbers—

Interjection.

Hon. Christine Elliott: —that they are increasing in these locations.

The measures that we bring forward based on the advice we receive—from the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Williams; from the Public Health Measures Table; from the other tables that are involved, including the mental health table that gives us advice—tell us that we need to, first of all, look at the number of cases in an area. We also have to look at the public health response—the ability of public health to respond, the ability of our health system to respond in terms of hospitalizations and places of care for people in long-term care, hospitals and retirement homes. And then we have to look at the community transmission.

We are looking at all of those issues as we make these decisions. We want to make sure we take a measured, careful approach that protects the health and safety of the people of Ontario—

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

TEACHERS

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Premier. Jesse Ketchum public school is one of 485 schools in Ontario with positive cases of COVID-19. Teachers have been waiting up to 10 days to get back their test results—10 days. With the supply teachers covering the shortage of virtual teachers, it has been impossible to replace teachers self-isolating and waiting days for their results.

In addition, Jesse Ketchum just lost two more teachers last week due to the reshuffling at the TDSB.

With cases of COVID-19 on the rise and more and more schools being disrupted because of outbreaks, testing delays are making it even more difficult to manage the outbreaks and find teachers to teach our kids. Without a good testing system, we cannot keep teachers in the classroom, kids in schools and parents at work.

Speaker, when will this government fix our testing system so no one is left unnecessarily waiting?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: We certainly agree that testing is absolutely important to protect the health and safety of all Ontarians, including our children, and that is why we have developed a very robust testing strategy.

We started out only being able to do about 3,000 tests per day through Public Health Ontario. Since that time, we've created a network of over 40 participants with helping with the lab capacity, but we've also expanded to over 150 assessment centres. We've expanded into pharmacies for people who are asymptomatic who need to have testing. And we have tested over four and a half million Ontarians.

We have the most robust testing strategy in the entire country. We're testing twice as many as all of the other provinces and territories combined. So we do have testing capacity. We are increasing our tests—but also the timelines, we're reducing, for people to receive their test results. Most of our public health units have their test results back within 24 hours—over 90% of them.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: What I'm hearing on the ground is that teachers are waiting 10 days for a test. That's a long time. That is too long.

Back to the Premier: Peter is a grade 7/8 teacher at Jesse Ketchum. Peter's class has had two cases of COVID-19, and he and his class are now self-isolating. Because of a lack of replacement teachers, Peter has lost his prep time, and he was given zero time to prepare for the immediate switch to online teaching. In his 27 years of teaching, Peter told me, he has never felt so run down or worked so hard—and we are only in October.

The Ontario College of Teachers warned us in September about the shortage of certified teachers across the province. They warned us. And now, schools are being forced to cancel classes because they are unable to replace staff who are required to be in self-isolation.

Speaker, why did the government's back-to-school plan ignore calls to hire more teachers to prepare for this very situation?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It was this government that put in place funding to hire over 2,000 net new teachers. But Speaker, some weeks ago, we wrote the Ontario Teachers' Federation. We called on our teacher unions to waive the 50-day rule which precludes retirees from re-entering schools beyond 50 days. We need them to do so, and the unions have responded, respectfully, saying, "There is no evidence of a shortage of teachers," which is ironic given the member's question and perhaps her ideological affinity for labour in this province. But the point is that we know every school board—every responsible and objective leader knows that there is a shortage, which is the basis for why we're asking them to rescind the rule.

Days ago, we announced a plan to rescind regulation 274, which will allow principals to move swiftly and quickly to hire the right teacher for the job. We need all members of this House to stand with the government, stand with parents, to get the teachers our kids deserve.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: My question is to the Minister of Long-Term Care. Last week, the Prescott and Russell Residence, a long-term-care residence in my riding, in Hawkesbury, was reporting 35 active cases—35 cases, Mr. Speaker. For context, this is a residence of 125 seniors. And we just learned that over the weekend there was the first death associated with this outbreak. The residence has been in full isolation since last week, creating anxiety, chaos, stress and very real and understandable disappointment—disappointment as long-term-care homes across the province are yet again forced to scramble to manage outbreaks, a situation that was foreseeable, manageable and avoidable if only the government had prepared. And now, with CTV reporting today that long-

term-care associations were left out of the planning discussions—unbelievable.

How could the minister and this government fail not once but twice to protect the most vulnerable people in our society, our seniors, who depend on us?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. I want to reassure the member opposite that Prescott-Russell is receiving the support that it needs and that we are closely monitoring every day, making sure that we understand what their staffing situation is, what their PPE situation is. This is a home that the Red Cross has been activated for, as well as paramedics, as well as the local hospital, Hawkesbury general hospital. So Prescott-Russell is being supported.

Unfortunately, there are homes where there are still significant numbers in outbreak like this, but I want to reassure Ontarians and the staff that are in the 96% of Ontario long-term-care homes that are not in outbreak that we are doing everything to make sure that they have the support that they need, and we're putting dollars behind that. Our hearts are with them, and we will continue to do everything possible.

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

M^{le} Amanda Simard: Thank you to the minister for that answer. Again to the minister and the Premier: This summer, when the Premier was asked why he was nominating all of his candidates so early before the scheduled election, which is almost two years away, he replied, "We just want to be ready."

The Premier was all about getting ready for the next election but clearly wasn't getting ready for a second wave. He said this wave was a big surprise, when we knew very well from experts everywhere that the second wave was coming, and it was going to come at us hard. People are getting sick. Businesses are hurting. Families are separated. The consequences are serious.

Why did the Premier spend the summer doing a premature victory lap, campaigning across the province for re-election instead of preparing for the second wave and protecting Ontarians from its health and economic consequences?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you for the question. I reject the premise of that question.

1130

There is no doubt that continuous work has been done, working across ministries, working across the sector: outreach, listening, acknowledging the issues and understanding that there have been lessons learned from the first wave. Science was evolving. Our medical experts are advising. We're taking that advice. This has been ongoing. The planning never stopped.

We were left with neglect from decades—previous government neglect for decades. On top of that, a COVID crisis, and on top of that, planning for future waves of our elderly. We continue to do that relentlessly. We will continue to do it with focus and determination. I will make sure that our long-term-care homes receive the help that

they need. My heart goes out to everyone who has experienced loss or pain from COVID-19.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: My question is for the Acting Premier. My community is located in Toronto's northwest end and, like the Premier's own riding, has been one of the hardest hit by this pandemic. Because of this, many parents are choosing to keep their children at home and, in effect, some are now being punished for this decision. Jennifer, a mother in my riding, is still waiting for her son in grade 2 to start virtual learning.

The probability of a second wave of COVID-19 this fall was widely predicted as early as the outset of this pandemic, meaning there has been plenty of time to prepare for the school year. Yet here we are today, a month and a half into the school year, and so many children across this province are still waiting for the education from home as promised. Speaker, in fact, they'd been touting online education for over a year and a half, but in their moment to shine, they forgot to turn on the light.

With so much time to plan ahead, why are many parents across this province still waiting for virtual education to begin for their children? How much longer will they have to wait?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: At the beginning of this pandemic, we undertook a plan to provide online learning as an option for parents. When we did so then, as we stand today in this Legislature, we do not have the support of all parties in the context of developing this program, nor did they support it at the time.

But notwithstanding their opposition then and now, our government continues to be committed to building up a program which we developed in real time over the past months, working in partnership with our educators by hiring virtual principals, by expanding Internet access to every school, by procuring tens of thousands more devices and, yes, by giving the funding to the school boards to hire virtual teachers.

We are doing everything we can, recognizing that as parents make decisions based on public health risk—they may make movements in mobility between the in-class and the online. We're going to give them that choice. We're going to respect the choice. But we're also going to give our school boards every resource and every opportunity to do the difficult work that they're undertaking to ensure quality education for their children.

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

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Ottawa Centre has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Long-Term Care concerning

whistle-blower protection for PSWs. This matter will be debated tomorrow following private members' public business.

DEFERRED VOTES

SENIORS' ADVOCATE ACT, 2020 LOI DE 2020 SUR L'INTERVENANT EN FAVEUR DES ÂNÉS

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

Bill 196, An Act to establish the Seniors' Advocate / Projet de loi 196, Loi créant le poste d'intervenant en faveur des aînés.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We now have a deferred vote on Bill 196, An Act to establish the Seniors' Advocate.

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

The division bells rang from 1135 to 1205.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote has been held on Bill 196, An Act to establish the Seniors' Advocate.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 65; the nays are 0.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 101(i), the bill is referred to the Committee of the Whole House.

The member for Kitchener Centre: Do you wish to refer the bill to a standing committee?

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Legislative Assembly, please.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Is the majority in favour of this bill being referred to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly? Agreed? Agreed. The bill is therefore referred to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly.

There being no further business now, this House stands in recess until 1 o'clock.

The House recessed from 1206 to 1300.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. John Fraser: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Short): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill 201, An Act to proclaim Magna Carta Day.

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

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE POLICY

Mr. Roman Baber: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Justice Policy and move its adoption.

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

Bill 207, An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act, the Courts of Justice Act, the Family Law Act and other Acts respecting various family law matters / Projet de loi 207, Loi modifiant la Loi portant réforme du droit de l'enfance, la Loi sur les tribunaux judiciaires, la Loi sur le droit de la famille et d'autres lois en ce qui concerne diverses questions de droit de la famille.

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

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

FOOD LITERACY FOR STUDENTS ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 SUR LA LITTÉRATIE ALIMENTAIRE DES ÉLÈVES

Mr. Kramp moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 216, An Act to amend the Education Act in respect of food literacy / Projet de loi 216, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation en ce qui concerne la littératie alimentaire.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Does the member for Hastings-Lennox and Addington care to explain his bill?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: The Food Literacy for Students Act, 2020 will amend the Education Act to provide that curriculum guidelines be developed in experiential food literacy education and healthy eating for every grade, from grade 1 through grade 12. The courses of study must ensure students are given opportunities to grow food, prepare food and learn about local foods.

When implemented, every school board in Ontario will be required to provide instruction in the courses of study and to provide training and support for teachers and other staff of the board. Completion of these courses of study will be a requirement for obtaining the Ontario secondary school diploma, the secondary school graduation diploma and the secondary school honour graduation diploma.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to the support of all of the House.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Hon. Kinga Surma: It's an honour to rise in the House today to talk about the significant progress we've made on our four priority subway projects in the greater Toronto area.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all of us greatly and has brought many changes to our daily lives. From the start, the foundation of our government's response to COVID-19 has been ensuring the health and well-being of all Ontarians. This will always be our number one focus. But these past few months have not been easy and the decisions we've had to make as a government have been difficult.

Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker: Health and safety will always be our number one priority, but as a government, we must play a dual role to do everything we can to continue to stimulate our economy. Every corner of our economy has felt the enormous economic impacts of this virus, the province's transportation sector being hit as hard as any.

Despite the challenges we face, we must stick to our long-term plans. Now is not the time to let up on the tremendous progress that we have made in the last two years when it comes to building transit. That's why we're moving forward with our historic investments in the GTA transit network as a part of our made-in-Ontario plan for growth, renewal, and economic recovery.

Our government remains committed to getting shovels in the ground faster on these major transit infrastructure projects and transit-oriented communities that will create thousands of jobs, provide more housing options for people and open countless opportunities for residents throughout the greater Toronto area.

Prior to COVID-19, and far too often, I heard about people's frustration with spending hours stuck in traffic on their way to and from work, instead of enjoying time with their loved ones. I couldn't agree more. People were tired of wasting time in traffic or waiting for a bus in the cold. They would rather take rapid underground transit and spend more time with their families.

Right now, the region's transit network is not adequate in meeting the needs of millions of commuters. We've seen that access to transit improves communities and quality of life while providing economic value and jobs to

communities. There are many such cases of this around the world. Yet if you look at the map of the Toronto subway network, there hasn't been substantial expansion in decades. In that time, the GTA's transit network has been left overburdened and antiquated.

While transit ridership may be low today, demand will return once the pandemic ends. We must be ready to meet the needs of one of the world's fastest-growing regions by expanding our transit network. We must also recognize that our essential workers rely on public transit and will continue to rely on it in the future. Expanding our subway network by 50% will shorten travel times and will be a huge benefit for all hard-working essential workers.

Under the Minister of Transportation and the Premier's leadership, we are ending the era of neglect and ushering in a new generation of bold investment in the GTA's transit network. Our government's \$28.5-billion new subway transit plan for the GTA will transform the region's outdated subway system into a modern, integrated rapid transit network that offers more options and reduces travel times to make life easier for the people. Our plan constitutes the largest subway expansion in Canadian history.

Our priority transit projects will bring significant relief for commuters across the GTA in communities that are underserved when it comes to rapid transit. Our signature project, the Ontario Line, a brand new 15.5-kilometre subway, will double the city's previously proposed downtown relief line. This new line will allow someone travelling between Thorncliffe Park and downtown Toronto to arrive 16 minutes faster than today's travel times. For someone who lives in this area and works downtown, that's a savings of approximately 35 minutes every single day.

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The Yonge North subway extension, spanning from Finch station to Richmond Hill Centre, will provide a much-needed and long-awaited rapid transit connection to residents in York region. The Eglinton Crosstown West extension will increase transit access to Etobicoke, connect MiWay riders in Mississauga to rapid transit, and enable future expansion to Toronto Pearson International Airport, a significant economic hub not just for the GTA, but for all of Ontario.

The three-stop Scarborough subway extension will provide residents with the same rapid transit that has long been enjoyed in other parts of Toronto, because Scarborough residents deserve equal transit service, and our government will deliver subways to the people of Scarborough. I know the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation and my colleagues that represent ridings in Scarborough have been advocates for building a transit network for the 21st century.

This plan is about delivering meaningful transit relief to people across Toronto and the GTA. Our government is committed to taking a collaboration-first approach as we build better transit faster to serve the people's needs, and this commitment, we take very seriously. As the Associate Minister of Transportation for the GTA, I've been helping

to oversee transit expansion in the most populous metropolitan area in the country. Thanks to our collaboration-first approach, we have a clear path forward when it comes to expanding the region's transportation system.

Successful negotiations with our municipal partners have led to preliminary agreements with the city of Toronto and York region, allowing us to quickly and efficiently build transit infrastructure. These two key agreements will ensure that the province, the city of Toronto and York region continue to successfully collaborate in the delivery of the Premier's historic plan for subway expansion. GTA residents recognize the importance of building infrastructure and investing in our local communities. During consultations with our municipal partners, we heard loud and clear how important it is to build transit quickly and to get it done right.

Since the Premier unveiled our government's historic plan for subway expansion last year, a lot of hard work and collaboration has been under way to pinpoint steps that can speed up the planning and construction process. That's why we passed the Building Transit Faster Act this summer, which will expedite the planning, design and construction process of our four priority transit projects. This legislation is focused on streamlining project delivery so we can eliminate roadblocks that cause unnecessary delays and deliver these significant transit projects as quickly and cost-effectively as possible.

We can no longer afford to delay building transit. We are already playing catch-up due to decades of inaction. We must act now if we are to improve the quality of life in the GTA today and for future generations, and we will not let the virus get in our way.

As I mentioned before, COVID has impacted many areas of our lives, but we need to keep moving when it comes to making progress on these historic investments in the GTA's subway expansion. During the pandemic, we moved forward on procurements on three of our four key transit projects, and we're moving at an unprecedented pace to deliver the Premier's transit vision for the province.

In March, we announced the start of procurement on the first phase of construction and tunnelling work for the three-stop Scarborough subway extension and the Eglinton Crosstown West extension. Issued through Infrastructure Ontario and Metrolinx, these two requests for qualifications marked the very first step in the procurement process for delivering on our commitment to build transit faster, reduce travel times and connect people to places and jobs.

Now, Mr. Speaker, these RFQs were issued right before the first wave of COVID-19. We heard from the market that more time was needed for teams to submit bids on time. We listened, and that led to a qualified slate of short-listed teams being announced in the summer.

In August, we took the next steps forward in building the Scarborough subway extension by inviting selected teams from the RFQ process to respond to our request for proposals and provide details on how they planned to design and deliver the tunnelling work for this project. A

similar request for proposals was also released inviting the selected teams from the RFQ process to outline how they planned to design and deliver the Eglinton Crosstown West extension. Upon evaluating the proposals received, Infrastructure Ontario and Metrolinx expect to award these tunneling contracts in mid-2021.

This brings me to the Ontario Line. At the start of June, our government issued the first two of three separate requests for qualifications to identify and qualify the short list of those who will design, build, finance and maintain the subway line. Infrastructure Ontario and Metrolinx are evaluating these RFQ submissions, and short-listed teams will soon be invited to respond to the request for proposals.

In the meantime, Metrolinx is out engaging with the public and releasing more details on the proposed route of the Ontario Line through their neighbourhood updates and on Metrolinx Engage. With COVID-19 limiting how in-person meetings can be done, we have moved these updates and consultations online so the public can see the progress that has been made on this important project during the pandemic and still have their say.

These actions show we are getting closer and closer to realizing our vision for transit expansion while generating the kind of economic activity that creates thousands of jobs as the province recovers from COVID-19. Despite the challenges that COVID-19 has thrown at us, we have made progress on these important projects, and work will continue.

Our priority transit projects will provide significant relief to thousands of people by expanding transit capacity, modernizing the system, cutting travel times and bringing subways to new neighbourhoods that desperately need them. We can no longer afford to delay building this much-needed infrastructure. It's essential we connect people to places and jobs to be able to responsibly lead the province's economy back to a strong position.

Our government is building a world-class transit network where new subways get built faster and at a lower cost to the taxpayers, so that people can get to where they need to go when they need to get there. We're doing things differently and taking bold action that gets shovels in the ground much faster. But our plan isn't just about building faster; it's about building better.

Mr. Speaker, it has been an honour to take the lead on the government's new Transit-Oriented Communities Program as part of our approach to building better. Our TOC program enhances our subway program by providing real opportunities to build vibrant, higher-density, mixed-use communities connected to transit stations, primarily using the lands that would be acquired for transit construction—because under our government, transit, housing and jobs all come together. Under this program, we will deliver a mix of housing, including affordable housing, along with services and community amenities like daycare and recreational spaces that the community may currently lack. It will also reduce travel times, provide more options for people like our essential workers, and build integrated, complete communities that will benefit every corner of the GTA.

By integrating transit planning, city revitalization and suburban renewal, we will build thriving, transit-oriented, complete communities.

That's why, in July, we passed the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, including the Transit-Oriented Communities Act, that contains measures that support our new Transit-Oriented Communities Program, which will apply to our four priority subway projects.

Instead of building stations in isolation, we will build fully integrated, transit-oriented communities. We're taking a comprehensive planning approach that looks at community building through a modern lens. Our TOC program will spur the development of more housing around transit in an integrated manner that puts thousands of well-paying jobs within reach of those in the skilled trades.

We have the opportunity and, I would argue, the responsibility not just to build transit stations, but to create dynamic, complete, mixed-use communities around transit.

We are committed to negotiating with prospective partners to achieve objectives that the province and the municipality share to ensure we build better around these critical pieces of transit infrastructure. Our approach will make it possible to enjoy a high quality of life without a complete dependency on the car.

1320

I think we can all agree that it simply takes too long to build subways in the GTA. Like the Building Transit Faster Act, this legislation aims to clear the roadblocks that have historically held up the development of transit infrastructure. The COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act will also help us streamline and accelerate the construction of major provincial highway projects. We see transit and transportation construction as vital to our economic recovery, creating significant economic activity and driving job creation. Construction creates jobs, increases money spent in nearby communities and provides Ontario with infrastructure that keeps our people and goods moving.

Since introducing both pieces of legislation that build transit faster and enable transit-oriented communities along our new subway projects, the response has been exceptional. We've heard from municipalities who have expressed their interest in pursuing transit-oriented communities in their region. They want us to help them get infrastructure built faster, just like we're doing with our subway program. That's why we are actively looking at other opportunities to potentially apply these measures to other provincial transit projects. We will modernize the outdated approaches of the past so that municipalities can benefit from our investment sooner, as we connect people to places more efficiently. We're listening, Mr. Speaker, and our government is responding.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also added the increased element of urgency to get things done faster. We can't let red tape and prolonged processes get in the way of building for the needs of future generations. We're committed to looking at options for getting shovels in the

ground faster on highways, light rail transit and other major infrastructure projects, like long-term-care homes, and to facilitate and accelerate transit-oriented community opportunities wherever possible. And as a part of that work, we will be collaborating with our municipal partners to figure out new ways they may need to move forward with their local infrastructure project. We'll have more to say on that front very soon.

As Ontario recovers from COVID-19, it will be important that the province and our municipal partners continue to work closely and avoid any unnecessary delays. I'm proud to be a part of a government that has joined a coalition of municipal partners to build some of the most ambitious, historic and nationally significant projects in the country. Working with our federal partners in the past, we've accomplished so much, and we can do it again with our plans for transit expansion in the GTA. That's why we continue our discussions with the federal government and always encourage them to join the province at the table and fund at least 40% of the four priority transit project that are now well under way. Because projects of this scale cannot happen without all three levels of government at the table, and the people of Ontario expect all levels of government to work together, especially during this difficult time.

Mr. Speaker, it takes great transit to make a great city, and our essential workers rely on transit to get to work. The people of the GTA have been waiting decades for our ambitious plan for subway expansion, which is now very well on its way. We are working quickly to connect more people's homes and jobs to transit in ways that will improve their quality of life for generations to come. Working in lockstep with our municipal and private-sector partners, we are making smart, long-term transit investments that address the region's constant congestion and help people get to where they need to be.

I want to thank the Minister of Transportation and the Premier for giving me this chance to champion the GTA's transit needs. Under our government, the province will emerge from this pandemic stronger than ever before. It's a plan to build major transit projects, affordable housing and provincial highways. It's a plan that supports our essential workers, helps move essential supplies and helps our economy recover. It's a plan for the future of Ontario.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses? The member for University–Rosedale.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, also, to the Associate Minister of Transportation for her summary of the Ontario government's move forward on the four priority transit projects.

I do want to be clear that the Ontario NDP clearly supports that we need high-quality, affordable public transit now, especially in the GTHA region, the largest area in Canada and one that has been suffering from a lack of quality transit options for many years now.

We know the benefits of good public transit. We know that it is good for the climate. We know that it is good for our economy, because it means we spend less time stuck

on the 401 and more time doing what we need to do at home or at work. It's also good for our city and building livable, quality, world-class cities, which is exactly what this region should be.

In order to get there, it's pretty clear that there are two key things that need to happen. One is, all levels of government should be investing in operations and maintenance now, so people who live in Scarborough and Etobicoke and all across our region can catch the bus or the TTC or the subway or the streetcar to quickly get to where they want to go at an affordable price. Two, it is critical that we move forward on building high-quality new public transit lines that are built using evidence-based decision-making—not decision-based evidence-making, where you come up with the map first and then do what you can to find the evidence to justify a decision that was made behind closed doors by just a few people.

I want to summarize a little bit more around some of my concerns with the Ontario government's ability to provide critical funding for operations and maintenance so that people can get to work on time during COVID, and then also use the remainder of my time to talk a little bit about the four priority transit projects and where we're at with that.

The federal government committed a significant amount of money to help public transit agencies get through COVID-19, because there has been a dramatic reduction in the amount of funding that transit agencies are getting from fare revenue. In the case of the TTC, which affects my riding, fare revenue has dropped by 80%. That has put the TTC and many other transit agencies in a very difficult situation. The city manager at the city of Toronto came out with a statement last week saying that the TTC is facing a \$453-million shortfall, which means unbelievable service cuts are on their way.

Now, the Ontario government and the federal government—mainly the federal government—have said, "We're going to provide you with emergency funding so that there won't be major service cuts." But unfortunately, when you do the math, you see that the TTC is still very short. What that means is that the people who the associate minister mentions are waiting for that bus in the cold, they are going to be waiting a really, really, really long time, because the money isn't there to pay for the drivers and the buses and the gas to get those people to where they need to go.

I already get calls from people—health care workers at St. Mike's, people who work in long-term-care homes—and they are stuck in overcrowded TTC buses right now and they are feeling unsafe. Even though they are doing everything they can—they're wearing their masks—they are feeling unsafe. So I call on this government: As you look toward your long-term plans in building, you also need to look at what is happening now and how we can improve transit and make sure it is safe and affordable now.

The final piece I want to address is around the delays—because it is "delays"—with transit infrastructure expansion.

In 2020, the relief line, which was the idea behind transit in the east, would have been under construction for six months now. Instead, what we're doing, this government has gone back to the drawing board and is starting again, where we don't have the route, we don't have the technology, we don't know the stations, we don't know the builder, we don't even know really how much it's going to cost and we don't even know when it's going to be constructed yet. What we do know is that when we peel behind the curtain and we start to look at what the deadlines are and if you are meeting them, I see that we are already behind.

With the Ontario Line, we are already two years behind the initial announcement that you said. So financial close for a large chunk of the Ontario Line isn't going to happen until 2024. I have never seen a project being built in three years. From Danforth and up, I have never seen a project built that quickly. So you are already behind.

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So when we're talking about delays—this government is all about transit delays, and that is going to be your record.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's my pleasure to rise and respond to the associate minister's statement on transit.

I want to be very clear: Obviously, the Green Party is a strong supporter of public transit. We know how essential public transit is to reducing gridlock, increasing economic productivity and reducing climate pollution.

Mr. Speaker, one caution I want to bring to the government's attention today, and something I have been saying as they've been trying to fast-track these plans, is that you cannot build good transit without proper planning, evidence-based decision-making and community consultation.

I want to give a very concrete example. Everybody in my riding of Guelph and in the entire region supports all-day, two-way, electrified GO, but we do not support putting a traction power substation for that in Margaret Greene Park, which Metrolinx has declared as unused land. That is why people in my community are outraged about this particular proposal. What's relevant here is, this is exactly what happens when you fail to properly consult with communities. There's unused land just down the track—about 300, 400 metres—that could be used. So why transit planners in Toronto decided to impose this on "unused land" in my riding is exactly why you have to consult with local communities to get it right. That's what I'm calling on the government to do.

Finally, if this government is serious about building "a transit network for the 21st century," why are they building the GTA West highway, spending \$6 billion, when we should be using that money to build transit for the 21st century?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I'm very proud to rise today. As you can see, I'm wearing my TTC mask. When I was first elected into this Legislature, I was elected as the subway champion, and I am proud of that, because I have been championing transit for many, many years. I'm very proud to stand with the workers and the riders of the TTC.

Speaker, investing in transit infrastructure is important to our city region. We are a world-class city region, and, getting beyond COVID-19, we're going to start to see that influx of newcomers and immigrants wanting to live, work, raise a family and get around in this region. So we have to have a transit system that makes the investments for a seamless and integrated system that actually deals with the growth and the gridlock that we're facing.

Unfortunately, some of the government's plans are unclear, so I am pleased that the associate minister is here to do that clarification.

When you look at the Ontario Line—I know you're proud of that line, but it stops short at Ontario Place. It actually does not close the loop on the west end of Line 2, which it was meant to do, because it's replacing the downtown relief line, which we know was addressing the overcrowding at many stations.

Residents of Toronto and those who commute here deserve a transit system that works and that serves their needs.

The residents in my community of Scarborough, which occupies 30% of the geography of the city and 25% of the population, can't wait any longer. Unfortunately, the Premier does not have a good record. As a councillor at city hall, he actually was involved in cancelling the night bus service that was providing service for PSWs and other workers overnight. I remember that distinctly, because there was a big outcry. So we need investments in transit in Scarborough, in addition to the three-stop subway, which we welcome.

The LRT is also very important to residents who will use that service. It connects the priority neighbourhoods, it connects the university, and it goes beyond into communities in Malvern. So hundreds of thousands of people are waiting for this government to speak up about that LRT service and to not be silent any longer.

Then, what about line 3 that is always down? In fact, when it was put in it was already beyond its useful life. I remember it 30 years ago. It squeaked then and it squeaks now.

The people of my community in Scarborough deserve investment in an integrated, seamless transit system, and they deserve that now.

PETITIONS

WOMEN'S ISSUES

Ms. Jill Andrew: This petition is entitled "Fighting for Ontario's Women.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas years of Liberal inaction on the things that matter, like child care and closing the gender pay gap, has made life harder and more expensive for women and families in Ontario;

"Whereas Conservative cuts to shelters, transitional housing and supports for women fleeing violence, the

rollback of the minimum wage, and the firing of thousands of teachers and nurses overwhelmingly hurts Ontario women;

"Whereas Ontario women and families deserve better than a government that takes things from bad to worse. They deserve a government that's fighting for them and is on their side;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to call on the government to reverse their cuts to the services that women and families rely on and start putting women at the centre of every decision they make."

I wholeheartedly support this petition and have affixed my signature for tabling.

CURRICULUM

Mr. Dave Smith: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the province of Ontario is a rich source of fresh produce with a vibrant agricultural community; and

"Whereas food literacy, including experiential or hands-on skills learned in gardens and kitchens, is critical for making healthy food choices that enable self-reliance and improve human health; and

"Whereas food literacy and skills in every grade would allow students to learn how to make healthier food choices that are critical to lifelong health; and

"Whereas requiring school boards to offer experiential food literacy education will equip Ontario students with essential life skills and the knowledge and confidence to grow, prepare and choose healthy food that will support positive health outcomes and help reduce health care costs;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"Amend the Education Act to provide that curriculum guidelines shall require that courses of study be developed in experiential food literacy education and healthy eating for every grade from grade 1 through grade 12, so that:

"(1) Students are given the opportunity to grow food, prepare food and learn about local foods;

"(2) Every board is required to provide instruction in the courses of study and to provide training and support for teachers and other staff of the board;

"(3) Completion of the courses of study are a requirement for obtaining the Ontario secondary school diploma, the secondary school graduate diploma and the secondary school honour graduation diploma."

I'll affix my name to this and give it to the page.

WOMEN'S ISSUES

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: This petition is entitled "Fighting for Ontario's Women.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas years of Liberal inaction on the things that matter, like child care and closing the gender pay gap, has

made life harder and more expensive for women and families in Ontario;

“Whereas Conservative cuts to shelters, transitional housing and supports for women fleeing violence, the rollback of the minimum wage, and the firing of thousands of teachers and nurses overwhelmingly hurts Ontario women;

“Whereas Ontario women and families deserve better than a government that takes things from bad to worse. They deserve a government that’s fighting for them and is on their side;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to call on the government to reverse their cuts to the services that women and families rely on and start putting women at the centre of every decision they make.”

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

CURRICULUM

Mrs. Robin Martin: I have a petition here:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the province of Ontario is a rich source of fresh produce with a vibrant agricultural community; and

“Whereas food literacy, including experiential or hands-on skills learned in gardens and kitchens, is critical for making healthy food choices that enable self-reliance and improve human health; and

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“Whereas food literacy and skills in every grade would allow students to learn how to make healthier food choices that are critical to lifelong health; and

“Whereas requiring school boards to offer experiential food literacy education will equip Ontario students with essential life skills and the knowledge and confidence to grow, prepare and choose healthy food that will support positive health outcomes and help reduce health care costs;

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

“Amend the Education Act to provide that curriculum guidelines shall require that courses of study be developed in experiential food literacy education and healthy eating for every grade from grade 1 through grade 12, so that:

“(1) Students are given opportunities to grow food, prepare food and learn about local foods;

“(2) Every board is required to provide instruction in the courses of study and to provide training and support for teachers and other staff of the board;

“(3) Completion of the courses of study are a requirement for obtaining the Ontario secondary school diploma, the secondary school graduation diploma and the secondary school honour graduation diploma.”

I fully support this petition and will affix my signature hereto and give it to the page.

PUBLIC SECTOR COMPENSATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Roxanne McGrath from Lively in my riding for the petition.

“Pandemic Pay...”

“Whereas the pandemic pay eligibility needs to be expanded as well as made retroactive to the beginning of the state of emergency; and

“Whereas Premier Ford stated repeatedly that the workers on the front lines have his full support but this is hard to believe given that so many” of us “do not qualify; and

“Whereas the list of eligible workers and workplaces should be expanded; and

“Whereas all front-line workers should be properly compensated;”

They “petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To call on the Ford government to expand the \$4-per-hour pandemic pay to include all front-line workers that have put the needs of their community first and make the pay retroactive to the day the state of emergency was declared, so that their sacrifice and hard work to keep us safe is recognized.”

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

VETERANS

Mr. Michael Parsa: It’s a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario labelled “Supporting Ontario’s Veterans.

“Whereas our veterans have made tremendous sacrifices to make our province and country a better place; and

“Whereas veterans and their families can face many challenges including post-traumatic stress disorder, physical injury, unemployment and homelessness, all while trying to navigate a complex support system; and

“Whereas the Soldiers’ Aid Commission was created in 1915 to support Ontario’s veterans returning home from the First World War. It was later expanded to support those who had served in the Second World War and the Korean War; and

“Whereas it is a sad reality that with each passing year, the number of living veterans who served in those wars decreases ... and while we will never forget their bravery and sacrifice it is time we honour a new generation of servicemen and women; and

“Whereas currently about 230,000 veterans live in Ontario. About 93% of those veterans served after the Korean War, meaning those in financial need have not been able to access funding from the current Soldiers’ Aid Commission.

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

“Continue working hard across government to ensure assistance for our veteran heroes by modernizing and

investing in the Soldiers' Aid Commission by immediately passing the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act, 2020 so that additional assistance to help provide:

“—health-related items and specialized equipment, such as hearing aids, wheelchairs and prosthetics;

“—home-related items such as mobility-related renovations and repair costs;

“—personal items and employment readiness supports, such as clothing and counselling.”

I'll add my name to this petition and hand it over to a page.

SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS

M. Michael Mantha: J'ai une pétition ici à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Considérant que l'énoncé économique d'automne du gouvernement a annoncé l'élimination du Commissariat aux services en français et l'annulation des plans pour l'Université de l'Ontario français; et

« Considérant que ces décisions constituent une trahison de la responsabilité de l'Ontario envers notre communauté francophone;

« Nous, soussignés, pétitionnons l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario de demander au gouvernement de maintenir le bureau du commissaire aux services en français, ainsi que son financement et ses pouvoirs, et de maintenir l'engagement de l'Ontario de financer l'Université de l'Ontario français. »

Je suis complètement d'accord avec cette pétition. Je mets ma signature et je la présente à la table des greffiers.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Vincent Ke: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic has presented us with new and unique challenges to reopening our school; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario has vigorously consulted with Ontario's leading medical, scientific and pediatric experts; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Education has had over 200 separate discussions with the five major unions in the education sector; and

“Whereas the Minister of Education” is meeting “with all of Ontario's 72 school boards; and

“Whereas the plan presented by the Ontario government is historic in nature, including smaller class sizes, cohorting, target testing, additional staff, more space, and 500 public health nurses supported by a \$309-million investment; and

“Whereas this plan is the most comprehensive in Canada and invests in more per capita than any other province; and

“Whereas this plan accompanies a record investment of more than \$700-million increase in education which

invests more in classrooms such as mental health, technology, support staff and the procurement of 35,000 devices for students;

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

“That the government continue its remarkable efforts to support a return to school that prioritizes safety and a conducive learning environment.”

Thank you. I support this petition.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: This petition is titled “Fix the Northern Health Travel Grant.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Northern Health Travel Grant is supposed to even the playing field” for “all Ontarians” so they “can get the medical care they need, but is failing too many northern families;

“Whereas successive Conservative and Liberal governments have let northerners down by failing to make health care accessible in the north;

“Whereas not all costs are covered, and reimbursement amounts are small compared to the actual costs, northern families are forced to pay out of pocket to access health care, which is a barrier for seniors and low-income working families;”

Therefore “we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fix the Northern Health Travel Grant so we can ensure more people get the care they need, when they need it.”

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

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: A petition: “Supporting Ontario's Plan for a Safe Return to School.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic has presented us with new and unique challenges to reopening our school; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario has vigorously consulted with Ontario's leading medical, scientific and pediatric experts; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Education has had over 200 separate discussions with the five major unions in the education sector; and

“Whereas the Minister of Education has held weekly meetings with all of Ontario's 72 school boards; and

“Whereas the plan presented by the Ontario government is historic in nature, including smaller class sizes, cohorting, targeted testing, additional staff, more space, and 500 public health nurses supported by a \$309-million investment; and

“Whereas this plan is the most comprehensive in Canada and invests more per capita than any other province; and

“Whereas this plan accompanies a record investment of more than \$700-million increase in education which invests more in classrooms such as mental health, technology, support staff and procurement of 35,000 devices for students;

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

“That the government” will “continue its remarkable efforts to support a return to school that prioritizes safety and a conducive learning environment.”

Mr. Speaker, I support this petition. I put my name to this and give it to the usher.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Jill Andrew: This petition is on behalf of my community in Toronto–St. Paul’s. It’s called, “Petition for Real Protections from Above-Guideline Rent Increases:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas housing is a human right;

“Whereas rental rates in Toronto–St. Paul’s and across Ontario are increasingly unaffordable;

“Whereas we need to protect our affordable housing stock in Ontario;

“Whereas paying to maintain a building should be the responsibility of the landlord;

“Whereas above-guideline rent increases can increase rent well over what people can afford;

“Whereas inaction on this issue will mean thousands of Ontarians will be forced from their homes” into homelessness;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately review above-the-guideline increase rules and regulations, and ensure that rental housing remains affordable in Ontario.”

I proudly affix my signature to this in support of Toronto–St. Paul’s, and hand it to an usher.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for petitions this afternoon.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MAIN STREET RECOVERY ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 VISANT À REDONNER VIE AUX RUES COMMERCANTES

Mr. Calandra, on behalf of Mr. Sarkaria, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 215, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to the economic recovery of Ontario and to make other amendments / Projet de loi 215, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne la reprise économique de l’Ontario et apportant d’autres modifications.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Government House leader to lead off the debate.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Whilst I welcome the opportunity to speak to this matter, I’m going to be splitting my time with the member for Flamborough–Glanbrook, the member for Kitchener–Conestoga and the member for Don Valley North, each of whom has worked extremely hard on bringing this bill forward. I think with that I will yield the floor to the member for Flamborough–Glanbrook.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. I will recognize the member for Flamborough–Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I am so pleased to stand in the House today to speak to the main street recovery plan. Main street small businesses are the cornerstones of our communities, and helping them get back on their feet is critical to Ontario’s recovery. As our government navigates through this unprecedented pandemic, we’ve been committed to helping Ontario businesses reopen safe, rehire faster and recover from COVID-19. That’s why we are continuing to take major steps on the road to economic recovery, by offering support through our government’s COVID-19 action plan.

Small and main street businesses are the backbone of the Ontario economy. I am the proud mother of a small business owner. My son is a barber who owns a salon in Hamilton. I can attest to the anxiety that he and his employees endured during the business shutdown in the first months of the pandemic. He was worried about paying the utilities, covering the rent and keeping his employees and the business solvent. I understand what businesses mean to the people who run them, the communities that they serve and the economies they support.

There are more than 400,000 small businesses in Ontario. These are enterprises with fewer than 100 employees. Our communities depend on small businesses. These entrepreneurs and their employees did their part by closing their doors during the first wave of the pandemic. Now they are depending on us to offer our support through these extremely difficult times. Our government is determined to support them through this pandemic and beyond.

COVID-19 has presented challenges unlike anything that main street Ontario has ever faced. Through dozens and dozens of round tables, I have heard directly from entrepreneurs, employees, customers, local leaders and economists. Some of their stories are heartbreaking. I’ve heard from entrepreneurs and family businesses who have sacrificed absolutely everything to make their dreams a reality, only to face devastating setbacks caused by the restrictions that were necessary to protect the most vulnerable from this deadly virus.

Throughout the pandemic, small businesses have asked us to support them. They have asked our government to lay a more solid economic foundation by offering new opportunities for growth. Our government’s proposals, outlined in the main street recovery plan, will help small businesses struggling to get back on their feet. The plan consists of the proposed Main Street Recovery Act and Ontario’s small business strategy, alongside new programs and policy changes. Altogether it offers a comprehensive package of supports, services and modernization

opportunities to help more small businesses recover from the economic effects of COVID-19. The plan will also help jump-start our economic recovery so that Ontario's main streets can reopen safer, rehire faster and rebuild stronger than ever before.

The proposed legislation would modernize regulations and remove unnecessary and costly barriers, along with new programs and services like PPE grants for main street businesses and direct support in local communities through the Small Business COVID-19 Recovery Network.

Ontario's Small Business Strategy completes the plan. It's a long-term framework that will help small business owners grow and invest through the COVID-19 recovery period and far beyond. The strategy reinforces the government's commitment to small businesses, providing a vision for their future successes.

Main-street businesses sustain thriving communities. They support supply chains and connect regional economies. Many of them grow into the game-changing companies that Ontario is known for right around the globe. Small businesses account for 98% of all businesses across our province. They employ close to 2.4 million hard-working Ontarians. That is the reason why small business and main street recovery is so critical to Ontario's overall economic recovery.

Our government's main street recovery plan addresses the concerns voiced by small businesses. Our government delivers on our main street recovery plan with a number of initiatives. Our government is providing personal protective equipment grants for main street businesses. We are ending outdated and redundant rules to allow businesses to focus on what they do best. Our government is modernizing regulations to allow businesses to innovate and to meet the challenges of today's competitive economic environment. We are providing mental health supports to business owners and employees who are struggling through the pandemic. Our government is building e-commerce tools so businesses can have more interactions online, and we are launching a new web page to assist small businesses to make it easier for them to quickly find the supports and information that they need.

There is no question that COVID-19 has had an unprecedented and extremely challenging impact on small businesses across the province. During this crisis many have mobilized to serve their communities in the best way they can while sacrificing to help protect the public's health. Whether it was temporarily closing their doors in an effort to flatten the curve, putting new physical distancing rules in place to keep employees and customers safe, or transforming their business model overnight, small businesses have adapted and gone above and beyond to help service and to protect the people of Ontario. They have made the sacrifices often at great cost to themselves and to their families. Together, Premier Ford, cabinet ministers and MPPs have travelled across the province to personally thank some of those businesses who have gone above and beyond in support of their communities during these difficult times.

Many small businesses across the province have carefully and safely reopened, but as we all know, it's certainly not business as usual. Our government wants small businesses to know that we will be there for them every step of the way.

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Ontario's new main street recovery plan builds on more than \$10 billion in urgent relief and support provided through Ontario's COVID-19 action plan. It features the proposed Main Street Recovery Act, along with new programs and policy changes to provide the supports and services that businesses need. Those needs were identified through our numerous meetings, round tables and discussions with owners, employees, economists and associations.

Ontario's Small Business Strategy completes the plan. It provides the framework for how our government will support small business growth and investment over the long term. Our strategy has five pillars to support main street businesses. They include:

- lowering costs by reducing costly red tape while streamlining and digitizing government interactions;
- increasing exports by helping small businesses gain access to Canadian and international markets;
- developing talent by helping businesses access and retain skilled talent;
- accelerating the adoption of technology by helping small businesses create a strong online presence, while promoting the development, adoption and commercialization of new technologies by local innovators; and
- encouraging entrepreneurship, succession planning and diversity by encouraging entrepreneurship and supporting the next generation of diverse business leaders.

Taken together, our main street recovery plan will allow more small businesses to learn about, apply for and easily access the help that they need.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk about some of the programs, services and supports our government has developed to help small and main street businesses reopen, rehire and rebuild.

Ontario businesses come in all shapes and sizes. Businesses that require frequent in-person contact with customers or co-workers have been more severely impacted by the physical distancing requirements to stop the spread of COVID-19. To help these businesses provide a safe place for their customers and their employees, our government has initiated the main street recovery grant. It will offer eligible businesses a one-time grant of up to \$1,000 for small and main street businesses in the hard-hit retail, food and accommodations sectors. Grant eligibility will include other service sectors with fewer than 10 employees, to help them cover the costs of providing personal protective equipment. This \$1,000 grant will help about 60,000 eligible small businesses create a safer space for their customers to shop and a safer space for their employees to work. Of the nearly 100 round tables our government has had with small businesses, almost every one of them mentioned a need to be reimbursed for the cost of PPE. This grant money can also be used for cash flow.

Eligible protective equipment costs including Plexiglas, gloves, face coverings and other items that might be needed to keep customers safe. These safety measures will go a long way toward increasing consumer confidence. We are recommending that small and main street businesses consider using this grant to purchase Ontario-made PPE. This will help local manufacturers and retailers while supplying local businesses with high-quality Ontario-made PPE. Grant applications will open later this year.

Small businesses in every region of Ontario have been negatively impacted by the pandemic to one degree or another. Our government is helping small businesses access direct local support by linking Ontario's 47 Small Business Enterprise Centres into the new small business COVID-19 recovery network. The network has the potential to reach between 50,000 and 75,000 small and main street businesses right across the province. Through this network, Small Business Enterprise Centres will be able to offer more individually tailored advice, planning, and tools to directly serve the needs of owners and entrepreneurs. New location tools and updated contact information to find the nearest local centre are available on the new small business recovery webpage.

The digital space opens up a whole new world of opportunities to owners and entrepreneurs to expand and advance their business. To help more small and main street businesses go digital, Digital Main Street squads are going live right across Ontario. These squads are made up of talented graduates and students with solid technology and marketing backgrounds. They will be offering businesses face-to-face help with digital assessments, website creation, social media advertising and e-commerce platforms.

These squads are part of our government's Digital Main Street program. In partnership with the federal government, this \$57-million program will help nearly 23,000 Ontario businesses with grants up to \$2,500 to help create or enhance their online presence. Businesses will be able to take advantage of four programs to support their digital transformation. Our government is committed to helping small and main street businesses quickly pivot their operations online, reach more customers in a physically distanced environment and be better positioned for future success.

With the COVID-19 crisis changing daily, small businesses can't be spending valuable time searching for information. They need one window to get answers for their most important questions, as well as easy access to available supports and programs.

Ontario's new small business recovery webpage brings together government services for small and main street businesses. This webpage is making it easier to learn about, apply for and access COVID-19 recovery and relief programs, including the most current information. The webpage will be regularly refreshed with small business-focused news right across the government and right across the province. It currently features reopening information, financial and non-financial supports, adapting and transforming operations and how people and individuals can seek help. The webpage can be accessed at Ontario.ca/smallbusiness.

Our government is offering expanded mental health and addictions services. We want to help more families, front-line workers, youth, children and Indigenous communities manage through this difficult time. Our government wants to make it easier for businesses to innovate to meet the challenges of COVID-19.

The last thing that small businesses need as they struggle to deal with the pandemic are outdated or redundant regulations and red tape. Such obstacles slow them down and cost them money. Our government is committed to helping more businesses rapidly adapt to new demands and the changing business climate by modernizing regulations to allow businesses to keep their doors open.

Focused and effective rules are improving existing standards which are helping Ontario workers and families remain safe and healthy. At the same time, modernized regulations are protecting our environment and public interest. Smarter regulations, which use digital pathways where feasible, make compliance easier and faster. This allows businesses to invest their valuable time and money in restarting, rehiring and implementing required safety measures.

Our government is working on the necessary legislative changes to allow restaurants and bars that have a liquor licence to permanently add beer, wine and spirits to takeout orders. Our government has heard from small businesses and restaurant owners that have been severely impacted by the pandemic, and this has been a measure that has helped them weather this economic storm. The plan includes a commitment to permanently allow around-the-clock deliveries to retail stores, restaurants and distribution facilities.

If passed, the Main Street Recovery Act would result in a number of benefits for rural communities. Main streets of rural communities are social and economic community hubs. Ontario farmers rely on these businesses to ensure that their agri-food products get to market. These small businesses ensure farmers can access the tools and services to continue to produce high-quality affordable food. Ninety-six per cent of Ontario farm families are operating their farm business with under 10 employees.

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Our government supports the distribution of local food and food products by increasing the range of products sold at the Ontario Food Terminal. Thousands of small businesses, from farms to independent grocery stores to restaurants, depend on the Ontario Food Terminal for their products, and ultimately, their success. This initiative would help support the recovery and growth of agri-food businesses across Ontario. Sellers would increase their revenues by offering more products; at the same time, buyers and consumers would enjoy a wider variety of local products for sale.

Our government is supporting the Ontario taxi and limousine industry by increasing fines for illegal operators. To ensure that Ontarians are safe when they travel, these changes would act as a stronger deterrent to illegal operators, making it easier to protect travellers arriving at

Ontario's airports. The proposed changes increase the range of fines to between \$500 and \$30,000 per offence. It would help support the recovery of the economically battered taxi and limousine sector.

Our government would eliminate barriers for community developments, enabling small business and residential customers to embrace innovative low-carbon opportunities and to provide access to more choices in how they meet their daily energy needs. Smart communities could unlock lower costs through sustainable energy choices and distributed energy and conservation technologies.

Our government is bringing Ontario's Assistive Devices Program into the 21st century. We are proposing to eliminate unnecessary paperwork and outdated timelines for small business vendors. By digitizing the process, small businesses that sell covered assistive devices would be able to upload claims online and receive payment within days as opposed to weeks.

Our government wants to encourage everyone to buy local, visit local and support local businesses. Our government is doing its part to ensure these vital operations are still operating long after this pandemic is over.

As the province gradually reopens and the economy continues to recover, it's more critical than ever that Ontario be positioned as a top-tier destination for investment growth and job creation. Our government is committed to help position more innovative small businesses and entrepreneurs to grow and succeed through the pandemic.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member did say she would be sharing her time, so we go to the member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure if it was mentioned or not, but we'll be sharing whatever time is left over with the member from Don Valley North as well.

It is my pleasure to rise today and take part in debate of the Main Street Recovery Act, 2020. Thank you to the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade for her remarks.

I want to first recognize the work of the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction, who, alongside the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade and his parliamentary assistants, have spent countless hours speaking with business owners. The associate minister held over 100 virtual round tables, and I had the privilege of being part of one of those with business owners from across my riding in Waterloo region.

Our government made a commitment to support the job creators of this province when we first took office. Small, local businesses have always been the backbone of Ontario's economy: 98% of businesses in Ontario are small businesses, employing over 2.4 million hard-working Ontarians. They are the pillars of our community, and COVID-19 has presented an unprecedented challenge for all Ontarians, especially our business owners, and our government has been there to support them in an unprecedented way. Back in March, our Minister of Finance

was able to quickly bring forward a \$10-billion relief package. This included over \$3 billion in direct financial support.

While we have made progress in reopening our province's economy, businesses continue to face challenges as they adjust to the new normal. COVID-19 has put a spotlight on the ingenuity of our small business owners, and as a government, we are removing hurdles so that our small businesses can innovate and pursue new opportunities.

The associate minister's main street recovery plan that was unveiled earlier this month proposes to modernize rules to help our small businesses meet the challenge of the pandemic. This plan is built off what was heard during the round tables and discussions with owners, employees, economists and associations. The plan has three parts: First is the bill we are introducing here today, which makes legislative changes to promote new opportunities for small businesses; second is new programs, services and supports to help small and main street businesses reopen safer, rebuild stronger and get more people back to work faster; third is the small business strategy.

The legislative changes before us span across government and, if passed, would impact a range of sectors.

The first change I speak of builds off of one of the first emergency measures that our government put into place. Earlier in the pandemic, the Premier made it possible for deliveries to occur 24/7 to Ontario's businesses. This change came at an absolutely critical time in early spring, when stores were having difficulty keeping shelves stocked. I'm sure we all remember that. This change has been beneficial for small business owners. The reputation of small businesses is something local entrepreneurs spend years building. Think about your regular local coffee shop, restaurant, butcher or grocery store and how you can always depend on them to have just what you're looking for. This change makes it easier for them to maintain that reputation through our economic recovery and beyond.

Before implementing this temporary change, there were two previous pilots for off-peak deliveries. The first was during the Pan Am Games and the second was in Peel region in 2019. The Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade as well as the Ministry of Transportation analyzed the data from these pilots, and there have been some interesting findings. The first suggests that fuel costs and emissions were reduced by almost 11%, Mr. Speaker. The second is that up to 30% of trucks were moved off the road during rush hour. Both you and I have a very long commute to get here and I'm sure we can both appreciate that. Finally, air pollutants were also found to be reduced by 11%, to 18%.

Noise bylaws restricting deliveries have been around for decades, but in those decades, trucks have become quieter and the need to stop them from delivering from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. has become outdated.

Another part of this bill is an amendment to the Ontario Food Terminal Act. This amendment, if passed, would benefit local food producers by expanding the range of products that can be sold at the food terminal. There are

nearly 1,400 farms in Waterloo region and most of them, if not all, are in my riding. Kitchener–Conestoga is also home to one of the largest farmers' markets in the country, St. Jacobs market. Supporting local Ontario-grown food is important to me and my constituents. These changes would expand the products growers and producers can bring to market. It would also give buyers more choice when it comes to Ontario-grown produce. The Ontario Food Terminal is a key part of the supply chain and our agricultural sector, with thousands of producers and purchasers relying on it. I've heard first-hand how important wholesale links are to local farmers.

Also in my riding is the Elmira produce auction, a co-operative started by Old Order Mennonites. During its peak season, three times a week food grown on local farms is auctioned off and bought by independent grocery stores, produce stands or anyone who is looking to purchase local food in bulk. While on a smaller and more localized scale than the Ontario Food Terminal, it's places like these where you can really see Ontario-made, Ontario-grown in action. It means local small businesses like Stemmler's in Heidelberg can stand by their commitment to locally sourcing produce and purchase directly from community growers. Giving more options and diversity when it comes to buying Ontario-made is good for local producers and our shared economic recovery.

Another concern that small business owners shared with me was around the purchasing of personal protective equipment. We have said since day one that health and safety is our government's number one priority, and the overwhelming majority of small business owners share this commitment. So when it came to reopening their establishments, at the top of their minds was sourcing protective equipment and supplies they've never had to purchase before. Masks are no longer just for health care workers. Now the employees of hardware stores, servers, plumbers and other hard-working Ontarians are all needing to wear face coverings. My office fielded calls and emails from local business owners trying to get the supplies they needed to be able to reopen safely, and I know the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade was also getting these calls. His team took quick action and created a directory where employers could purchase Ontario-made PPE. Being able to share that resource with businesses in my riding made a huge difference and has provided some relief as they have made their plans to safely reopen.

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But of course, this all comes at a cost, and our government wants to try and ease that burden, Mr. Speaker. Under the main street recovery plan, we are making \$60 million available in \$1,000 grants to support businesses with two to nine employees in the retail, food, accommodations and service sectors. These are sectors that have been hardest hit by COVID-19 and have had the biggest challenges to their typical operations.

In total, almost 60,000 businesses across the province will be able to access this money. The Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction is working on

getting this grant into the hands of business owners as quickly as possible. Because our mom-and-pop shops along our main streets were closed for weeks, this assistance can't come soon enough, Mr. Speaker.

Even in the worst of times, our local businesses have demonstrated their resilience and innovation. While all businesses have had a tough time over these past few months, our restaurants and bar owners have had a particularly rough go. Being able to only sell takeout and delivery cut out a significant portion of their profits, and we heard that from industry time and time again. I heard it from local restaurant owners, because when people go out to eat at restaurants, along with their food, they're likely to purchase a drink or perhaps a bottle of wine. But now, just getting a meal to go, they were only spending about half as much. Never before had restaurants been able to serve alcohol with takeout or delivery.

So when restaurant owners asked for this, we listened. Our Minister of Finance and the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario made it possible for restaurants to sell alcohol along with their food via takeout and delivery. This has been a game changer for restaurants and bar owners, yet it was set to expire at the end of this year. I'm pleased to see a commitment to making it permanent included in our main street recovery plan.

Helping our hospitality industry get through this is something we are committed to on this side of the House. Earlier this summer, alongside my colleagues, I supported the proposal to extend patios and liquor licensing by removing red tape to get temporary permits. In my ongoing conversation with local mayors, including the mayors of Kitchener and Waterloo, they were very supportive of the idea and made changes locally to make it happen.

I want to thank our Premier and Attorney General for their work to make this a reality. It allowed for restaurants to expand their patio seating and capacity, while also complying with physical distancing and public health guidelines. And even though patio season would typically be winding down this fall, it is great to see this measure being extended, Mr. Speaker. I know Kitchener city council just voted recently to extend their patio program into December, giving our local restaurants a few more months to operate their expanded patios. There are more than 60 businesses that have taken advantage of this, and I support Mayor Vrbanovic and his council, who hope to see this go on as long as possible.

Some businesses are taking additional steps to prepare their patios for winter in some impressive ways. One local restaurant has put a unique spin on outdoor dining. The Village Biergarten on King Street in St. Jacobs is one of our main street businesses. To be able to offer outdoor dining all winter long, they've installed plastic domes that can accommodate up to eight people. Even before the pandemic, these dining domes were popular in Scandinavia, so it is really great to see local entrepreneurs bringing this to Woolwich township, and I can't wait to check it out, Mr. Speaker.

The third part of this plan is the small business strategy. This is our long-term strategy for small businesses and

entrepreneurs, and it is intended to lay the foundation for economic growth for many years to come. There are five key pillars to this strategy, and they reflect the direct consultations with businesses across this province.

First is lowering cost. Time is money, Mr. Speaker. When business owners have to spend their time complying with government rules and navigating red tape, they're losing time that could be spent growing their businesses, increasing their customer base and creating jobs. So instead of filling out paperwork, we are going to take a step forward in digitizing our government interactions.

I've been a champion of this for quite some time, using my first private member's bill to bring about common sense changes for motor vehicle dealers. As a bit of a recap, my bill would allow auto dealers to be able to register vehicles in-house, so they no longer needed to go to ServiceOntario in person, and customers would be able to register and pick up their vehicles in a matter of hours, Mr. Speaker. Our Minister of Government and Consumer Services is hard at work making this into a reality to relieve some of the burdens on car dealers and our major employers here in the province.

The second pillar is increasing exports. Gaining access to domestic and international markets can play a huge factor in businesses' success and also helps amplify made-in-Ontario products. I think of BlackBerry and Broil King, two very well-known companies that have roots in Waterloo region. We've also got The Canadian Shield, a new business I'm sure a lot of people here in the House are aware of, that specializes in producing face shields and PPE.

The Canadian Shield is a great example of a company that, once it was able to access the domestic market, scaled from fewer than 10 employees to—get this, Mr. Speaker—employing over 300 people through the summer. And these are good-paying jobs that came about during a pandemic, much-needed jobs for 300 families in Waterloo region. There are other companies in our province that, once they can access the market, will also grow 30 times larger and bring more good jobs to their communities. We want to help them do that, Mr. Speaker.

Our third pillar is accelerating technology adoption. We launched the Digital Main Street grant as a partnership with the federal government back in June. Some \$57 million was made available to help almost 23,000 businesses create and enhance their online presence. Part of our main street recovery plan also includes the Digital Main Street squads that were mentioned earlier, that will go live across the province to expand an e-commerce market for our small and main street businesses.

Developing talent is our fourth pillar. Before COVID-19, Ontario had created over 300,000 new jobs. We've heard the Premier say, time and time again, that he had been pushing the federal government to send in more people to fill those vacancies. The goal, as we get back on the road to recovery and kick-start our economic engine, is to get back to those days, to see that growth. Because I heard from companies in my riding, too, and there weren't enough workers to fill the jobs. Part of this includes

matching the skills for our workers with the available jobs. Getting more skilled workers out there is something our Minister of Labour, Training, and Skills Development is extremely passionate about, and I know he has a lot of support on the government benches and on the other side of the House for this.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, our last pillar is encouraging entrepreneurship, succession planning and diversity. This includes supporting the next generation of small business owners and entrepreneurs, as well as creating a more inclusive economy. I had a chance, along with the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues, to visit some of the local female-owned businesses in my riding last week. My constituency office is actually surrounded by some women-led businesses, like Maggie's Mudroom and Local Renaissance espresso bar, and also, just down the street, Never Enough Thyme, which is a small deli and catering business. They are really the backbone of main street Elmira, and it was great to have the associate minister come down to visit them and hear about their experiences through the pandemic. A diversity in small business owners means more vibrant main streets across the province.

The three parts of our main street recovery plan—the legislative changes, the new programs, and our long-term strategy—deliver on what I have heard from local businesses, Mr. Speaker. The act we have put before us and the key changes it makes, as well as our Better for People, Smarter for Business Act, 2020, will help our main streets reopen safer, rehire faster and, ultimately, recover from COVID-19.

We support entrepreneurs and small business owners, and we're determined to pull out all the stops to help them get through this. They have been there when we needed them, and this government is going to be there to get them through the tough times. There will come a day when we will be able to put COVID-19 behind us, and when that day comes the heart of our communities—our main streets—will be there, too.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll now turn it over to the member from Don Valley North.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Manning cleanup this afternoon is the member from Don Valley North.

Mr. Vincent Ke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Associate Minister Sarkaria, for this excellent opportunity to stand with you today to declare my strong support of Bill 215, Main Street Recovery Act, 2020. At this complex time in our history, I am encouraged that Bill 215 will provide the good news that we and many small business owners and patrons have been waiting to hear.

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As the humble representative of the great people of Don Valley North, I know I speak on behalf of many small businesses in our community. Here in this House, I am their voice. I take this responsibility very seriously as I convey the important concerns and challenges that small businesses face during the pandemic.

The word "small" in small business gives everyone the impression that small business is insignificant to our

economy. On the contrary, the small businesses that populate main streets in towns and cities all over the province contribute immensely to our economic well-being and wealth. They employ nearly three million Ontarians, represent 66.2% of all private-sector workers and make up 30% of our GDP. Therefore, to our economy small business is not small at all.

Due to their size, individual small businesses are indeed vulnerable, especially during this pandemic, as they struggle with limited human resources and strained financial resources. They must rely on their daily customer traffic to pay for rent, payroll and utility bills. They don't have the extra time, energy or the effort to deal with the duplicative and unnecessary red tape.

Our government recognizes the significant economic contributions that small businesses make, and we understand their genuine need for support to help them to secure their spots in the marketplace during this pandemic. Small businesses can count on our promise to stand by them and stand with them, shoulder to shoulder, to help them navigate the course of their recovery as they help us all by continuing to keep their doors open.

With the creation of the Ministry of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction, our government addressed a critical need. Unlike any previous government, this government acknowledges the importance of small business in a meaningful way. Bill 215 leads the way to economic resilience and recovery with innovative and creative solutions to address the very real need to reduce red tape, making it possible for small businesses to not only survive but to also genuinely thrive, especially in difficult circumstances.

I consider Bill 215 to be another prime example of our government's ability to define a problem, offer solutions and act in the best interests of small businesses and the people we serve.

In January this year, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, representing approximately 42,000 small businesses in Ontario, assigned the government an A- score on their annual red tape report card. It is important to mention that not only does this government have a reason to feel pride in its record, CFIB's director of provincial affairs, Julie Kwiecinski, noted that for the second year in a row the province has received an A- mark, up from a C+ under the former Liberal government. She also noted that the government is creating the right framework to let small business flourish.

I could not agree more. The introduction of Bill 215 is both timely and relevant, and I have confidence that it will help to create the right conditions and economic environment for small businesses in Ontario to grow even stronger.

Since the onset of the pandemic I have had the privilege of meeting virtually with many engaged individuals and groups representing small businesses in my community. I have organized, hosted and participated in virtual consultations, town halls and individual meetings in an effort to understand the particular challenges they face. Through more than 100 virtual meetings, round tables and discussions, our government has engaged with small business

owners, employees, entrepreneurs, economists, and associations across the province.

We know that small businesses face a variety of obstacles they must overcome in order to compete and succeed in the hard world of business, but it is especially challenging during a pandemic when there are new rules and restrictions. What were once routine challenges for small business enterprises have since transformed into major hurdles during the COVID-19 pandemic. These stumbling blocks I refer to threaten the very existence of some small businesses. Many small business owners have told me they worry that they may go under. It is heart-breaking whenever I hear such a statement. Small business owners and entrepreneurs feel discouraged by their circumstances and reach out to our government in the hopes of finding help. I feel encouraged and hopeful for these small businesses, as Bill 215 will provide much-needed guidance and support.

In my community of Don Valley North, I know that small businesses give everything they have to ensure that they can stay in business, not only for their own good but also for the good of the wider community. They are the meaning of "main street" in Ontario.

During the pandemic, I have witnessed incredible courage and character in many of my constituents as they deal with aspects of the changing landscapes in their lives. There is a small restaurant in my riding called Seven Yummy Garden. When COVID-19 hit us in March, this small business experienced difficulties. However, knowing that front-line health workers were working so hard to fight COVID-19, the owner donated 100 meals to North York General Hospital.

He is one great example of how small businesses work day and night during these unprecedented times. In order to keep his doors open under reduced customer traffic, he does his purchasing in the morning and takes orders until midnight. He established a social media presence to gain business online, adjusted his menu to reflect consumer demand and changed his operation from indoor dining to takeout.

We need to make sure that businesses like Seven Yummy Garden and so many others like it receive the support that they need to succeed. Bill 215 will guide them to stay the course, choose the best way forward, and ultimately recover.

As we discuss the proposed legislation, it is important to note that three ministries pursue amendments to the legislation to improve the level of support that main street and small businesses receive while on the road to recovery. Successful revitalization requires the government's substantial assistance to help them to adapt to changing circumstances, as many of them reinvent their existing business models to stay competitive and grow their businesses by adopting digital platforms to extend their reach to their customers and promote their presence online.

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Now is the time for the government to ensure that main street and small businesses are unburdened, by removing

barriers and eliminating red tape and ineffective, redundant and outdated rules and regulations that too often impede progress.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 215 will not only permit progress; it will inspire many small businesses on main streets across the province to unleash their power and potential.

As a government, our first priority will be to ensure that small businesses can reopen their doors safely—to protect and promote the health and safety of people. The proposed amendments to Bill 215 will provide funding for essential PPE supplies and access to information, design graphics for health and safety signage, and instructive materials to help educate and protect small business owners and their staff and customers by keeping them informed, safe and assured.

The main street recovery grant will provide necessary funds to help small businesses arm themselves with information and give them purchasing power to secure PPE so that they can help create a safer environment for themselves, their staff and their customers. The one-time grant will provide up to \$1,000 for small and main street businesses in the service industries that have two to nine employees.

Our government wants to assure both the public and the small businesses that we will do our part to ensure that all required safety precautions and protocols are in place to help protect them.

I also want to spotlight an amendment to the Municipal Act and City of Toronto Act that would make it permanent to allow truck deliveries to retailers, restaurants and distribution centres on a 24/7 basis. Temporary measures were put into place earlier this year, during the first wave of the pandemic, to facilitate timely and consistent deliveries to prevent any interruption to our supply chains. This policy works to keep grocery stores well stocked and restaurants and many other small business enterprises operational. It also serves to shore up public confidence and helps to discourage panic shopping and buying. We need to capitalize on the success we observe when 24/7 truck deliveries are permitted, and therefore we seek to make this change a permanent fixture in our plan.

One of the most exciting parts of the main street recovery plan is the government's creation of the small business COVID-19 recovery network, which links together 47 business enterprise centres. In these times, when many of us rely on technology to access information and resources, this will be a vital support network providing relevant information and fostering local connections. Necessity is the mother of invention, and many small businesses and entrepreneurs prove this old adage to be truer than ever during the global pandemic. The old way of doing business is not working today for every small business. The need to adapt has never been greater. We are seeing an increased interest in learning new skills and technologies that will help small businesses and entrepreneurs to expand their reach in the online world of business.

As businesses seek knowledge and guidance on how to engage and operate in online marketplaces, the Digital

Main Street squads, equipped with strong technology and marketing backgrounds, offer individualized assistance and advice with digital evaluation and onboarding, website construction, promotional content, social media platforms, online engagement and a variety of e-commerce solutions. Our government is here to provide the road map to achievement with the introduction of Digital Main Street.

In participation with the federal government, the Digital Main Street Program is an essential resource for 23,000 small businesses across Ontario to help them to go digital and establish a name for themselves in the world of online business. Perhaps in 2020 the old adage should be updated to say, "Necessity is the mother of reinvention."

As we all know well, since the onset of the pandemic, COVID-19-related rules, regulations and supporting programs change daily. Small businesses and entrepreneurs need to know in real time when there are new guidance or support programs that influence their businesses and any sources of support that could benefit their operations. Our government's new small business recovery web page provides all the important information they seek in one convenient place.

Ontario's Small Business Strategy brings together all elements of our recovery plan. With Bill 215, we intend to reinforce our commitment to develop a strategy that focuses on creating an environment where small business can flourish and shine in success.

We aim to implement our small business strategy in five key steps:

- (1) Reduce costs associated with red tape;
- (2) Expand opportunities for exports in domestic and international markets;
- (3) Encourage and promote the use of technology;
- (4) Develop and reward talent;
- (5) Celebrate entrepreneurship, value diversity and support succession planning.

We count on Main Street and its small businesses and entrepreneurs to help us help them as together we broaden and bolster our economy, all while keeping in mind the true Ontario spirit, which includes a diverse and dynamic population of talented and resourceful people.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I want to say to everyone on Main Street, the small businesses and entrepreneurs who contribute so much to our province and all the wonderful people of Ontario, the consumers and patrons who embrace and support them, that Ontario will only succeed when you succeed.

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

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: A couple of weeks ago, I did a business forum for women entrepreneurs in Beaches-East York. These women are beside themselves, and I don't think that they're going to be particularly impressed with the bread crumbs that the government has thrown them today. Not a single one of them said to me, "Gee, in the middle of this pandemic, the red tape is killing me."

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What they said was they need rent relief, and there's nothing here that provides rent relief for them. If they're not here after this pandemic is over, the red tape relief isn't going to do anything for them, so I would like to know what the government has to say about this bill, and the 75% rent subsidy, for instance, that we are suggesting, that is not here in this bill. What do you have to say to the women entrepreneurs in my riding who are terrified?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Would the member from—

Ms. Donna Skelly: Flamborough–Glanbrook.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I know it's Flamborough–Glanbrook, but I have trouble saying that—Flamborough–Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. This is one step in a much bigger project, moving forward, to help small businesses—the backbone of our economy—recover in Ontario. This is just one of the many things that this government is doing to help them succeed, whether they're women entrepreneurs or any entrepreneur in Ontario. We started this with our fall economic statement back in 2019. We recognized that businesses, small businesses, in Ontario were being saddled with unnecessary red tape. While the member opposite is suggesting that that isn't an issue, I have heard that time and time again. I was part of the largest-ever stakeholder consultation process in the history of this government, and it took place through SCOFEA, the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. On that committee, we heard time and again that red tape was one of the many problems that small businesses in Ontario were facing, so I would have to disagree with the member opposite. This is a big issue that we are tackling with this particular bill.

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

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I'm proud to see the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction understand small business in this province. My riding is home to the Port Credit and the Clarkson BIAs, where you can find businesses like Posta ItalBar, Michael's Back Door, Solstice and the Crooked Cue, naming a few. Just like how our local communities support our small businesses, small businesses support our province and are the backbone of our economy.

However, these organizations have been hit hard with red tape that has made it tough for businesses to recover. Can the member explain how this bill will help small business?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you for the question. Again, as I mentioned just a minute ago, our government is laser-focused on really building an environment to allow small business to not only survive COVID-19 but to thrive beyond COVID-19, and this particular bill has presented a number of, I think, very innovative outside-the-box measures that will help small business.

You mentioned your community, and of course restaurants are one of the areas where we're seeing small

businesses struggle. One of the things that our government has introduced is the opportunity, when you are ordering takeout, to order a spirit, a bottle of beer or a bottle of wine. It's something that we heard time and again from the restaurant community that was helping them. We are looking at keeping this permanent so again, as I said, these businesses not only survive this pandemic, but thrive beyond.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I listened to the MPP from Kitchener–Conestoga lay out some of the provisions in this bill. I know that he did not have the opportunity to participate in the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, and I have before me, on my desk, the reports from that committee. I also have before me this bill. You can see a distinct difference between those two.

We heard from 500 witnesses and we received 130 written submissions, and what we heard time and time again was that businesses were desperate for supports now; not a long-term plan, not a digitization plan that may take months to years if it ever gets off the ground without some kind of catastrophic failure known to happen with big IT projects. My question would be: What has happened to the request for rent relief from these businesses? What is happening to the ban on commercial eviction? Because they are going out of business now.

Mr. Mike Harris: With all due respect to the member opposite, I did participate, actually, in several of those committee meetings. I have heard time and time again, not only in those meetings but also from constituents and just from people all around the province—and all around Canada, to be quite frank—that red tape is something that gets in the way constantly. It doesn't matter if you're a small business or whether you're one of our larger organizations that are creating jobs here in the province, red tape is something that stands in the way of being productive. Our government has a strong mandate and a strong conviction to be able to reduce that red tape so that our job creators can do what they do best, and that's employ people here in the province.

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

Ms. Amy Fee: As we're listening to the debate today, it brings me to thinking about a couple of female-led businesses in Cambridge. One in Hespeler is a furniture business that sells used furniture, called Next Time Around. They had a big struggle in the middle of COVID where they needed to move places. They were down in South Cambridge, and now they're up in Hespeler. It's a big struggle for them, but they keep saying that every little bit that we do is helping them.

Then in Cambridge, the Beechwood Brainery—again, a female-led business—talking about how every little thing that we can do means that they can keep going and keep building their business. Again, they started their business in the middle of COVID, so they're here because of the measures that we've put in place and for the help from this government.

I'm just wondering if you can elaborate on more of what you're hearing from other businesses.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you for that question. As I mentioned throughout our comments this afternoon, and as my colleagues also raised, a number of the measures that this government is bringing forward to help small businesses—one of them is a \$1,000 grant to help cover the cost of PPE. When you are a small business struggling, in particular during this particular time with COVID-19, that will help. We're being very generous in terms of what you can use in order to qualify for this \$1,000 subsidy. We're talking about masks and gloves and Plexiglas and anything that was needed to help keep your employees or keep your customers safe. That's just one measure.

We're also working with small businesses to modernize and digitize their business. In fact, the customer you just mentioned could go online and offer her products online. We have a \$2,500 grant that they would be eligible for.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I don't think you can go into a cab or a limo and not have the conversation about the unfairness of the competition and the unfairness of the types of help or regulatory systems that limos and taxis face but Uber and Lyft drivers don't. If we have a system in place that now has fines of \$300 to \$20,000 for people being unlicensed and not having the proper regulatory things, how do we believe that just increasing it to \$500 to \$30,000 is going to be any different? They're saying the system doesn't work now—to make it fair. How does this make it fair?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you for the question. We believe that that measure that we're bringing in—stiffer fines, tougher penalties—will act as a deterrent. We have to do something. It's difficult. We know that the taxi industry has faced many challenges over the course of the past number of years since the introduction of Uber, of course. This is just one measure to help alleviate the pressures that they're facing when people who are not licensed and who are unfairly targeting customers at airports, for example—we're saying we're going to introduce tougher, stiffer fines, and that will act as deterrent. If you are picking up a person who you should not be serving and you are fined up to \$30,000, I think that would act as a deterrent.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize that it's very difficult in these times with, as I said, the new competition facing the taxi industry, but we do believe that this is just one additional measure that will help limousine drivers and taxi drivers in particular who are facing unfair competition at the airports.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 101(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business, such that Ms. Stiles assumes ballot item number 52 and Ms. Fife assumes ballot item number 64.

Speaking of which, further debate?

1500

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to join the debate today on Bill 215, Main Street Recovery Act. I am going to be bringing the voices of people from Waterloo region to this debate and I'm going to be honouring the 500 delegations that came to SCOFEA this summer and asked us for very specific help.

I have to start off my debate by saying how completely disrespectful I think it is of this government to bring forward a piece of legislation like this in response to an economic crisis in the province of Ontario. It defies logic on so many levels, because the voices and the businesses from the five sectors that we heard from, from June, July, August and September—over 800 hours of testimony with tangible solutions, with reasonable and rational proposals around targeted investments that actually could get the economy back up and running.

Really, one in particular was the downtown BIAs of Ontario, where they basically said to the committee as a whole, "Help us get through this and we will help you get through this economic downturn." You know, the government members are very fond of saying, "They had our back. They shut down when they needed to shut down"—and they did. Now we actually have to do something for them.

Mr. Speaker, though, I will tell you that if you had told me that I would be asking the PC government of Ontario seven months into a pandemic to do the basic, common-sense measures that would help sustain businesses through this time—seven months into a pandemic—I honestly would have said, "No, I don't think that's going to happen. I think that they're going to come to the table," not with the low-hanging fruit, which we heard from committee on a regular basis. I thought that they would come forward with a broad proposal which actually had targeted investments to address the gaps in revenue. That was actually the whole premise of us meeting for four months.

Can you imagine how disrespectful it is to actually draft a report—a historic report, we've been told. Yes, a historic report, where we had the most delegations come, and during a time of crisis—please remember that. These are businesses that were in crisis, and they took time away from whatever they were doing to come to this committee. And they came to us in good faith. That is the most heartbreaking part about this. When businesses come to this committee in a crisis with tangible solutions and then they are not listened to, that compromises and undermines the confidence in our government and in our roles as legislators.

We're at a very interesting time right now in the province of Ontario. There are many economists who will say that right now we are actually in a full recession, and then there are other economists who will confirm that we are in a depressed economy. Some 750,000 jobs have failed to come back. They are in very targeted areas. They were in very precarious professions, if you will.

The latest economists have said that we are now facing a K economy. A V economy would be good, right? You go down, but then you come back up again. A K economy,

which is what the province of Ontario is facing, based on the job numbers that came out last Friday, is where there is a great, growing divide between those who are recovering—they're recovering very quickly because they have wealth, because they have stable jobs and they don't have to work from this job to that job. They're not a PSW trying to cobble together the rent every month. There is a group of employees in the province of Ontario who have actually weathered this storm with great resiliency because they had basic things like benefits, sick days and job security. Also, their actual work, their profession, they could actually work from home. It's interesting, because the whole nature of work will vastly change because of this pandemic.

I was speaking to a CEO of one of the companies right down here in Toronto, and he was desperately asking the government if he could get out of his 10-year lease because he doesn't need his employees to be in a commercial space anymore. The company has found that 50 employees of the 70 have been able to transition very well to working from home. In fact, their productivity is up. In fact, the fact that those employees don't have to get on a very slow GO train has actually improved their productivity and even their quality of life a little bit.

But now he's trapped—and there is a solution to this, but he is trapped in a 10-year lease, paying \$100,000 a month in rent that he doesn't need. He basically said, "Listen, if you could give us an exemption, I will pivot"—because that's the word now, "pivot"—"and I will hire back those other 20 employees. I want to be part of the economic recovery, but the government has to come to the table with some tangible pragmatic solutions so that they're actually not hindering the ability for businesses to rehire and retool."

And so, what does Bill 215 do? Well, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't do much, and that's really unfortunate, I have to tell you. There are four schedules that it addresses. I would be embarrassed; if I was the minister responsible for the economy, I would be red-faced right now because this does so little to address the emerging issues that we have right now—and the government has also introduced another bill, Bill 213, which also does less than little. But it's part of this complex—they are trying to do a public relations exercise on businesses in the province of Ontario, saying, "Look, we brought forward these little pieces of legislation. Look, we care about you." That is not what businesses want in Ontario.

Businesses want bold and courageous action from this government, not low-hanging fruit and a little tinker here with a little red tape and a little regulation. It's quite ironic, actually. In some instances, the government is actually creating more red tape by pushing a lot of things to regulation, so the book is getting thicker.

By the testiness that we saw this morning in question period, I must say the government members are clearly hearing what we're hearing. We're hearing desperation. We're hearing anger. We're hearing from businesses who have mortgaged their homes. They have a bare-bones operation right now. They are just trying to hold on. And

the rent abatement that my colleague, our finance critic, raised earlier was and continues to be the number one issue. You have known that for so long. It's in the report that you accepted and then, of course, it's in the dissenting reports because nothing happened with rent abatement.

The federal government last Friday made an announcement—I guess it's better late than never from this federal government. They unveiled a revamped program to help small businesses cover rent costs during the pandemic. While the previous program depended on landlords applying for the small business rent relief, the new program is supposed to make it easier for businesses to obtain rent and mortgage relief by allowing them to apply directly to the Canada Revenue Agency.

That flawed program, which was allowed to exist for six full months—unfortunately, it is really challenging because the federal government is obviously prepared to come to the table with small businesses, rent support and mortgage relief for October, but nothing is going to happen until November. So if you are a small business owner in the province of Ontario and you get this hopeful moment where the federal government is finally going to change their flawed plan so it's tenant-driven now, and then the revenue threshold is going to be a little bit more reasonable and they can directly apply for it, but you're not going to see it until November and the details—it actually needs legislation. Right now, it's just a Liberal promise that they've lobbed out there, and still businesses are not going to see any support.

This is from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. This is Laura Jones. She says, "It's really challenging. We've heard from businesses. They are putting" their rent "on their credit cards, they're borrowing from friends and family, they're going to the bank but they're really uncomfortable taking on more debt." She's the executive vice-president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

If you follow the money—and I like to follow the money because sometimes the money tells the truth about what's actually happening—of the \$3 billion that was promised for rent abatement at that flawed federal program, \$3 billion was assigned but only \$1.8 billion actually got out the door. So think of the businesses that failed because the province just waited for the federal government to make some sort of an adjustment, and now they're still content to wait until November. It's unconscionable.

Jeff Clarke, who is the president of Murdoch Travel in Barrie, Ontario—I saw the member here—says he implored the government to offer retroactive assistance to cover the months when he and other businesses were missing out. "You have a program. You have the money budgeted for it," he says. "Let's use that." What a reasonable request, is it not? It's just a reasonable request.

1510

If you look at what the Financial Accountability Officer told us just last week, what a concept, right? First of all, I just want to say I'm so thankful that we have the Financial Accountability Officer, because he pulls back the layers

on where the money is and where the money is not going. This morning, my colleague from Kitchener Centre was successful in securing support for an independent seniors' advocate which would be independent and would not be partisan. These officers of the Legislature are an important part of our democracy.

So when Peter Weltman announced just last week that we're in a tight spot, I have to say—the structural deficit is \$14 billion after the pandemic. Of course, they projected a record \$37.2-billion deficit this year. However, the Premier said, "Listen, the economy's going to come back. We're going to turn this economy on, the likes of which people have never seen." Mr. Speaker, that's what the Premier said. You know what? The economy will not come back if businesses are out of business.

The government is dead set against this concept of having direct financial support for businesses. Meanwhile, businesses have borne the entire brunt of this pandemic. They are in debt. The government offered them a break on their eHealth premiums and also on WSIB, but just deferred to six months and then they came asking for that money after six months, after giving no real direct support. It's almost like an abusive relationship, Mr. Speaker. You promise something, you say you're valuable—it's actually emotionally abusive.

But I just want to say—and I hope that we can agree on this—that it is difficult to turn the economy on if we lose a majority of main street businesses. That is why we came to the government, because we did buy into this concept that we're all in this together. It sounds really good. And we have come forward with a number of recommendations that are respectful and represent what we heard at the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. It really is a Save Main Street plan, and we want the government to adopt some of these ideas. Why they don't, I have no idea. We are willing to come to the table. We are willing to partner in investing in businesses in the province of Ontario. Why would a majority government not say, "You know what? If the official opposition is there with us, then let's do this"? It is the key to our economic recovery.

Our plan aims to keep workers on the payroll: "Immediately order a ban on all evictions, lockouts or eviction threats by commercial landlords." You know who is ending businesses prematurely? The landlords, by locking out progressive businesses.

We would have the province, "Institute a utility payment freeze for small and medium-sized businesses." It may not be a huge amount of money for a lot of them, but at least it's a signal to them that, "You know what? We understand that energy costs in the province of Ontario are a major burden for businesses." And God knows, the energy file is a pretty messy file. We know this from all the years that we've been here.

We would also, "Offer a stand-alone emergency 75% commercial rent subsidy." This directly comes from businesses that came to SCOFEA. "The province should offer a monthly subsidy of up to \$10,000 until the pandemic ends," because the planning around the pandemic has

been so poor and so irresponsible that this has actually put us in a very precarious place, from a recovery perspective.

An investment in public health and an investment in prevention around COVID-19, and around active and ongoing contact tracing—I mean, the government just put out an advertisement last week offering 500 new positions for contact tracing at 20 bucks an hour. It is October. It defies—I guess it's better late than never, and I'm happy that those people are going to get hired, because you have to know where the virus is spreading and who is spreading it.

That's another thing that businesses have asked of us. They have said, "Give us some transparency." What's all this cloak-and-dagger stuff? This lack of transparency around the provincial planning table and who the Premier is listening to or who the Premier is not listening to undermines confidence in our plan as a province. I see it so very clearly. I don't understand why it's this cloak-and-dagger thing.

We didn't even know that the government was going to cancel Halloween until this morning, which also is contradictory on so many levels. How can you have 25 students in a cramped classroom in a 125-year-old school with poor ventilation and then say that kids can't go outside with masks on and sanitizer? Even the federal medical officer of health says we can figure this out, but not the Ford government. If we can't figure out Halloween, does that instill confidence in you, Mr. Speaker?

We're willing to come to the table. We're willing to support businesses from a rent abatement perspective. We certainly want to create a fund for businesses that face historic barriers. The Canadian Black Chamber of Commerce has identified some systemic issues. We would be very targeted in how we would address those barriers that racialized people and women experience in the province of Ontario so that we all recover, not just some people in that K economy model.

We feel strongly, as everybody should—we hear the rhetoric around keeping workers safe, creating a safe reopening and remote work set-up fund for small businesses. This came directly from businesses that came to SCOFEA. They said, "Listen, we know that the new normal is going to look very different. Can you help us adapt to this new normal? Can you put some money on the table? Can you set up a fund specifically so we can retool and redesign and get back into the economy?" Has that happened? It has not.

We feel very strongly about this next point: It's bring in made-in-Ontario paid sick days for all. I thought that this pandemic would recalibrate this government in many respects, because you have to understand that if people do not have sick days, they will go to work sick. When they go to work sick, other people get sick. The community spread happens. It compromises productivity. People need an option to not be penalized for being sick in Ontario.

The federal government has put money on the table. Why has the government not put that money into play? That is an investment in our health and safety, and therefore, it's an investment in our economy. There is no

good rationale for not putting the federal dollars so that this is not a burden on businesses. Businesses don't want their employees to come in sick, because that actually puts their whole business model at risk.

We have called on the Ontario government to create a permanent provincial plan to provide paid sick days for all workers. The government will say, "We can't afford it." You're sitting on \$9.3 billion that you've not put into play. The Premier said in the press conference last week, "We're going to get that money out." But \$9.3 billion just doesn't get out the door in a week—I mean, unless you're a Liberal. They did spend money very quickly, I have to say, but not in a smart way, not in a strategic-investment-perspective way.

Then we would be very focused on the 51% of the population which are women. We would focus on the "she-covey." The pandemic has disproportionately impacted women, both when it comes to health and personal finances, leading experts to dub the recession a "she-cession."

Women initially experienced more job losses than men, as we often do, and jobs have been slower to return for women. Women have shouldered more unpaid caregiving responsibilities, with children out of school and child care. Women, traditionally, also care for elderly parents needing more support. Meanwhile, women, especially women of colour, are more likely to be in jobs that put them at risk of COVID-19—because they don't have paid sick days—from low-wage jobs in grocery stores and pharmacies to personal support workers in hospitals, long-term-care homes and home care agencies.

There will be no recovery without a she-covey. Women, especially women of colour, need policies and programs that support and that work for them. If you ignore this vast majority—51% of the population—then you are actually planning a half measure. You're looking at a half measure to economic recovery, and that will slow our economic recovery on that perspective.

1520

Under the she-covey, we also have capping class sizes at 15. When people hear that the government voted against investing in keeping classes at 15 in order for social distancing, which was the best advice under the medical officer of health at the time—when they hear that the government refused to do that step, they definitely heard that this government only cares about saving money. That's what it translates to. I don't know if they will speak about it when we get a chance to have a debate, which I always love. But that is what people see. When a government willingly, intentionally, puts 25 to 30 students in a classroom, then they are basically saying it's not worth the money, and that is a sad state of affairs. What we heard at SCOFEA throughout the whole summer, but mostly through August and into September, is that—businesses asked us to have a safe start-up for school. They said they cannot ramp up their businesses if their employees have children at home. So the investment piece, which this government clearly avoided altogether, is that if you keep our schools safe, if you ensure the resources are there for

the custodians, if you make sure that the modelling actually is coherent and easily applied regardless of where you are—if you're a bus driver in northern Ontario or if your kids get on the TTC here in Toronto. It makes good fiscal sense to invest in the safety of our educational institutions, so they begged us to. A tide turned during finance committee, when, basically, businesses said, "Please, please get this right"—and, I have to say, the government did not.

Creating more child care spaces: Last week, our member from London West, our deputy House leader, revealed the changes that are going to be made around regulatory changes to the number of children who are in child care. The phone in my office was ringing off the hook. People are definitely not supportive of the government creating larger infant and toddler classrooms. When the minister stood up and said, "Well, it's the most expensive system we've got," that clearly, again, indicated that it's too costly to keep our youngest citizens safe. People will say, "Well, these kids are resilient," but their parents and their grandparents are not. So we're very focused on making sure that those early investments around prevention and around spread are investments in our economic recovery.

We're very committed, as well, to the dedicated retraining fund, and this also came from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce—target support for those who are hurt worst by the crisis, including women and racialized Ontarians, with dedicated retraining funds and an office to advance women's apprenticeships, as recommended by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. That's a great idea. You guys love the chamber. Let's do that.

My son is apprenticing as an electrician right now. I have one kid who goes up to the attic to go to Conestoga, and I have one kid who goes to the basement to go to Conestoga—different programs. He's so busy. He works with a Kitchener company called Wired. He's almost at 7,000 hours; he has to finish 9,000. He has to do this classroom component, which is pretty difficult during a pandemic.

We need skilled tradespeople. Let's include women and women of colour in that career path. Let's train them up. Let's get it going. Is that in Bill 215? No, that's not in—and it's not in Bill 213. It may be in the fall economic statement. I guess I'm holding my breath on that, because it actually needs to be supported through resources; it just can't be the Premier playing all Mr. Dad-like and saying, "We're going to get this done." You need a plan and a strategy to make it happen, and you need dedicated funding to make it happen.

The fourth point about our Save Main Street strategy, which is very different than this bill that the government has tabled, really addresses insurance gouging, and I know that I'm not the only member of provincial Parliament here in Ontario where businesses have told us that the insurance sector is not honouring business interruption premiums. This is a huge issue.

We would like the province to work with the insurance industry and the Financial Services Regulatory Authority

to institute an auto insurance grace period for taxis and car sharing. You've got one little piece in here under the Highway Traffic Act on licensing; why not include insurance in that? It's right here. You're talking about the shared economy, which is not really about sharing, but it's a missed opportunity for a piece of legislation.

We would ask to stop the insurance gouging and stop insurance corporations from denying coverage based on COVID-19. It defies all logic, really. Depending on who you talk to, people have various stages of anger with regard to the insurance sector. If you're in Brampton and you're a driver and your rates are almost 30% higher than somebody in Waterloo region, for instance, those folks have every right to be angry. In fact, that is definitely a regulatory change that the government should be looking at, because it's a barrier for people to enter: to deliver, for instance, or to offer transit services.

We are definitely interested in addressing the insurance sector. How the government has gone this long—it was the first question that I had for the finance minister back in April. It was the first time. I said, "What are you going to do about this?" The insurance sector has turned its back on businesses that never had a claim for two years, Mr. Speaker. They've seen their premiums go up, and the restaurant and bar sector has seen their insurance coverage actually not be offered.

It's pretty hard to open a business if you don't have insurance, especially if you are serving alcohol, and so much of the economic recovery strategy of this government is very pinned on the buck-a-beer model. We are not against ensuring that people can access some alcohol, but it is not the be-all and end-all. It will not bring back the 750,000 jobs—unless you're looking at jobs that we'll require to assist with the addiction issues that may come at the end of it, but that's not a smart investment either.

The final piece on insurance is that we would mandate commercial vehicle insurance rebates. There have been fewer vehicles on the road, fewer accidents, so insurance companies are rolling in a windfall of cash, and they're doing very well, as are the banks. Do you know what? The banks are doing okay. From restaurant delivery services to taxis and trucking companies, mandating commercial vehicle insurance rebates will keep people who drive for a living behind the wheel. We need to move goods and services across the province.

The final thing from the restaurants: I think the restaurant sector, when they came to us at finance—I know other members heard it loud and clear, that the population is just not there anymore. The office buildings are empty, right? We should be trying to house people in those things. When Starbucks came and said that they were down to 10%—one of the busiest Starbucks in Ontario and, in fact, Canada—you can't run a business if the people aren't there.

The other part of that for restaurants is that we would definitely limit food delivery fees. This has been done in other jurisdictions, namely New York. Many bars and restaurants are struggling with delivery fees charged by third-party delivery operations. Predatory fees that can be

as high as 30% are making restaurateurs' margins razor-thin. The government should limit food delivery fees and charges from third-party delivery services, in combination with mandating commercial vehicle insurance rebates. A strong food delivery business can help restaurants keep their kitchen open and their staff on payroll.

This proposal actually makes so much sense. It's a win-win-win, and it doesn't cost the government anything. That's the other thing, Mr. Speaker: It's actually just doing the right thing for small and medium-size businesses. That 30% premium on delivery charges—how can that be justified? It certainly cannot.

What we've learned is that I guess we're really not in this together, because all of those ideas that are in our Save Main Street strategy and plan—none of them are in Bill 215. None of them are in Bill 213, which we'll be debating later on this week. And so, we are in a bit of a predicament here wondering what people are doing on that side of the House.

1530

What Bill 215 actually does is it prohibits municipal noise bylaws, except as authorized by the minister via provincial regulation in connection to the delivery of goods to retail stores, hotels and restaurants. This would make permanent an existing provision that was enacted by regulation during the pandemic.

It would amend section 39.1 of the Highway Traffic Act to clarify that a taxi, limo, Uber or Lyft driver must have a licence to carry passengers. This seems like a reasonable thing. We're going to support that.

In order to help unlicensed taxi and limo drivers that must compete unfairly against unlicensed and possibly uninsured Uber and Lyft drivers, the bill also increases section 39.1 fines—not by a lot, but it's consistent. We're supportive of this. If you don't have a licence, if you don't have insurance, you should be fined.

It amends the Ontario Food Terminal Act to allow the terminal to sell a wider range of agricultural products and not just fruit and produce. The terminal may also now sell a few non-agricultural products as long as the terminal primarily sells agricultural products. The terminal manager may now be appointed by the minister instead of the LG.

These are four things that this bill does. If you look at the legislation—and Peter Kormos always said, "Read the act." It amends four schedules; that's it.

There are other things that the minister has said he will do, but to date—actually, I do want to cover those. Two of them have been talked about by the minister. Bill 215 is one part of the government's overall main street recovery plan. Most of the plan consists of policy and regulatory changes that do not need new legislation. That's an important piece, Mr. Speaker. The government didn't need to bring a new act for the vast majority of the changes that are happening here before us.

The plan includes changes to programs or policies that were in the works before the pandemic. You were already moving in some of the deregulation areas prior to this. They're not even pandemic-specific.

I can guarantee you that the food terminal of Ontario did not come and say, “Can we sell some other things other than food and produce?” They didn’t. That was not a priority item that from—I mean, we don’t object to it, but we just don’t see why, in the middle of an economic crisis, in a health crisis that this has become a priority. So we’re supportive of that.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has also said the \$1,000 that Minister Sarkaria has said that they are going to share with businesses to help with PPE installation—that’s great; we support that. It’s seven months too late, but it is better than nothing at all. At least this is a grant, because many of the measures that the government has sort of moved down the line have been loans, right? They’re very against saying to businesses, “We’re going to recognize that these costs are prohibitive and that you likely will not be able to pay this back for years and years and years.” And so, the idea of debt forgiveness for the businesses that are trying to help us recover as an economy is a foreign concept for the government. And yet, it is the smart thing to do. It is not a handout; it is an investment.

I know that we see things very differently sometimes, but this is actually what businesses said to us. They said, “Listen, don’t consider this a handout if you help us with our rent. Consider this as an investment in our economic recovery so we can keep people hired, so people have money for their rent, so people can invest it back in the community.” I mean, this is a circular economy concept. It’s not trickle-down economics—this money is an investment in keeping the province going.

From a background perspective, we are obviously supportive of the \$1,000 grant for personal protective equipment. There are very few details on actually how that’s going to happen. And they’re going to make the emergency regulation allowing bars and restaurants to include alcohol in takeout orders. This policy and regulatory changes do not require new legislation and are not even part of Bill 215, so there’s really a very strong disconnect between what’s in the legislation and what the minister is saying out in public. Just so you know, we’re supportive of that.

Part of the other language that the minister has said is that they support the previously announced extension of the existing Digital Main Street program. BIAs came to us—it’s an administered program. This was under review from April 2018, as are the small business enterprise centres which is also part of the plan but not part of the legislation. You can see why, technically, we should be debating exactly what’s in the legislation, but it’s so thin that it’s hard to fill an hour on Bill 215.

Mr. Mike Harris: Pass it off to somebody else, then.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, let somebody else? But aren’t you enjoying—I think I’m on a roll here, but anyway.

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: There’s no apparent reason to table this piece of legislation separately from Bill 213, except for the political value of passing something that’s pretending to be a save main street recovery act. This really isn’t the time to be going through the motions here on where businesses are in Ontario. There are a few ongoing issues that we have seen. I started off by saying how truly disrespectful I think it is of the government to bring forward a piece of legislation which doesn’t reflect what we heard. I just quickly pulled out some of the things that we did hear through the summer, particularly on culture and heritage because this is an area of the economy that had come under attack, I think, prior to the pandemic. A lot of the delegations were really just asking the government to stop cutting them or reinstate some of the funding.

I know the Speaker and the finance critic will know how important arts and culture and heritage are to the economy. The return on investment, when they actually see some investment, is very clear. For instance, Soulepepper Theatre Co. said, “We ask that you consider multi-year measures that support the financial resilience of our sector, including direct recovery investment and initiatives to incentivize charitable giving through approved tax incentives and matched funding programs.” That was one theatre company.

Live Nation Toronto said, “Existing initiatives, such as the tax rebate for landlords who house live music venues, were confusing, I believe, to some operators and the buy-in wasn’t significant. We need to access funds directly.”

Then, Coach House Books said, “The top-up to the Ontario book fund would be a great start, because it would give us the opportunity to make sure that we’re prepared for this new reality, post-COVID-19.”

Does Bill 215 address any of these? It does not—nor does Bill 213, nor does any other piece of legislation that the government has brought forward.

The Canadian Live Music Association said, “To echo the recommendations we put forward in the music panel’s report, we will need sector-specific funding to ensure that shuttered companies and individuals can survive the months ahead.”

The Ontario Museum Association said, “We recommend an Ontario museum relief fund that can be applied consistently across the museum sector to help stabilize museums.”

It really is unclear what’s going to happen to that sector as a whole, but they were very clear in that they had some—the Canadian Arts Coalition, now this is good. They asked for “the establishment of a provincial stabilization fund for arts and culture...” This presentation, I remember, was strong. It made the case for those jobs, for the stability of the sector, for the longevity of some of the most creative sectors that we see in Ontario. They’ve asked for “the establishment of an integrated policy and funding program for the reopening of arts and culture.”

You can see that these folks came to the committee with a very earnest and honest and open outlook, saying, “We want to be part of the recovery. Help us be part of the recovery.”

And then, finally, from the same group, “An infrastructure funding program to support renovation and retrofit of existing cultural facilities to ensure that those public health protocols can easily be accommodated.” Not only is this good for the sector, but it actually creates jobs.
1540

I think of what REEP did and those environmental groups that came to the committee. They said, “Listen, there’s an opportunity here to not just survive but also thrive.” Investing in energy retrofitting and HVAC systems, particularly in our schools—this proposal to incentivize and to reward, if you will, energy retrofits, is actually a win-win-win, because you can’t outsource those jobs—those are good local jobs; you’re supporting apprenticeships and you’re supporting the skilled trades, which we all want; and also, there is a consumer protection perspective. So if there is a tax rebate, then you have to go through legitimate channels. So this addresses the underground economy, and then you actually get more tax revenue. Why this is not a major plank of any piece of legislation that the government brings forward is truly a missed opportunity. I’m hoping that some members are actually listening to some of this.

Those were some of the voices. I don’t want to pass this opportunity by, but David Marskell, who runs THEMUSEUM in Kitchener, says, “Our economic impact has been significant but we don’t have the funding from the province. We have three main asks for you to consider: that you fund the capital expansion bridging us to that bright future to help reboot the economy in that way; work with us and find new ways of meeting our mandate digitally, which is increasingly important; and review the criteria of core funding of unique, emerging, new types of museums like us, who have 100,000 people for core funding.”

When I read those, and I recall back when people did come to the committee, and then I see a piece of legislation like this, which only amends four schedules—the City of Toronto Act, the Highway Traffic Act, the Municipal Act, and the Ontario Food Terminal Act—I truly have to wonder what is going on over there.

The frustration that businesses are actually experiencing—I just want to bring Michael Wood into this conversation, because when this piece of legislation came out, I did my job as a critic. I reached out to the various organizations, which I now have fairly strong working relationships with, and I asked them for their feedback. So this is Michael Wood. He is a partner at Ottawa Special Events. He says, “As a small owner, I cannot begin to explain to you the hardships that I have been going through over the past eight months. Unless someone is in the same position, it may be possible to empathize, but it is impossible to understand completely.”

I think this is a major criticism of this government. There is an outstanding question out there about who this government is listening to, because if they were listening to businesses, we would have an insurance modification for businesses. If the government was listening to small businesses who are experiencing financial barriers around

paying their commercial rent, then the Commercial Tenancies Act would have been modernized by now, and that power imbalance would have been addressed.

This is from Ottawa Special Events; I just want to read a couple of things around what Michael Wood shared with us. This is about consistency. I feel very strongly, and I think that many people do, that this is a government that is reacting to a crisis on a regular basis. They are not being proactive in the way that they address emerging issues. Michael wants to share this:

“For the government to give restaurant owners less than 12 hours to shut down (leading into a long weekend after many supplies were purchased) is not reasonable.” They’re not saying that they don’t agree but they’re saying give them some clarity around communication. Give them the time to adapt. He says, “What are they expected to do with food and beverages they have purchased seeing as they will be closed for 28 days?”

Many businesses across this province are now coping with a sudden shutdown. “Most restaurants cannot afford a covered patio, heaters, the cost of propane or have the space set up for additional outdoor seating. This, of course, will be a massive problem when the temperatures” dip. All of us have restaurants who are going to be facing this in a go-forward basis. A thousand dollars is not going to cut it to try to heat an outdoor space.

And then he makes the point—and this is the inconsistency in what’s happening: “While federally regulated, Canadians are flying across the country on airplanes shoulder to shoulder for hours. How can dining in a restaurant with your friends and family for an hour be worse than being on a plane?” I know that we’ve all heard these cases from individual restaurants who have bought in hook, line and sinker. They have the best safety protocols; they have followed the public health guidelines.

Yet there are obviously bad actors in some of the hot spots. What the business community would want, Mr. Speaker, is they want to know who they are. They want to know where the outbreaks are, and our member this morning asked a question about this. Tell us where the outbreaks are and ensure that there’s an accountability piece, because right now, the lack of communication I think undermines confidence. When there is a lack of confidence in the economy and in the safety of businesses, then recovery becomes all the more difficult on a go-forward basis.

He has asked, “Furthermore, businesses that cannot sustain themselves throughout this crisis should not have outstanding HST payments sent to collections.” I asked this question the week before about how now the government has come calling for the debt deferrals around the health tax and around WSIB. Listen, the businesses don’t have it. They don’t have it. I was talking to a wedding operator not that long ago, and he said, “Listen, the deposits are not going back to individual couples, because I had to use those deposits to pay my hydro bill and to pay my rent.”

So you’re going to have a cascading effect of, really, economic and financial pain. Because no financial support

was on the table, businesses have dipped into their lines of credit, they have begged and borrowed from their families and their friends. There's a real lack of transparency around that happening.

But finally, Michael Wood mentions business insurance: "The provincial government needs to work with the federal government to mandate insurance companies to pay business interruption insurance. Companies have paid tens of thousands of dollars into ... premiums only to be stonewalled by 'force majeure clauses.' To add to this point, insurance companies have either not extended policy renewals to bars and nightclubs and restaurants or have reduced their coverage. Many restaurants have seen insurance companies raise their premiums." Is this okay with you? Is this okay that a restaurant paid hundreds and hundreds and thousands of dollars in premiums and then there is a crisis which interrupts their business and then the insurance policy company refuses to honour it? Is that okay? Because I don't think it's okay, and businesses don't—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from York Centre come to order, please.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And you can't say that it's not your responsibility. You can't say it's not your responsibility. You have to do something. It is price gouging. When the Premier saw Fine Foods or whatever charging \$37 for Lysol wipes, he addressed it. This is price gouging. Not honouring business interruption insurance is price gouging.

And this is from a business owner, too. I'm sharing what a business owner is experiencing. You can't discount it. I mean, I guess you can, because you didn't address it in this piece of legislation, but I'm asking you not to discount it. I'm asking the government to recognize that businesses cannot reopen if they can't access insurance. They can't reopen if those insurance premiums increase by 30%, as we've seen.

And so ignoring the insurance sector or just listening to them and not to businesses—and this goes back to my point about who Doug Ford is actually listening to. The Premier needs to listen to businesses. As I said at the beginning of my comments, if you had told me that seven months down the line we would still be having these conversations around direct financial support, why go through this process? Why go through and put all of these companies and businesses and dreamers through this process and then ignore what they had to say?

This is the Stratford Festival. I always like saying this one. They said, "We beseech you"—because, you know, they're Stratford—"to allow us a voice in the development of such reopening plans. Lives depend on getting it right; so do livelihoods."

1550

So the business community feels completely shut out of your plan, your planning process. It's like a black box. They have no idea how you are coming up with these proposals. One that really struck very close to home was the dance community. I just wrote the Premier about this,

because dance studios—we launched our Save Main Street strategy at a dance studio in Faisal Hassan's—what riding is that?

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: York South–Weston—beautiful dance studio, huge, circles everywhere, Plexiglas everywhere, sanitizer everywhere, masks everywhere. Dance studios are predominantly women-owned businesses—not all, but a majority of them are.

I have to say, I was completely impressed by the fact that six young dancers with one instructor in a very large room—and the joy that you saw in this process was really uplifting and hopeful. And listen, we all need that. We all need a little bit of that. But the dance studios across the province have been lumped in with fitness centres. Now, the dance community is greatly offended by this, and they're greatly motivated to actually do something about it.

So I have written, in conjunction with our arts and culture critic, the member from Toronto–St. Paul's. But this is one of the quotes from the national director of the Royal Academy of Dance, and this is from Clarke MacIntosh. The quote is, "While we understand that all dance training might have to stop in the interest of the broader societal emergency, if training of pre-professional dancers on prescribed syllabi is allowed to continue, the Royal Academy of Dance Canada would be remiss in not seeking clarification on behalf of those students. The Royal Academy of Dance considers these classes to be training sessions, not fitness classes, and so under the recently modified stage 2 restrictions are allowed to continue. Does the government of Ontario find this interpretation congruent with its current public health objectives?"

So dance studios across the province are seeking clarity on their classification. We're hopeful, working with public health officials, that appropriate information can be shared. Now, I have to say, I'm very encouraged because the minister responsible for culture and heritage was interviewed earlier today, and she agreed that it is unfair to lump dance studios in with fitness studios. But it raises the point, how did this happen? Who made this decision? If the minister agrees that it's an unfair practice to clump dance studios in with spin classes, drop-in spin classes, then who's making this decision? Who's guiding this process?

I actually have a citizen who reached out to me last week, and he's going to FOI. He wants to know. He wants to know the metrics. He wants to know the data. He wants to know the evidence. He wants to know who is sitting at the provincial planning system. I raise this because this all speaks to confidence. It speaks to confidence in the process. I think that we owe our businesses in this province not only a comprehensive strategy as we have proposed under Save Main Street, which would address many of the gaps in revenue to see them through to the end of this pandemic, but also, they would see a partner in government and that would make them, I think, have more confidence in the process, feel more supported and then also think about investing.

This was in the *Globe and Mail* just yesterday: “Small Business Owners Fear for Survival, Wish They Had Sold Out Earlier,” and this was a survey. KPMG Canada did a survey of small and mid-sized businesses in Canada and it “paints a dour picture, finding owners fearing for their companies’ survival and, in many cases, wishing they had sold out before. This could mean a wave of consolidation.”

I raise this because one of the key factors in strengthening the economy is investment. It’s business investment, and it’s business investment in modernizing their structure, in adapting to new societal and consumer needs: “In the KPMG poll of 500 company owners and decision-makers, 31% are worried that they lack the resources to keep their businesses running”—31%—“through lockdowns that could accompany the second wave of infections. More than a tenth say they do not have the cash to keep operating ‘for the foreseeable future.’”

Cash is king—or queen; it depends on whatever you want. That’s what they need. They need some form of revenue, because the pandemic has stolen that revenue from them.

“Indeed, 46% of business owners said they do not have an accurate picture of the value of their business owing to the effects of the pandemic.”

So even the people who are trying to get out of business can’t exit in a graceful manner.

Meanwhile, Walmart in Ontario is doubling down and increasing fees.

The critic for consumer protection, the member from Humber River–Black Creek, and I have written—we’re writing a lot of letters these days. We’re responding to a group of eight organizations representing commercial food and agricultural producers that wrote to the government requesting that it establish a grocery code of conduct. Is that in Bill 215? No. Does it make sense to have a code of conduct about what rules and guidelines are in place when you are in a state of emergency? We’ve challenged and we’ve asked the Premier to take some action on this.

This group said that—“Walmart’s decision to charge suppliers’ fees of 1.25% on goods sold in-store and 5% on goods sold online to support your company’s infrastructure upgrades, as a recent example for why such a code of conduct is necessary.

“During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ontario’s agri-food industry has been critical in maintaining our supply chain and keeping our province fed.” I hope we can all agree on that. “The new fees that Walmart is now imposing will further cut into the already razor-thin profit margins of these essential businesses.”

Let’s remember that last year Walmart reported a profit of \$134 billion. Do they need to be nickel-and-diming, with increased fees, these small businesses that supply that store? Should this be something that the government—this is a regulation that you should bring in. You should not let a major corporation like Walmart put extra burdens on small and medium-sized businesses. This is not supporting main street.

“Many producers and suppliers earn pennies on the dollar for each product they sell, and it is a harsh blow for

these companies to have to foot the bill for Walmart’s own infrastructure upgrades.”

Can you imagine—a company making \$134 billion a year increases their suppliers’ fees to 1.25% or 5% to fund the PPE that the government has brought in? That’s predatory. In the dictionary, there’s a picture of Walmart increasing their fees, right next to their \$134-billion profit margin line.

We are at a very interesting point in the history of our province. I’ve made the case that having a K-shaped economy, where the divide between those who have resources to make it through this economic hardship—some people are definitely thriving in this environment. We try to look holistically and inclusively at the province that we serve, and a growing number of people are facing more hardship than they ever thought. They are losing hope because they’re not seeing leadership from this government. When you look at Bill 215, which has a great title but has very little teeth to actually bring forward any measures that we heard first-hand from the people of this province and the businesses of this province, it’s disappointing.

We don’t have anything against changing the Ontario Food Terminal Act, and we don’t have anything against making sure that Uber drivers must have a licence and that they’re fined if they don’t have insurance. So we’re going to support this piece of legislation. We hope it goes to committee. If it goes to committee, we actually might make it a stronger piece of legislation that, for instance, addresses the imbalance from the insurance perspective.

So I leave it there. I have to say, once again, it is genuinely surprising to me that on October 20, 2020, I’m still asking the so-called “open for business” government to support businesses in the province of Ontario.

1600

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We now have an opportunity for questions and responses: the member for Barrie–Innisfil, who just missed out the last time on the opportunity to pose a question.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you for noticing that, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the opportunity to ask the member opposite a question.

I frequent Waterloo from time to time. My husband went to school there, and so we go down memory lane when we’re there. A big part of it is going to the St. Jacob’s market, and a big part of it is going to Morty’s for their wet Cajun wings. I’m sure the member has been to Morty’s a few times.

Whether it’s a small business like Morty’s and the great wings that they serve, or whether it’s St. Jacob’s market with all the great agricultural food they produce, a lot of what is in this bill really supports those industries, especially when we talk about policies like the Ontario Food Terminal.

My question to the member opposite is, when you talk about economic impactors like the St. Jacob’s market and like small businesses like Morty’s, what would you say to those businesses in terms of your support for this bill in making sure that those small businesses know we have

their back as all one government working together hand in hand?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm so happy that you raised Morty's, because I just met with Jay, a co-owner of Morty's, not that long ago. One of their biggest issues right now is their insurance premiums. They've expanded their patio—I'm sure the member has maybe checked it out—and they are still fighting their insurance agency to adapt to COVID-19. And they're not alone. I will say that Bill 215 doesn't address that and I would think that Morty's and the owner would be disappointed that the government has refused to engage the insurance sector.

This is from the Financial Post just from last week: "Canadian ... businesses, already reeling from the downturn sparked by the coronavirus pandemic, are facing yet another existential threat as insurance companies spike premiums or exit the space...." That's what I would say to Morty's.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Question?

Ms. Sara Singh: I'd like to thank the member from Waterloo for a very impassioned one-hour lead on this bill. Maybe we could have saved some trees and not brought it forward, because it really does very little for main street businesses.

My question to the member is around the insurance and some of those fixed costs that those small businesses have been incurring and that have been deferred and are piling up. Can you maybe share with us how this bill really does nothing to help those small businesses address those compounded costs that they're facing?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much for the question. The government of the day will say, "Well, you know, we can't do anything about insurance rates," but of course they can. Insurance is provincially regulated. There's a federal regulator, but you have a role to play to address barriers that businesses are facing.

"Even before COVID-19"—this is from the same Financial Post article—"insurers globally were scaling back from riskier businesses to improve performance. The pandemic's profit hits have accelerated the trend and led underwriters to exit from, or raise premiums in, select categories.

"Hospitality businesses, particularly those needing coverage for accidents caused by alcohol-impaired clients, were already seen as higher risk...."

So the government—we went through this fight with the Liberals when they were in government—has allowed the insurance sector to basically write their own rules. It's like the Wild West out there, and it's not helping businesses in Ontario.

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

Mr. Roman Baber: Speaker, it's good to be back after a couple of weeks away from the House. First of all, I am astonished that I am standing here on October 19, and I'm hearing the opposition party, the NDP, tell us that they're the party that supports business. I simply can't believe that. It defeats the entire *raison d'être* of your party, I say to you with respect. Of course, the member couldn't help

herself and still had to attack profit margins towards the ends of her submissions. I think that when businesses make money, it's a good thing, and so I would say that supporting business should also mean that we support their right to be profitable.

But with respect to the insurance issue—and by the way, I want to say that my heart bleeds for every single business that is suffering through this pandemic, and every single business that we may not see after this.

Specifically, with respect to the insurance issue, I'd like to pose a question to the member. Most—all—standard insurance policies exclude pandemics as insurable events. Do you propose that government comes to businesses and says, "No, despite what the contract says—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The member for Waterloo to respond.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I cannot believe that I'm hearing from a government member—actually, maybe I can—the defending of a Walmart profit margin of \$134 billion and then charging small mom-and-pop enterprises 1.5% to 5% premiums just for doing what they used to do before the pandemic.

This is a theme, Mr. Speaker, where the government is using the pandemic as cover to bring in policies that would never fly. But we know now who this government is listening to: It's listening to Walmart and not listening to the main street businesses that have supported this province through these very trying times.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions? The member for Sudbury.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you, Speaker, and also thank you to the member for Waterloo. This bill is incredibly tiny, so my hat's off to you for being able to speak to it for an hour. It's seven pages, and even double-spaced it wouldn't take up that much room.

You talked about dance studios, and it made me think of my daughter's dance studio, Dance Evolution, and Miss Tay and all of the work that she did to have a safe re-opening, to the point where my daughter, who's volunteering to get her high school hours there, said, "Why can't schools be like this? Why can't we have these systems in place at our schools?"

I was thinking about Miss Tay from Dance Evolution, and although her business is doing well, they're struggling because of having to restructure and the dance competitions that closed last spring, but one thing we talk about a lot and I haven't heard very much during the debate is the she-session and the needed she-covery. I just wondered if you wanted to expand on that.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much to the member from Sudbury for the question. Listen, I didn't know that much about dance studios until they started telling me about their environment, but you have to be open to listening to them. You actually have to meet them halfway and say, "Why are we comparing a children's dance studio of 10,000 square feet to a drop-in mini fitness centre, where people can just drop in?" The dancers are registered. Public health has inspected the site. There are policies and protocols in place. Maybe they'll even be able

to access the \$1,000 that nobody knows how to get out the door.

I think that the question comes from a place of not having transparency around how the government is making decisions. I'm glad, though, that the minister has agreed that it was unfair to include dance studios in with fitness centres.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question to the member for Don Valley North.

Mr. Vincent Ke: I have met many small business owners in my riding. Many of them changed their business model, moving their business online and learning ways to keep their employees and their patrons safe, because they understand that in this difficult time, everyone has to adapt to this new situation and work hard together to get through it. Many businesses are seeing progress.

My question to the member of Waterloo is, at this complex time, do you agree that to assist businesses to change and to adapt so they can move forward is the government's first priority?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you for the question. I appreciate that. I just want to quote from this Financial Post article that says:

"Make Second-Wave Support for Small Business Targeted and Workable...."

"After months of warnings, the second wave of COVID-19 has arrived and Canadians are gearing up for another long fight against the virus. One of the biggest lessons we can take from the first wave is that many of Canada's small businesses cannot win this fight alone."

So my question back is, why are businesses still struggling so much? Because the strategies and the policies that have been brought forward by this government have been abstract. They have not been fully communicated. There are inconsistencies in messaging. Then there are pieces of legislation like Bill 215—it's not unsupportable, but there's really not too much to support in it, and businesses deserve more from the government.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My quick question would be, after all of this consultation that we heard—you and I were on this committee—my point is, I don't know what committee they were in. It's like Bizarro World. We heard one thing and this slim bill comes out with another.

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The question is, what about COVID-19 testing? That's an important thing for businesses to stay open. Businesses in my riding are not able to access timely COVID-19 testing.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Obviously, contact tracing, access to testing in a timely manner is now an economic barrier. We have people who want to go back to work, and they need to go back to work, and yet they are waiting on a test. It's completely unacceptable and completely preventable. Businesses in Ontario deserve so much more.

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: It's a pleasure to be back. As some of the other members have mentioned here, it has been a while, so it's good to see that everybody is healthy and back in the Legislature.

It's great to be able to rise today to be able to speak to the second reading of Bill 215, the Main Street Recovery Act, which was introduced by the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction, and to provide my support for this timely and important piece of legislation.

There is no doubt that small businesses play a critical role in our provincial economy. I think we would all agree on that. They provide employment opportunities and are responsible for the majority of net employment growth. These businesses also deliver goods and services that we all enjoy. Small businesses account for 98% of all businesses across the province and employ close to 2.4 million Ontarians. Small businesses are operated by hard-working, first-generation Canadians or successive generations who took a financial risk to chase their dream.

But for small businesses in my riding of Oakville and across the province, they have been experiencing their darkest days, since March of this year. This unprecedented time has devastated their revenue and the investments that they have poured into their businesses.

I'm proud that this government is taking additional action, with this legislation, to help small businesses recover and thrive. Owners have been vocal that they need government help. This bill will enable small businesses to meet the demands of the pandemic and help them operate.

I want to see family businesses passed down to the next generation and other small businesses thrive for decades. This bill will help remove even more unnecessary red tape and regulations, as well as modernize regulations for these job creators to keep pace with the new way of life in our province.

Speaker, this proposed legislation will be an essential component of our government's main street recovery plan. The recovery plan builds upon more than \$10 billion in urgent relief and support provided through the COVID-19 action plan. Within the COVID-19 action plan, measures to help businesses have included lowering electricity rates, providing an interest- and penalty-free period to make payments on a majority of provincially administered taxes, \$1.8 billion in property tax deferrals for individuals and businesses, and \$1.9 billion in relief by allowing employers to defer Workplace Safety and Insurance Board payments for up to six months. We have also allowed businesses to make requests for exemptions on rules that were implemented, partnered with the federal government to implement the rent assistance program, and put forward the Ontario Made program for customers to easily identify, access and purchase local products—it will promote Ontario's homegrown products. We want Ontario products to be visible and the first choice for consumers. These previous measures have all been well received, and the COVID-19 action plan has laid the foundation for additional resources to help small businesses in their time of need. The recovery plan has been designed to help small businesses in their main area of need.

The government has been consulting with owners, employees, economists, and associations in round tables and virtual meetings to learn how we can assist in improving operations, providing support and eliminating unnecessary costs. New programs and services like PPE grants for main street businesses and direct support in local communities through the small business COVID-19 recovery network are being offered as a response, and this legislation will improve the regulatory aspect of running a business.

As we all know, PPE has become essential in our lives. Small businesses want to ensure a safe experience in their store for both customers and employees. This is why within our plan we are providing a one-time grant of up to \$1,000 for small businesses with two to nine employees to procure PPE.

Our recovery plan brings together legislation, programs and services to help businesses recover from the effects of the pandemic.

Let's start, Speaker, with red tape. We all must know that Ontario has the most red tape of any jurisdiction in the world. With over 380,000 pieces of regulation, we are the most over-regulated jurisdiction in the world—double the number of regulations, for example, than British Columbia. So red tape is a hindrance on small business that only adds costs and slows production to get goods and services to market.

Our government has been focused since day one on reducing the burdensome red tape facing small businesses. We are not waiting to take steps to improve the business environment because red tape does not eliminate itself. Our effort has been reflected in our province going from a C+ under the previous government to an A- in red tape reduction as graded by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. This is an achievement our government is proud of, and the people of Ontario should be proud of.

With a C+ the members on this side of the House knew we had to get down to work. We have been awarded the highest recorded grade since 2011. Real action has been taken to unburden these businesses, and we continue to slash unnecessary duplications, modernize regulations and remove costly barriers, which is a major focus of this legislation. This pandemic has only exposed new ways to take additional steps.

There's also the food terminal aspect. We talked a little bit about Ontario-grown food and the importance of that here within our province. Regarding this legislation as it pertains to that, one of the changes this bill proposes to make is supporting the distribution of local food and food products by increasing the range of products sold at the Ontario Food Terminal. The Ontario Food Terminal is Canada's largest wholesale fruit and produce terminal, which provides an outlet for Ontario growers to sell their product, not only within our province but beyond our borders to the Maritimes, Quebec and western Canada. Ontario has a diverse and abundant agricultural sector.

Importantly, the terminal is an avenue for independent business to compete with larger businesses that have

advantages, such as purchasing power in the market. With over 5,000 registered buyers employing a minimum of 20 workers, the facility contributes at least 100,000 direct and indirect jobs to the Ontario economy, and this number does not take into account the growers and the farm workers who are the sole source of the products and goods.

With the crucial role the terminal plays for small businesses, the number of products is not as extensive as it could be. This is why we are proposing adjustments to the Ontario Food Terminal Act. Thousands of small businesses, including farms and independent grocery stores to restaurants, rely on the food terminal to succeed. We are assisting their recovery in the agri-food business' growth by enabling sellers to offer more products for sale to increase their revenues across even more products. Consumers also benefit from finding a wider variety of local goods and fresh produce.

These modernization amendments acknowledge that small businesses have a wider variety of goods that can be sold than is currently allowed. Expanding revenue helps to secure jobs, which in turn makes a positive impact on our economy through spending.

My sense from hearing from the other side in the opposition is that they seem supportive of this, so I'm happy to see that they are supportive of this component of the legislation.

I'd like to now move on to the taxi industry. This is an industry that many of us have experienced as we may take a taxi or a limousine to Pearson airport. This is an essential business. It's essential for many workers to get to and from work. The people employed in the taxi and limousine industry work tirelessly to get individuals safely to their destination. We need to protect them from unfair competition.

Illegal operators might not be something we readily think of, but they create competition that harms the legal owners and operators. In order to protect those arriving at our airports and the legal taxi and limo drivers, we are taking action. I'm sure everybody here has been to Pearson—and I know personally I have gone through the airport many times where I've been approached by illegal operators. Not only is it dangerous from a health point of view and a safety point of view, but it's impeding on the legal operators that pay a licence to go there. Taking swift and tough action on these illegal operators I think will make everybody in this province safer and our taxi and industry drivers thrive.

1620

Currently, the fine for offences related to picking up a passenger for the purpose of transporting him or her for compensation without the required licence, permit or authorization is between \$300 and \$20,000. To dissuade the illegal operators, the fine amount will be increased to between \$500 and \$30,000. I think that will be a big disincentive for illegal operators to operate at our airport and dissuade them from going there. Increasing fines signifies a tougher stance against illegal operators stealing customers from the taxi and limo drivers who have gone through the proper channels to get their licence, and will

aid in this sector's recovery. I hope the opposition will support this component of this legislation as well.

Now, Speaker, I'd like to focus the next component of my speech on expanded delivery. This is a crucial amendment that is proposed in the legislation. At the onset of the pandemic, I remember news stories and visiting stores where the shelves were noticeably bare of essential items. People were unsure of the situation and what toll it could potentially take. Even though stores could be replenished with the supply and distribution centres, this was not occurring at the beginning of the pandemic, when goods were not reaching stores in a timely manner.

To rectify this situation, our government lifted restrictions in March, enabling the delivery of goods 24 hours a day, seven days a week, between the retailer and the distribution centre. Allowing this to happen was achieved by waiving noise bylaws across municipalities. This restored confidence in the consumer to know that goods were going to be available. To quote the president and CEO of the Retail Council of Canada, "We applaud the Ontario Government for temporarily lifting time-of-day restrictions on roadways and deliveries for our retailers." This adjustment helped retailers and grocery stores and got needed products on the store shelves instead of sitting in a warehouse. Ultimately, everybody in this province and this Legislature benefited from this act.

This proposed legislation seeks to make this temporary measure permanent. When flexibility was required, we acted swiftly. Retailers are asking for this flexibility to continue, and we are listening to their feedback because they know their businesses more than we do, and these businesses know when their ideal time is to receive deliveries. If passed, this bill is going to allow the timely and efficient movement of goods and supplies to grocery stores, drug marts, other retailers and restaurants.

In addition, Speaker, receiving a delivery for the store shelves means potential revenue for the business. Businesses rely on carrying goods that customers demand. If shelves are lacking items, the customers take their money elsewhere, and it can cause reputational damage to the business for not having adequate stock. The difference between having the good for the customer or not is an employee's job that depends on store revenue.

Speaker, there may be subsequent positive implications if this measure becomes permanent. Two pilot studies have demonstrated that society may benefit as a whole. Mainly, it will reduce rush hour traffic. Fewer transport trucks and other delivery vehicles will have to compete with drivers on the roads as they try to meet the window permitting deliveries within the noise bylaw. Again, I think this is something we can all agree on: less traffic in rush hour. Moreover, this reduces fuel costs for businesses since the delivery vehicles can travel with ease throughout the day, when the roads have fewer cars.

People will see a reduction in rush hour traffic after a long day of work. Of course, when there is a reduction in rush hour traffic and vehicle congestion is less on our highways and major roadways, it has a positive effect on the environment. Less carbon dioxide is emitted when

vehicles move between destinations without frequent idling.

This amendment is helping our supply chain to get goods to market, and is a benefit for businesses and customers. To once again quote the president and CEO of the Retail Council of Canada, "Off-peak delivery will translate into an estimated 18% increase in the movement of goods in Ontario which is crucial for retailers and restaurants as they strive to achieve efficiencies during these challenging times."

I would also like to quote the Caledon mayor, Allan Thompson, who stated, "The passing of this bill will be welcome news and a big win for our local businesses, the environment and residents commuting throughout the greater Toronto-Hamilton area."

This bill has the support of many mayors and retailers, and I think benefits everyone in Ontario. Again, I hope the opposition will support this component of the legislation. When changes benefit businesses and society, they are worth implementing, and I strongly believe this is something that all the members can agree on.

As I've said earlier, this bill is just one component of the larger main street recovery plan. The recovery plan also includes Ontario's Small Business Strategy. The strategy is a long-term framework that will guide the government's actions for small business and entrepreneurs to rebuild, reinvest and create well-paying jobs right across Ontario. It is based upon five pillars: lowering costs, increased exports, accelerating technology adaptation, developing talent, and encouraging entrepreneurship, succession planning and diversity. Each of these pillars will remain competitive during the pandemic and beyond.

It is clear to see how the amendments in this bill are supporting many of these pillars. For instance, the amendments are cutting red tape, specifically by allowing deliveries at any time of the day. Additionally, increased exports will be realized by expanding the products sold through the Ontario Food Terminal. This will help boost local goods and products sold in the domestic market, as well as some of the northern states in the United States.

Through all of these changes, we encourage entrepreneurship by making it easier to operate a business in Ontario. Business owners and prospective entrepreneurs expect that the government has their back. Removing hurdles can go a long way for a business to attract new buyers and loyal customers. As our province recovers, it will remain open for business.

Other vital initiatives will complement the changes in this legislation. Our government is working to empower small business owners to increase revenues and find additional opportunities to keep their staff and actually hire more. Particularly, we are committed to exploring options to permanently allow restaurants and bars to make alcohol delivery with food takeout. Over the summer, when I was engaging with constituents, the restaurant owners I talked to were really appreciative of removing the restriction on alcohol delivery. This opened up another revenue stream to contribute to their growth and help cover some of their costs.

As our government works to implement programs from the recovery plan, we are communicating this to small business owners using the small business recovery web page. This page supports small business with recovery needs in one location. This centralization saves time when looking for how to reopen safely and is less burdensome to learn about, apply for and access resources and supports. Reducing search time has a significant advantage for the owner, which is redirecting time to running their business.

Speaker, we have just over two minutes left, but as I wrap up my discussion, I want to reiterate how important small businesses are in each of our ridings and the importance of legislation—and that's every single riding in this Legislature. The members on this side of the House know how vibrant small businesses are and their role as job creators. As I mentioned, 98% of the businesses in Ontario are small businesses. They are critical to creating jobs.

We need to continue to think of small businesses and help them recover. Promoting shop local helps to raise awareness of companies in our community, and it will encourage consumer confidence to drive revenue. Over the past several months, I'm glad to see that many members are promoting local businesses from all sides in the chamber through this campaign.

Our government continues to introduce legislation with the purpose of making Ontario a better place to start and operate a business. The key to the legislation is finding ways to modernize and keep pace with changing times, because this will allow businesses to better compete with the growing competition. We cannot fall behind as a province, and as we chart a path of recovery, there is no better time to listen to feedback and implement changes that help drive success. The least we can do is provide small businesses with the advantage of new and relevant regulations.

This proposed legislation is fundamental in assisting our previous efforts aimed towards small business. The bill will help businesses by saving them precious time and money to invest in their recovery and maintain or improve standards to help their workers and customers, and keep the environment healthy and safe.

1630

This goal will be achieved by enhancing supply chain management, promoting innovation across various sectors and modern regulations with focused and effective rules, and improving existing standards to keep Ontario workers and families healthy and safe and protect our environment and the public interest. Smarter and more efficient regulations that use digital pathways where possible are also easier and faster to comply with.

I'd like to call upon the members of the opposition to support this bill. I believe there's a lot of common interest in passing this bill, and it's great for the province of Ontario. With that, I'd like to thank the Speaker for allowing me the opportunity to speak today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. It is time for questions and responses.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'd like to speak to Bill 125, pretending to be a main street recovery act. The issue I have, quite frankly, is what's not in here. The insurance premiums have doubled and tripled for small businesses. It doesn't matter whether it's in Niagara Falls; it doesn't matter if it's in Pelham, whether it's Lincoln and St. Catharines. In Niagara, insurance rates are—they're being gouged by insurance companies. Some of these businesses, by the way, aren't even open and they're still paying that ridiculous rate.

Now, I paid quite attention to your leader, our Premier, Premier Ford, and he gave the insurance companies, just last week, a second warning to fix the problem. Do you know what I heard today? Nothing. So maybe you could take that back to your party to fix the insurance rates for our small and medium-sized businesses.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: When one is in government, one represents society as a whole. We have to balance interests. I can tell you that the Premier has, in the past—in fact, actually the Minister of Finance back earlier, I believe, in March or April—dealt with insurance companies. A lot of people saved a lot of money through the automobile sector with respect to insurance.

Now, with respect to this legislation—I think you got the bill number wrong, but that's okay—we are focused on helping small businesses. Small businesses—

Interjections.

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Small businesses in this province have extensive problems. There are so many different moving parts. I know, as a previous business owner—I think there are a lot of business owners certainly on this side of the House; I'm not sure about your side. But there are so many different components that we're focused on. I think what we're doing is trying to focus on eliminating some of the red tape that so many people—I was involved in the SCOFEA conversations through the summer. By the way, it was the most consultation in the history of the province of Ontario. The feedback we got is in this legislation.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: Speaking of the SCOFEA consultations over the past summer, I recall, and my colleagues who were part of it may also recall, speaking with a restaurant owner from Hamilton. We hear consistently from the opposition that eliminating red tape isn't going to do anything for businesses in Ontario. But I recall a specific conversation with this business owner who has a number of restaurants in the city of Hamilton, and he was absolutely relieved that our government put in place measures that allowed restaurants in Hamilton to open their patios quickly. It doesn't seem like much, but it was massive in saving his summer through a COVID routine.

Can you speak to some of the other comments that you heard, positive comments, about what our government had been doing through those consultations, the largest ever in the history of the province?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member. You are absolutely right. I heard both in my community of Oakville, talking to individual restaurant owners—and I talked to dozens and dozens directly through the chamber of commerce and through SCOFEA, which, as you mentioned, was the largest consultation in the history of the province of Ontario.

Look, the restaurant owners get it. They know we're going through a difficult time. They know that the government had to make tough decisions, and continues to. This is unprecedented, not only in Ontario but in the world. You have to go back more than 100 years to find something even remotely similar to what we're experiencing now. They recognize that. But what they wanted was not handouts. They didn't want people to throw money left, right and centre.

What they want is the ability to operate efficiently, profitably within the environment that we are dealt. By allowing the patios to open and give people the opportunity to sit down and have a drink and expand the patio or alcohol delivery, it allowed their opportunity to get through a very, very tough period. So they are very—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Question?

Ms. Sara Singh: I heard the member from Oakville speak at length about issues in the taxi and limo industry around unfair competition. While it absolutely makes sense to ensure that those folks are appropriately licensed and that industry is regulated, what I didn't see or hear from the member was how the increases in their insurance premiums are unfair and also leading to issues for the industry.

So I would be curious if the member could expand on how and why your government wouldn't implement regulations to actually prevent those increases and ensure that those businesses have the coverage, because that would ultimately allow them to compete with those that can afford those increases. So could you please expand on what your government intends to do to help regulate the insurance industry here in the province of Ontario?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member opposite. As I said, there are a lot of components to helping small businesses. Clearly, there has been an issue with insurance for some taxi drivers—and individuals, quite frankly. Our government has discussed that. We have talked to insurance companies. There have been rate reductions. But more than that, people know we need more than that. It's not just a question of insurance; it's a question of being regulated in an efficient manner, allowing them to operate without illegal operators coming in and taking their jobs.

I have talked to taxi operators and we had some speak at SCOFEA as well. There are some legitimate concerns about insurance, which our government is looking at, but we have also been—what we heard from them was about the illegal operations.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill.

Mr. Michael Parsa: I want to start off by first congratulating the minister for small business and red tape reduction for putting this bill forward and the amazing parliamentary assistant from Flamborough–Glanbrook for having a big part in that.

When it comes to small businesses, we all know the importance they play in our local community. The small businesses are a huge part of every single community. Whenever sports teams, service clubs need support, the first people they run to are the local small businesses. They've always been there for us, so it's so nice to see that the government is now there for them. I have heard members from all sides talk about their connections to small businesses, certainly on this side, and I've heard my colleagues from the opposite side as well talk about their own small business backgrounds and their own connections to small businesses, so I am really hoping that the entire House supports this bill.

My question to my colleague is: When you're looking at red tape, it's incredibly important to make sure that you reduce red tape, to put initiatives forward, because it helps not only start-ups, but it also helps our current small businesses—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Response?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Yes, thank you to the member. Obviously, red tape reduction has been a focus of our goal to help small businesses. As I mentioned in my speech, we have 380,000 regulations in this province. Now, I don't know how that came about. I guess it was years, maybe a decade and a half of Liberal mismanagement, where regulations increased and hampered business to the point where, pre-pandemic, a lot of people just said, "You know what? I don't even want to open a business in this province anymore. The tax rates, the regulations—I've got so much paperwork to fill out." It really discouraged people from even wanting to open a business.

So what we are trying to do is find the regulations—not the ones that impact health and safety, but the ones that are creating a burdensome headache and a barrier to open a business—to help businesses through this tough time, because we all know we're living through a tough time right now. But we're trying to do what we can to help these small businesses get through these difficult waters.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am glad to add my voice to this discussion about Bill 215, the Main Street Recovery Act. Specifically, the member opposite had spoken about ways to get traffic moving and folks moving as they need to, and he highlighted that.

I would take that a step further and I would ask, then, in the spirit of getting people moving forward: Out in the Durham region, we have Highways 412 and 418 and we have boards of trade and chambers of commerce, municipalities, regional municipalities asking, begging for this government's support of my bill, Bill 43, to remove the tolls, because folks are unable to afford to take them. It's a deterrent. They're stuck in traffic. We have north-south connector roads that are just stopped because of the traffic.

1640

So my question is, how does this member feel about getting traffic moving in the Durham region?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Obviously, I want traffic to flow everywhere. I haven't been to Durham recently, but I know you live in a great community and a great auto city—like me, in Oakville. We want to reduce traffic congestion everywhere in this province. Durham is included, of course—but certainly in my region and other regions, particularly the GTA, where I think we have the most traffic congestion.

A couple of things, just to highlight what our government has done to improve traffic flow—number one, getting transit moving, having the biggest investment in transit infrastructure in the history of Ontario, with our \$28.5-billion plan. I hope the opposition would support us on that. We've made a big investment in Ford Motor Co. of Canada, which—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Response.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: —electric vehicles here in this province.

We're out of time, but thank you very much.

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

Mr. Jamie West: It's good to see everybody for debate again. It's good to be back after a week.

We're here to debate Bill 215, the Main Street Recovery Act. At the beginning of the debate this afternoon, the lead government member talked about Digital Main Street, PPE and renovation funding, alcohol takeout and delivery, access to larger markets, encouraging entrepreneurship—a whole list of things that, frankly, are not in this bill.

Bill 215 has four schedules—technically three, because two of them are almost identical.

Just a moment ago, during debate, the member opposite said they took the feedback from the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and put it into this bill. The bill, Speaker, as you know, is eight pages. Basically, the report is about the size of this book, and they condensed that into eight pages that I don't think addressed every single need of small businesses—at least not the small businesses that I'm hearing about.

I want to start on a level playing field. I know the government respects small businesses; I know all parties do. I've been here for many of the inaugural speeches, and we have many similarities about supporting small businesses or having small businesses in our families.

My mom had a small cleaning company, and that's what pulled us over the poverty line. We didn't get rich, but we got out of poverty, so that was good. My in-laws, for example, also have a small business.

The same stories that you could share about trying to make ends meet or not making any payroll for yourself because you had to pay your employees, about the lean times and the good times—we have those stories, too, on this side of the House. So we're absolutely united on the need to help small businesses. But I think the gap is, we're hearing stuff that you don't seem to be hearing.

The number one thing I am hearing that small businesses want is help with debt—that they are drowning in debt. If you think of the shutdown in March—and let's just start in April. In April, May, June, July, August, September—we're halfway through October. We've had six or seven months where business has not been the same and has not picked up. So far, the response from the provincial government is, "Don't worry. You can pay later." You don't have to be a financial genius to see that after two quarters of the year, if you haven't been able to pay your rent, you're not going to be able to pay your rent. They are desperate for this government, the Conservative government, to do something and listen to them. I can't imagine that they only phone me and that in your ridings it's different. In the standing committee, I sat in on many of those deputations and I listened and participated in the conversations. I heard them say clearly that they needed help—and I don't hear that.

Bill 215: It was frustrating, to be frank, preparing for this because what I want to be in here doesn't exist in here.

Schedule 1 and schedule 3 are very similar—like I said, there are four schedules: One is about removing the city of Toronto's ability to regulate delivery noise; the other is about municipalities' ability to regulate delivery noise. They're pretty similar. I'll get into more detail on them.

Schedule 2 amends the Highway Traffic Act so that taxicabs and limousine services that go to the airport have licences, and if people are unlicensed, there's a higher fine. I'll talk about that more.

Schedule 4 updates the Ontario Food Terminal Act. A few small changes: The terminal manager could be approved now by the minister instead of the LG, and it expands beyond wholesale fruit and produce to agricultural products and other products.

I'm sure that's helpful for some businesses, but I can't imagine that was the pressing issue or that there couldn't be more to this bill than those four and, like I said earlier, technically, three things. If I were to make a wish list, if we had a genie go to a small business, there are very few of them that would say, "Oh, genie, my wishes are to help me out at the airport, to help with the food terminal act, and to help"—I already forgot the third one, sorry—about having delivery and being able to make noise while delivering in the evening. It's not that those aren't important. I just don't think they are the most important, the number one priority that would hit as many businesses as possible that would throw lifesavers to them so they'll be successful.

I'm going to talk about schedule 1 and schedule 3 together because they're similar. They're basically almost the same wording; one talks about Toronto and one talks about the Municipal Act. Basically, it says:

"City of Toronto Act

"A new section 115.1"—in the Municipal Act, it says, "A new section 130"—"is added to the City of Toronto Act"—in the municipal version, it says, "added to the Municipal Act"—"to provide that the city does not have the power to prohibit and regulate with respect to noise made in the city in connection with the delivery of goods

to specified places, except as otherwise authorized by regulation.”

I can see how it would help, and I guess it aligns the two together. But again, and as much as delivery is important, I can't imagine that when you speak to—I think they said there were 500 deputations, 500 small businesses came forward—I can't imagine that being all 500. In my riding of Sudbury, for example, many of our businesses aren't open 24 hours a day, and so no one's there to receive deliveries in the evening. I have a feeling that in smaller communities, this isn't as big of a deal for them.

When I first read this, I thought it had to do with delivery of food or delivery of alcohol, that people were allowed to make deliveries after certain hours, but it's not. It's deliveries to those establishments, so it's to restock. At some point, I thought: Oh, maybe it's to help restaurants who are doing so much more delivery service and takeout service. But it isn't that.

Basically, we had an existing provision that was in place because of a pandemic and now we've made it law. I think we could have rolled it over if we thought it was really important, but again, I feel like it's sort of a thin thing to do.

The member from Kitchener-Conestogan—sorry.

Miss Monique Taylor: Conestoga.

Mr. Jamie West: Conestoga, thank you. He'll never let me live that down. My apologies to the member.

He said: “Think of your small businesses, how they always have exactly what you want, and having these evening deliveries, these noisy deliveries in the evening, that will help them be successful.” Maybe in many ridings it will, but in my riding, when I think of small businesses, I think of mom-and-pop shops. I think of places that are closed in the evening, some that are closed on the weekend. I know it's a little old-fashioned that we have that system and I know there are a lot of places in Toronto where it's 24-hour shopping and all things like that, but in a lot of northern ridings, small businesses aren't 24 hours. Some are. But I think of family-run businesses like Skakoon Home Hardware in the Donovan.

I grew up in the Donovan. I never knew the local hardware store—that actually the owners lived on my way to school. But they were known throughout the city because they had this giant Christmas display every year, a big Christmas display with all these lights, which is becoming more common now, but back then, it was magical as a kid to walk by this. It was fun to go to school and see all the lights.

But they're basically a mom-and-pop place. They retired and their kids are running it now. They're not taking deliveries in the middle of the night because they have little kids. And no one is at the hardware store for those late night deliveries. They'll go and show up if it's an emergency rush order, but a lot of these small businesses—these small businesses that we've talked about from the beginning, the small businesses that are 98% of our business in Ontario, that employ 2.4 million employees—a lot of these places are not open at that time. It's going to help those that are, but I'm just going back to the

genie and three wishes: I feel like we could have got a bigger bang for our buck on this.

1650

I do know who does take deliveries in the middle of the night, and I was reminded of this when the member from Waterloo was talking about Walmart. Walmart made \$134 billion last year in profit. They did good; good for them. They do run all night and they take deliveries at night, so it's going to be very helpful to Walmart. Walmart, unfortunately, is crushing small businesses. A lot of small businesses can't compete. Walmart was able to run when other small businesses were closed, because they had produce as well. It might feel a little bit like the thumb is on the scale to help maybe a Walmart over a small business, a small business that's struggling.

Schedule 2 was basically talking about picking up a passenger for compensation with a licence, which I guess is the legal term. I pulled that right out of the legislation. Here's what it says, for context:

“The Highway Traffic Act currently provides that a driver of a motor vehicle other than a bus must have a licence, permit or authorization in order to pick up a passenger for the purpose of transporting him or her for compensation, if such licence, permit or authorization is required by the Public Vehicles Act, a by-law passed under the Municipal Act, 2001, a regulation made under the Department of Transport Act (Canada) or an airport or airport authority.”

Just in English, what this schedule does, it amends section 39.1 of the Highway Traffic Act. It basically means that a taxi, a limo, an Uber, a Lyft—there are probably some other terms that I'm not familiar with; I generally just take taxis—must have a licence to carry passengers for compensation, if such a licence is required by a bylaw passed under the City of Toronto Act. Currently, it just says municipal so we're balancing and closing those loopholes. I think it's great; I think it's important. It's going to close a gap. It's going to help align legislation so it's a little more clear. If you're outside of Toronto or in Toronto, it's going to cost some enforcement.

I think that from the taxicab drivers I spoke with, what they are looking for is fairness, that the criteria they need to operate their business for them seems to be here in terms of insurance, training and background checks. The criteria for the peer-to-peer services, the Ubers and the Lyfts, seems to be lower, and so the cost of running your business when you're a taxi company seems to be more expensive. I think that's what they are looking for. I mean, this will help. It will eliminate people just showing up and pretending to be an Uber or a Lyft or something.

I think that in terms of taxi drivers I speak to, they're really concerned about Uber and Lyft. They're really concerned about being able to compete. I talk to drivers—and I'm sure you all do. Prior to COVID, we'd fly here, and you talk to the taxi driver as you're going somewhere. In Toronto, especially, they talk about Uber and Lyft and how difficult it is to compete. Some of these drivers have been driving for decades and they're seeing their money absolutely disappear and fewer and fewer people. People

are choosing to go to the competition. Competition is good, but it's not good if it's unfair. That's what I hear from taxi companies and taxi drivers, that they want that competition to be fair. They want the threshold for getting into business to be the same for everybody. That could be in here. It's not, but it could be in here.

As well in here, in the same schedule, it increases the offence. In subsection 8—that's the other part of the legislation that was changed—the fine for offences increased. It was between \$300 to \$20,000. It's being increased to \$500 and \$30,000, which is substantial, but when you compare it to the member from Barrhaven, the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries—in her bill in 2014, her private member's bill, called the Bandit Taxi Cab Safety and Enforcement Act, she proposed a maximum fine of \$100,000. As well, it would suspend their licence and impound their vehicle.

I know that things get changed through committee and things get altered. I'm not expecting them to be identical, but going from \$20,000 to \$30,000 is a far cry from \$20,000 to \$100,000 and licence suspension. I think that if you want to keep people away from doing the bandit taxicab, a hefty fine like that would do it. A licence suspension would do it.

Then schedule 4—and it's interesting; this is the end of the bill—is the Ontario Food Terminal Act. I think it sounds good, at its face value. I need to look into it more. But basically, it amends the Ontario Food Terminal Act. The part I don't really understand is they're changing—the board's going to consist of five to 13 people. I don't know what it was before. I apologize for not having the time to research that. The part that I'm not really sure why we're changing is that the appointment of the terminal manager has been changed, and it's not clear why. Now it's subject to the approval of the minister; it used to be subject to the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council. I'm not sure why that is. I know there are a lot of appointments. Maybe that has something to do with it. I'm not quite sure why. I'm not criticizing it. It's just not clear to me why we made the change. It's not clear to me, as well, if in the deputations that was what came up, that they said, "You know, what we need to do is the minister should approve this instead of the LG." I can't imagine that being in there. I stand to be corrected, because I wasn't there for all deputations.

Also, it amends the Ontario Food Terminal Act and it allows the terminal to sell a wider range of agricultural products, not just food and produce. Right now, when businesses are scrambling and it's difficult to make ends meet and you need to widen the variety of services that you have, I think it's good to have more agricultural products, a couple of—I think in the wording it says a few non-agricultural products. But to have that flexibility, I think, makes sense.

I think what's most telling in this bill, though, is what's missing. It's not what's in the bill; it's what's not in the bill. Most of it doesn't have a lot to do with helping the majority of businesses recover from the pandemic. It doesn't. I'm sure it's going to help some people. There are

some people who are going to be super happy. I don't want to be overcritical of it. I'm just saying it really was, I don't know, anticlimactic when I looked for it.

I have small business phoning me every day—just like all of my colleagues do, I guarantee it—small business asking for help and asking for support. There are a few who might be helped with this. Most in my riding aren't going to be helped by those late-night deliveries. Like I said, we don't have that sort of problem. I'm sure some will be helped, but the number one thing I'm hearing from small businesses is, "I need some money in my pocket." The member from Waterloo had said it. She said that it's an investment in business. It's an investment.

I heard earlier today, talking to small businesses as job creators—and they hire people for sure. But if these small businesses go under and their employees get laid off—and that's what's going to happen if we don't help them out, if we don't invest in these small businesses so they're sustainable. They'll go under and we'll be in trouble as a province, because what drives the economy is people with money in their pocket, people having money they can spend at a small business. You want to keep a restaurant alive? You have to give people enough money that they actually can go to the restaurant to buy food and you don't have the working poor who are working full time accessing food banks in the largest number ever, even prior to COVID. It's gotten worse now. That's how you drive the economy: You have workers who could spend money.

The changes that are in Bill 215, honestly, they seem fine. I'm criticizing them because of what's missing, but they seem fine. I don't really see a reason why I'd be against it. I'm just very disappointed that they don't go very far. There's that expression, "the least you can do." That expression isn't supposed to mean, literally, "Do the least you can." It's supposed to mean that there's the least you could do, and there's more. This is an opportunity to do more.

We had businesses—the member from Waterloo said this while I was listening to her debate. The government side was there; the independents were there. Four months of meetings with small businesses, who in the middle of struggling, in the middle of probably the most stressful time of their entire small business career, came to deputize, came to share with us, and the Conservative government tables an eight-page bill with three schedules.

Interjection.

Mr. Jamie West: Well, there's some blank pages, but still, eight pages.

Two weeks ago when we were here, we talked about helping small business again. One part of that bill, basically, was that we're banning commercial evictions for the month of October. I'm going to bring you back: April, May, June, July, August, September, October. If I'm going under in October and you ban me from being evicted for one month, I'm being evicted in November. Let's be honest with each other.

1700

There's this famous quote. I only have a minute left. There's this quote I love—I heard someone say it once and

I think about it all the time—that the world is thirsty for leadership. I love that: The world is thirsty for leadership. And what you have is, you're handing out a dry, empty paper cup.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): It's time for questions and responses.

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question to the member opposite: You spent a fair amount of time talking about and questioning why this bill includes the extension of delivery beyond 7 in the morning until 7 p.m. As you know, many municipalities do restrict delivery between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m.

I come from a riding that has the busiest cargo delivery airport in all of the country. That means we see a tremendous amount of transport trucks that cause increasing congestion on our highways, and that costs small business owners, manufacturers, people across Ontario money. Congestion costs money. By allowing deliveries through the night, you're taking a lot of those trucks off the road. And many businesses do want to have deliveries beyond 7 in the evening. If you have a restaurant or you have a convenience store, you would like to have those deliveries in off-peak hours. My question to the member is, do you see the value in that?

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook for your question. We had talked before. She actually grew up, or lived, about an hour outside of Sudbury, so Capreol, which is a very small town.

It's not that I'm against this; I'm just saying, when in a riding like Sudbury or Nickel Belt—Capreol is in Nickel Belt—these small towns came to say, "Help me as a small business," I think absolutely these deliveries are going to help many businesses. They're just not going to help Capreol. They're not going to help many businesses in Sudbury. They're not going to help many businesses in the north that don't rely on just-in-time delivery or evening deliveries. It's like I said earlier: It's not that it's a bad bill; it's just that there's so much more that could be in it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): A question from the member from Brampton Centre.

Ms. Sara Singh: Thank you to the member from Sudbury for highlighting the regional differences in our local economies and the importance of taking that into consideration when we're developing plans to address COVID and how those small businesses have been impacted across the province. I think you really fairly pointed out that this bill really doesn't actually speak to those issues for those small businesses.

You also pointed out that you come from a small business family, an entrepreneurial family. I do as well, and I think that really gives us a different perspective in understanding the burdens that those small businesses face. But again, when the government had the opportunity, through this legislation and other pieces of legislation, they failed to do things like a commercial eviction ban or helping out with a rent subsidy. Can you maybe elaborate on how important programs like that, like what we proposed in the NDP Save Main Street plan, would

actually be to help small businesses in communities like yours?

Mr. Jamie West: The member from Brampton Centre brings up an excellent point. I was visiting with Jay Mahida. Jay is an immigrant—he came from India—and, like many of the stories we've heard in the Legislature from many of the members, came here with a couple of suitcases, worked his way up, ended up moving from Toronto to Sudbury and bought a little hotel. It's an Econo Lodge now, but it used to be a Sheraton; anyway, a local hotel. It's an Econo Lodge now and it did really well, and just before the pandemic he bought the Fireside, the hotel right next door and was in plans to buy another one.

He wanted me to come and see what's happening with the hotel industry during COVID, because imagine how busy a hotel is when no one is doing any kind of business and when people aren't travelling. He showed me how he was struggling and asked if there was relief. There wasn't much relief. Basically, his response—when I said, "How is business?" he said, "The most important thing is health. But I need business."

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: I want to do this quickly. On September 26, the adult entertainment business was ordered to close by the provincial government. I'm glad the member from Nipissing is here. This is from the owner: "The concern is the insurance premiums we have been paying even while being closed. Not only have our insurance premiums doubled since January 2020, no discounts were offered while shut down for several months. Portions of this premium should be repaid back to us or forgiven."

So my question is, do you think it's fair that small and medium-sized businesses are being gouged by insurance companies across the province of Ontario?

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Niagara. I didn't get to that part in my notes. I wanted to talk about what was missing, and insurance is absolutely in there. For small and medium-sized businesses—earlier we heard about the insurance rates for taxicab companies, insurance rates for drivers. Something we haven't discussed is insurance for the film industry and the TV industry. It's so cost-prohibitive that they can't open, even though they can do it safely. They're struggling and begging for help on this all across the board. This is stuff that we can really help as government. If the Conservatives put this forward, we would back you all way; we would help save these businesses. We would be the government they want us to be.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Question?

Mr. Lorne Coe: I appreciate the presentation from the member for Sudbury, particularly the overview of the part of the legislation that speaks to the Ontario Food Terminal Act. You will know many of us here in the Legislative Assembly have parts of our ridings that have—where a big part of our economy is agri-business. When the minister spoke on October 19, he had this to say. He said that the intent of this will help contribute to a more sustainable

economic recovery province-wide by helping to create more homegrown jobs for local businesses within the agri-business economy.

In your narrative today, you talked about various regional differences as well, but I think that there's one commonality here and that is agri-business. Would you support the intent and purpose of this aspect of the legislation?

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Whitby. In terms of the food terminal act, I think I was pretty favourable about it. Very clearly, I didn't understand the whole intent of it. Sudbury is a mining town. We have farms around it, but we're traditionally a mining town. But I do understand how big the agri-economy, agri-business is, particularly in spinoff shops. You need those businesses to be successful so the spinoff economies work as well. So it does make sense on the face of it. I don't know enough about it, but I think it does make sense in terms of tweaking it so it can be more successful.

Going back to what I was saying earlier, what I was hoping for were more things like that that would help in different regions, that would help in a larger scale, that would help all businesses be successful, because week after week, they're looking at more and more stress. What they want is relief in a variety of areas.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank the member from Sudbury. I thought your debate was very thoughtful. You clearly identified that this bill did not necessarily have a northern lens in terms of the things that were most important to your constituents, and I think that's a failing. I think if we're putting forward legislation, then we should look at a lens that takes into consideration all regions in the province, in particular the Far North and remote communities.

I'm wondering about your comments around insurance, because that's something that I'm quite concerned about. It seems as if this problem is becoming even more urgent. At committee, we did hear from the film and television areas, where they are worried about becoming uninsurable because there isn't an opportunity to assess risk. But now the restaurant community is coming forward, saying that there's price gouging, that insurance companies are dropping them. They can't operate—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The member from Sudbury to respond.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Scarborough—Guildwood. Insurance is really important. There are very few people who get excited about insurance or think it's fair, but we realize how important it is. Any of us with home insurance or car insurance recognize that it's important. It's important to have it if things go wrong. But we really are in a state that seems very predatory, where people feel like they can't make ends meet because of this. It's unfair that we aren't helping people to be successful. We talk about small businesses, but we ignore the insurance rates that have doubled, as some reports are saying, or insurance rates that are preventing the film and

TV industry from getting their feet back on the ground to employ some of the people who were shut down first.

1710

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We don't have enough time for a question and response.

Further debate?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I'm always pleased to rise and to have an opportunity to address the Legislature on behalf of my constituents in Scarborough—Guildwood.

When the government put forward a bill that spoke to the economic recovery, I was excited. I wanted to see what some of the good ideas are that the government has gleaned from all of the consultations that have been taking place and all of the meetings that have been held—only to figure out that it's five pages, and not even five full pages; it's five half pages. I'm wondering, why is the government shortchanging Ontario's small businesses?

Ontario's small businesses are the backbone of our economy, and they give life to the main streets in every region of this province. Behind a small business, there's a family. Behind that family, there's a community. That's what makes Ontario what it is. So why is this government not taking their needs and their concerns seriously?

Sadly, this bill falls far short of what small businesses have asked for and what they need to survive the pandemic and its resulting economic recession which we're in. The government is saying that there's \$60 million being invested, but given the magnitude and the size and the scope of Ontario's 475,000 small businesses, how is that going to reach all of the businesses that have a need?

I have no issues with a program that's providing a \$1,000 grant for eligible businesses. I think some businesses will need that; they will want to take advantage of that. But my issue is that the government does not seem to be connecting with the complex needs of our small businesses and the community behind them. PPE is costly, and in the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs—that was one of the requests that we heard repeatedly, and it differs according to the size and the type of businesses. So I don't think the \$1,000 for businesses with two to nine employees is going to cut it.

Speaker, we also heard at committee from home-based businesses. Not only does this bill not fit for those who have employees—but there are many micro-businesses that are home-based. They don't have a retail storefront, but they are the innovators, and they are also providing for themselves and for their families. They pleaded with the government to consider them when designing programs. We heard that.

Even with the shortcomings of this bill—what is clear is that the government hasn't been listening to the real, urgent and immediate needs of our small businesses. The bill lacks direct support for those businesses that are struggling with liquidity. No, they didn't ask for a handout, but they asked, perhaps, for a break in accessing much-needed cash flow and capital to keep them afloat.

I was out in my local community, and a business owner, a restaurateur, said, "Mitzie, my wife and I retooled. We took the opportunity, with the shutdown, to make

improvements that we had long wanted to make to our business. But I don't know if we can weather a second-wave shutdown." There's a big question mark there. I am wondering if this government is listening to these small businesses and responding with real solutions.

As I said, five measly pages. I have to say that: five measly pages. This is a government bill for a complex problem that is plaguing our community. You know, Speaker, I have to say, what's the government waiting for? Are you waiting for the bankruptcies and for companies to shut their doors and let people go? Small business owners and the thousands of Ontarians employed by them are not going to be fooled by these crumbs that you're giving them in Bill 215. They aren't. These small businesses have been crystal clear in terms of what they need. In fact, look at the size of this report. It's pretty heavy. There are pages and pages and pages of recommendations in this report on the economic recovery and what businesses have asked for. But you haven't listened.

Over the course of the summer, all sides of the House have listened to businesses from the north, from rural, from cities across the province come forward and talk about their experience with the shutdown, their experience with the decisions that have been made so far, but also their prospects moving forward and what it is that they need to survive. And out of so many recommendations, the government has just come up with these ideas, some of which aren't even in the bill. They're ideas that you should be doing anyway. If you want to set up a website for a one-stop shop for small business, go ahead and do that. You should be doing that anyway.

We've talked a lot during this debate about what we did hear from small businesses, but I believe it's worth repeating, because you're not listening. Insurance is a major issue across sectors and I have to say it's growing. The first concern I heard about insurance was from the non-profit sector. They reached out because they were concerned that they were becoming uninsurable because of the inability to find the risk. Then we heard about the film and television sector once again being refused venues because they were not able to cover the risks. And now restaurants are complaining and saying—they're not even complaining; they're sounding the alarm—"Hey, our insurance companies are dropping us." The rates—some have escalated even 10 times.

The Premier said he will stand up for businesses and individuals against price gouging. Why not stand up for these businesses right now when it comes to the insurance issue? I've asked this question repeatedly in the Legislature. What have I heard? Crickets; nothing from this government.

Speaker, we know that food delivery services are important during a pandemic. It's actually technically being legislated because takeout and delivery are your only options. Peel, Toronto and Ottawa are in stage 2. There's no in-room dining. So, really, the option is for a delivery service. My colleague the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell has called repeatedly for the government to follow other jurisdictions, like New York,

and to put a cap on those fees, especially during the pandemic. Because you can argue that there is a benefit to having that cap and making sure that people can use that service to stay home and be able to receive their deliveries without the huge costs that are being passed on to them. Why not take this opportunity to act in a meaningful way that can make a difference for so many businesses that are local, as well as for Ontario residents?

1720

We've talked so much about rent relief in this House, so much about commercial rent relief, and this government sits on its hands, does not act and waits for the federal government to do all of the heavy lifting.

And then we have the commercial eviction moratorium—very needed to prevent unnecessary evictions of commercial tenants, but that will expire in 11 days. Where's the solution for that in this bill?

Speaker, I have to say that I'm not here to go through and disagree with these five pages. What I'm asking for is for the government to do the work that's required to respond to the real needs of businesses in our province. You have a lot to work with, because all members on all sides in this House were involved in the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and listened for hundreds of hours to the concerns and real needs of those businesses, and they've been very clear.

You've also been warned by organizations like the CFIB, which has said that between 6% and 22% of our small businesses on our main streets in our communities are not going to make it. What are you going to do to prevent that from happening? Are you going to wait till they close? What's the point of that? We want to see real solutions for our small businesses in Ontario, and I'm sorry, this just doesn't measure up.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We now have an opportunity to pose questions to the member from Scarborough–Guildwood.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I want to thank the member for her remarks and just wanted to reiterate that numerous measures have been put into place to help small businesses, many of which were supported by many members of this House when we first started in this pandemic—with, of course, the protecting workers act that had the result of helping many workers; the first package that happened with the economic update; and, of course, subsequent bills after that. Why? Because we didn't stop working. In fact, every member of this Legislature—opposition, third party, the people who help us with translating etc.—we've all played a role: the fact that we all show up every day to work and we make sure the job gets done, just like this bill.

I want to ask the member—because she and I spent the summer on the finance committee, listening to copious amounts of testimony and, of course, many questions. One thing that did come up that she mentioned in her speech was protective equipment. There was an announcement made to help support the supply of protective equipment—

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

Ms. Andrea Khanjin:—and more importantly, the production and creating of those jobs in Ontario through the lovely work our Minister of Economic Development has been doing through helping this province prosper by creating the PPE—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The member for Scarborough–Guildwood can respond.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I sat in on a virtual call with the Minister of Economic Development—I believe it was with Bruce Power—and they were talking about that, and I think that's actually great work. I reached out to the consortium to see how some of those supplies could come to a hot-spot community like my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood. Those are good measures, and I'm not criticizing those measures.

What I'm saying is, we sat in that committee, heard a lot and much of what's in here was not raised as an urgent priority. You could talk about the noise bylaw. Of course, during an emergency, it provided some relief and people are understanding that they don't have to worry about noise bylaws, and those who are hearing the noise probably are even more understanding as well. They want the businesses to continue. But if we're going to make it permanent, why not consult with the municipalities? Why—

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm going to stay on the same thing I've talked about all afternoon: insurance premiums. Small and medium-sized—their insurance rates are going up double and triple. Sometimes, the insurance companies aren't even going to insure them; they're not. They're price-gouging. We know that.

Some businesses in my riding and, I think, throughout Ontario, on their property taxes, they need relief. They're down 85% and they still have to pay their property taxes. They don't have the money. The government has to step up on property taxes.

So I want to ask you the question, do you agree with the NDP that we need to stop the price gouging of insurance companies on our businesses, so they can survive?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: It's something that I've raised as well, repeatedly. Insurance is complex, and I understand that. You make one decision here and you affect so many other things. It's like a domino effect.

What we heard in the committee: There were risks that there was no definition defining the risk because of COVID-19. The companies and the business leaders are saying, "Government, you need to step in." There are other governments in jurisdictions in Europe, for instance, that recognize that. They've created different pools to manage and to mitigate that risk, but this government has not done that.

We do have a Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. Perhaps reconvene that table for ideas around the insurance industry and how we can make sure that we don't price-gouge and that we have insurance—

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

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Again, to the member opposite: I hate to state the obvious but small businesses asked for rent relief, and we got it done. They wanted hydro relief; we got it done. They wanted protection for workers; we got it done. They wanted red tape cleared; we got it done. A lot of these things have got done, but what we heard before we were doing those things was that they were waiting 15 years, Mr. Speaker, for those things to be done. And now they're getting done. This bill, this piece of legislation, which I hope you support, is adding to those accomplishments. Certainly, there are other things that could be added in a budget bill or could be added to other legislation, but this, what is before us here today, is directly from those businesses.

So I ask the member opposite, will you listen to those businesses? Will you help prop Ontario up and support this economic-driving legislation?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My colleague from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell asked a great question this morning. She said the Premier took a victory lap too soon because now we are in the second wave. I think that the rhetoric I'm hearing from the government members is actually not recognizing the challenge that is ahead.

The previous government under the 2008-09 recession actually brought back more than 800,000 jobs after that recession. We don't know how deep and long this recession is going to be. The Financial Accountability Office just tabled its report last week that really cautions us about Ontario's economic outlook.

What I am saying to you in my debate today is that the backbone of the economy is in our small businesses, and I believe the government has a lot more work to do in helping to support them.

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

Mr. Jamie West: I thank the member from Scarborough–Guildwood as well for her debate. I want to go back to insurance, because I think it's so important—and primarily film and TV insurance. Now, 10 or 20 years ago, it seemed like everything in Canada was coming out of the Maritimes because there were grants and systems, and now more and more stuff is coming out of Ontario. Very clearly, when you talk to them, it's because Ontario is a great place to film. We have Letterkenny in Sudbury, and we've been very successful with it. I think Sudbury is a great place in a pandemic to film because we have a lot of space to film.

What they told me when I talked to film and TV industries this summer is that they need help with insurance. They gave examples, like the member said, in Europe what they do and also in Quebec what they do. The basic understanding of business: If it's cheaper and easier to do business in Quebec, they'll go there and eat our lunch. Can you please expand on how the government needs to pitter patter and get at 'er?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I agree. I believe that the government does need to get at it. As you were describing, there are so many areas that the government has not responded to. Insurance is just one of them. But what about the effects

of the pandemic on women, on Black, Indigenous and people of colour who identify as such? Where are the measures that recognize that the recession is hurting those groups more? Why not take an opportunity to address those inequities?

1730

There are many ideas. I would love to see a film program for the north, so that we can market our great north and all of the things that are happening there and the skills and the talents with our colleges and with our universities. It could be an incredible opportunity. I just don't see it here, in what has been put before us for this debate.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: To the member from Scarborough–Guildwood: I'm almost biting my tongue thinking about what is coming out of that side of the aisle today, especially in light of the fact that for 15 years—and the reason I got into politics was the Green Energy Act. If you want to see the single most destructive program that ever hurt small businesses in Ontario, it's what your government did for 15 years. The Green Energy Act has destroyed business after business after business. And you want us to come back here and come up with an instant plan to solve all of the woes that your government created for 15 years. This is one step. That plan, that policy, that act destroyed businesses. It is shutting their doors. They are still not able to recover.

My question is, will you agree that that also was the worst thing ever brought on the backs of small businesses in Ontario?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I just want to say to the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook, it's not an instant plan. You were there for most of the days, as was I. It's a thoughtful plan that hundreds of business owners have fed into. I'm just asking the government to use what has been provided to them and come up with something more thoughtful.

There are decisions this government is making that are shocking to me. I was out in eastern Ontario a few months ago, and you're ripping windmills out of the ground. The people in those communities don't understand why the government is doing that. You took out, along the 401, the electric vehicle charging stations, and now you're saying that you want to lead in e-vehicles. It just shows me that there's a lack of planning and there's a lack of foresight in this government. I'm urging you—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Further debate. The member for Hastings–Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good to see your smiling face in the chair.

I rise today to speak on Bill 215, the Main Street Recovery Act, 2020. It is a further important step. It's not the total solution, but it's an important step in moving forward and cutting red tape in Ontario. It's part of our government's powerful main street recovery plan.

It seems like a lifetime ago, but it has only been a little over 18 months since I first rose in this chamber to speak

about red tape reduction. At that time, I was speaking about Bill 66, Restoring Ontario's Competitiveness Act. Bill 66 did indeed boost the provincial economy and all of our local economies, contributing greatly to the economic resurgence which put Ontario, at that point, on a much more stable fiscal ground, giving us a base with which to be able to have some movement. Bill 66 added jobs at a record pace and allowed us to cut and eliminate Ontario income taxes for the lowest earners and reduce unemployment. It was a careful move that put us on a trajectory to balance the provincial budget ahead of schedule. Yes, we worked to balance the budget ahead of schedule prior to COVID-19—unbelievable. But again, that seems like a lifetime ago, given our 2020 battle with COVID-19, which is no longer a “novel” coronavirus, despite the media's misappropriation of that term. It is the growth in our economy which our government stick-handled before the virus hit that has made us resilient enough to resist the virus and has given us the tools and the means and the resources to battle it—because of those good decisions.

The battle of COVID-19 is being fought on many fronts, with each affected by the other. I know down on Main Street—in a lot of our communities from members from all sides of this House. Certainly, I've kept in touch with merchants over the last six months. It's an ongoing challenge for each and every one of them just to stay open and try to pay their bills. The hardship is undeniable.

It's why we worked diligently across ministries and government operations, our MPPs, our ministers, our skilled civil servants and our government staff, all working from their own and even their parents' basements occasionally, to consult and engage thousands of stakeholders in Zoom calls. I guess I am a Zoomer but I never considered myself to be one. Of course, now, all of a sudden, I'm becoming a little bit more proficient in that art. But we would listen keenly to merchants and experts, which is of course redundant.

But the main street recovery plan has been assembled from all of those valuable inputs, and from both listening to and hearing the wisdom of people on the ground, people behind the counter, behind the mask, behind the shield, the ones keeping us fed, keeping us clean and keeping us clothed.

So where to start, Mr. Speaker? Well, the government. Any government caught up in the belief that it could micromanage the economy might easily just take the wrong approach, and believing that they had the moral authority to simply bark their orders, start telling everybody how to run their businesses. Well, we've seen that approach elsewhere, and you can see it yet in the daily headlines. But that is not the approach of this government. We know Ontario became the powerhouse of Canada based on its people over the centuries, not due to a government with a focus on central planning. Indeed, Ontarians who came here to escape an economic dictatorship can tell us all about the suffocating feel at the heart of that. Many of the members in here—I know my colleague from York Centre, particularly, experienced that, and that's why we

so welcome his counsel to be here with us today. So just as red tape is the friend of no one—even those who saw it as a solution to a problem once upon a time—red governments are simply opposed to freedom and free markets.

The way we have chosen to bring Ontario's economy back from the shambles in which we found it back in 2018 is not to impose ideas and constructs which inevitably thrive in socialist circles and the bureaucratic mindsets, which are really fellow travellers. No, Mr. Speaker. Our government has shown a far better approach to put Ontario back on track. We have chosen to embrace freedom and free markets in the knowledge that individuals and the market that they create and thrive in will bring back the Ontario that we knew in the first two months of this year when we were in government. And it's working already, and more freedom for the businesses and entrepreneurs will expand those positive results. Let me underline my words above, because as the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade just tweeted 10 days ago, based on a tremendous amount of work he has done on behalf of our caucus, our government and the people of Ontario, "Employment in manufacturing is now above pre-COVID levels in Ontario."

Well, that fact should have led every newscast in Canada, because good news is needed, and here it was, indeed, good news. But who remembers hearing that from a news reporter or a news feed or seeing it zip across their TV news ticker? Indeed.

The minister, in the same tweet, announced that day's "new job numbers show an increase in employment in Ontario of 167,600—including 51,700 in manufacturing." Well, Mr. Speaker, that's the #OntarioSpirit, because people weren't hired and working hard because they were ordered to do so; they were back at work because that's what they do. That's how Ontario rolls. That's what makes us tick. That's why we're all here. They were making everything we need in today's world to the best of their ability, things that we use on a daily basis. They were answering the call of the markets with Ontario-made goods and services. And it wasn't a corner office that told them to make Ontario whole, not just a simple little bureaucratic directive from a group of people gathered in a think tank. No, it was skilled people of every background, age and sex, who, together, put their hearts and their backs into the return of Canada's manufacturing heartland. That's why there has been no shortage of news in the past weeks and months from small companies, from entrepreneurs, and big companies—as we just saw today with the drug announcement, about new investments, the 500 jobs that they will create. But growth announcements and the jobs attached have come from long-time leaders in their manufacturing markets. They have come from colleges and universities, whose brilliant prodigies in so many fields are responding avidly to 2020's challenges. Our young people of today are incredible. They're an enormous resource that we need to draw even further upon, because they're creating both in-house and external economic activity and jobs while inventively problem-solving at the same time.

1740

I want to note that all Ontarians should follow the information coming from the Minister of Colleges and Universities, because the minister celebrates this and explains how our best and brightest are pitching in from our post-secondary outposts. These are truly must-read accounts; they really, really are. The Premier said it best: "We have the best people in Ontario, there's nothing we can't do." The information that comes from the Minister of Colleges and Universities proves that on a daily basis. There is no on-high order from this government or from our population demanding creativity; there is just the Ontario spirit and all the different forms that it comes in.

Maybe a good comparison one way to our land to the south: There's a saying that everything is bigger in Texas. That's questionable, but they're proud of those big hats, their ranches and their interstate highways that have their own rules in the Lone Star state. But the one area they're not too big on: They're not big on red tape in Texas.

Well, here's the thing: Ontario's bigger than Texas. We have the busiest highway in North America, which was voted into existence in the 1950s in this very chamber—and, I might add, against the howls of the opposition at that particular time. Where would we be without it now?

Our province's capital city and surrounding area is bigger than any Texas town. We make more cars here too. Yes, I know the member for Oakville is so well aware of that, particularly with the latest investment that Ford is making in our economy here with electric vehicles. Kudos to them for all their hard work to make that happen.

We even had the very first commercial oil well in the world—a lot of people don't know that—in the legendary village of Oil Springs, and then we spread our energy knowledge around the world. But one thing we have that's bigger than in Texas and much of the developed world is something none of us—absolutely none of us—should be proud of. As I have noted here before, an independent report from the University of Toronto Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy says—and this is a sad reality—that "Ontario has the highest cost of regulation among any of Canada's 10 provinces—more than 380,000 regulation requirements, nearly twice that of" Quebec, "and over three times the provincial average." That is absolutely incredible. How can you be competitive when you've got a garrote tied around your neck to development? It can't happen, Mr. Speaker.

To again quote myself, I said earlier in the House that previous Ontario governments created red tape in the shape of hurdles, layers and waves that would force people to answer many of the same questions in multiple ways. It deflects, removes focus and puts arcane bureaucratic imperatives ahead of getting the job done. It holds growth back and deters the investment which creates jobs. I said it then and I say it now, because the reality is there. But that's the kind of red tape we have to cut and we are cutting.

When we put out the word that we wanted to hear from everybody who encountered red tape to tell us, we again heard volumes from the Ontario spirit, because that advice

came from far and wide, from down the street and out in the country, from town halls and feedlots and barbershops and parking attendants. They know what red tape is, and they know when they encounter it, and I can assure you, they have not been shy in sharing it with us.

Hence, the latest salvo over the bow and into the hull of the tired and decrepit SS Red Tape. Yes, it's a metaphor, but it's valid. An economic war is being fought worldwide, and we can't tie the hands of our economic soldiers who have the skills and the smarts to win it for us.

Mr. Speaker, this world is a marketplace of ideas. The knowledge economy is where this whole world is going. We have to be competitive. Like everything else in our modern world, infrastructure is needed to succeed and barriers have to be removed.

A significant education barrier was removed just last week. We support our educators and our education system, bottom to top, and are freeing them to be hired now based on merit. How long overdue has that been, colleagues?

And that's just as we support a demand economy over a command economy—a simple little play on words, but it is so, so true. That means giving our best and our brightest opportunities here, and the full spectrum of options available. Their victories in helping their fellow citizens and communities are shared victories for each and every one of us, every Ontarian.

Freedom, notably, isn't just another word for “nothing left to lose”—we've all heard that—because that song is wrong, dead wrong. Freedom is the greatest gift that our predecessors created, protected and passed on to us. Then it started getting wrapped in red tape and it started going down. You wonder why.

Main street is coping today with something none of them could have ever, ever planned for. It's up to the Ontario government, all of us in this Legislature from both sides, to do everything we can to help them cope. Fortunately, manufacturing is bouncing back and that bodes well. It means we have a growing group of consumers.

Main street has embraced the 2020 norm of social distancing: Plexiglas shields, elbow bumping, lineups outside. They have shown, collectively, extreme resilience. I'm very, very proud. I know my riding has done exceptionally well. Our two counties have a low, low incidence, and kudos to the responsible activities of all of our citizens. Many other ridings, I know, share that, so I congratulate each and every one of your citizens as well.

Personally, Mr. Speaker, I have a background for most of my life in retail and customer service. I've met with many small business people, both individually and in groups since mid-March. My staff and I have spoken to thousands of small business people across my two-county riding and in neighbouring counties. Mr. Speaker, I can assure you, I see, I hear and I feel the stress and the strains of these last six months of uncertainty. Like my fellow government MPPs, I passed on what I've heard, because what are we if we don't communicate? We've heard the advice and the suggestions and the tips and, yes, even the pleading. It has been a challenging time. Our Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction has

certainly listened to each and every one of us. It's why we have Bill 215 before us here today.

Our made-in-Ontario plan for growth, renewal and economic recovery treats individuals and businesses of all sizes with the respect they deserve and the understanding that it is not by government command that recovery and renewal will blossom. In effect, it is by getting government out of the way in the right places so we can do the most good. Often the government that must get out of the way is not just here at Queen's Park, but all governments at all levels that have got caught up in their own red tape misadventures over the many years. As a result, Bill 215, the Main Street Recovery Act, 2020, will remove some of that red tape, those regulations that hamper the ability of businesses to have needed goods and services delivered to their places of business. The domino impact of those regulations and restrictions has been to increase costs and has hurt the very businesses affected, both on the delivering and receiving ends of transactions. Both ends are suffering through this pandemic.

But it has also led to bare store shelves during this pandemic when, incredibly, laws kept trucks and other delivery vehicles away from the customers they serve—asinine. Allowing trucks to deliver to grocery stores and pharmacies overnight to ensure shelves are stocked with supplies is simply common sense, but that's a creature too often lacking in the rush that governments have made in past years when they hamstrung people, the very people who we now depend upon as the central providers for all of our goods and services. Well, Bill 215 rights that wrong.

Another example where red tape slam-tackles common sense is when it comes to defining foodstuffs. Amendments in this bill to the Ontario Food Terminal Act modernize it and remove undue language restrictions on prescribing what it does and the agricultural products it's allowed to handle. For example, who knew that to expand freedom, you'd have to put the following words into law: “A product is considered to be an agriculture product whether or not it is wrapped, packaged or minimally processed.” Wow, isn't that really, really consequential? And yet, of course, words really do matter.

The Ontario Food Terminal is a hub of activity of more than 5,000 people. Its vital operations in the wholesale marketplace set market prices for food across much of the province. This bill, 215, clarifies what can be termed agricultural produce, and so directly addresses what is bought and sold at the Ontario Food Terminal.

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Bill 215 is one piece of a powerful reform package, and I look forward to speaking on Bill 213, another one of those pieces, in just a couple of days. So let's examine how a red tape focus has helped people through the pandemic. For example, we extended the expiry dates of many licences and permits, eliminating the need for businesses and individuals to renew them during the pandemic. Every one of our constituency offices, regardless which side of this Legislature you're on, I would bet, has heard from constituents pleased at this, and surprised. But by having a government focus on barriers both large and small, we can make things better when needed.

The college of physicians and surgeons has been true in working with a group of people to allow for the temporary certification of qualifying physicians. This has allowed them to play a very important role in supporting Ontario's response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Our philosophy follows five guiding principles—very simple, but yet challenging.

(1) Protecting health, safety and the environment: We're working to ease regulatory burdens in a smart, careful way to ensure that health, safety and environmental protections are truly maintained and enhanced.

(2) Prioritizing important issues: We assess which regulations cost the most time and money, while looking for innovative ways to ensure rules are both efficient and effective.

(3) Harmonizing rules with the federal government and other provinces wherever possible: We're targeting duplicative red tape and aligning where we can to eliminate steps that cost job creators time and money.

(4) Listening to you: That's tremendously important. But we will continue to listen to the public, and we want to hear from all on what we can do to remove red tape and to create the right conditions for businesses, individuals and communities to prosper.

(5) The whole-of-government approach: We are taking a coordinated approach to make sure everyone is on the same red tape reduction page, a whole-of-government perspective from department to department, from ministry to ministry, to deliver smarter government for Ontario, with the economic growth to match.

Colleagues, this is a time of which our actions and reactions, both government and non-government, will be measured in future years, not just future weeks. Academics may even stumble across these words in Hansard, so I want you to know that I'm sincere in my thoughts, my words and my support for the noble, noble steps that we are taking in Bill 215 and its related legislation.

Government progress can rarely be measured, though, the next day. You just don't pass the legislation and have the impact the next day. But we're in challenging times and Bill 215 and the collective efforts of our economic recovery choices—and each and every one of us here, from all sides of the House: This is the time that partisan politics have got to go to the side. We need to be able to bring all of our work and effort together and put, together, Ontario back on track.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We won't have time to complete our 10 minutes of questions and responses, but we'll start anyway. I turn to the member from Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker, for starting. I just got another text. "I have a snow removal business and can't even find an insurance company to cover it." It's another one that just came out today.

But I want to talk about agriculture. You didn't really say much on the bill, but one of your colleagues did, and I have put forward legislation to eliminate the 6.1% basic tax on retail wine sales. It's time to stand with our local grocers and our wine producers to level the playing field.

So my question is pretty clear: Will you help to get the bill called to second reading and support our wineries in Ontario?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I welcome that question from the member of the opposition. I get to debate about where the number one wine region in Ontario is. I guess those would say Niagara; others would say in my region of Prince Edward that I represent too, but we'll leave that discussion for another point in a good-natured basis.

The reality is, there are no simple solutions to hundreds and hundreds of challenges and bills and organizations and regulations. Bill 66 was a start; Bill 215 is another one. We have more measures coming in Bill 213. I certainly will take his concerns validly, as stated, and should that go to committee, I would be pleased to take a look at whether or not it is feasible, doable and is going to provide the results that we need for all the citizens of Ontario at that point.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: I thought the member from Hastings–Lennox and Addington spoke quite eloquently about the bill, covered off many of the points that are contained within the bill.

I was hoping that he might be able to elaborate a little bit more on what he was just saying in regard to how this is only one cog in the wheel, so to speak, and how this plays into many of the other pieces of legislation that our government has brought forward in reduction of red tape and helping businesses thrive here in the province.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I appreciate that question.

It's funny; I've heard a lot of the questioning coming from the opposition here today, and they're saying, "Oh, but it's not enough." Granted. Shockingly, we'll agree. It's not enough. But could you imagine, if we took 75 other issues and put them all into one omnibus bill, the howls that would be coming from the opposition? This way here, they have an opportunity to be able to assess and offer criticism, offer co-operation, offer success, offer guidance, offer advice and counsel as to how we will proceed with each and every one of these.

These are four very important elements that we are dealing with in this bill, and they deserve consideration unto themselves. I certainly hope the opposition will take each and every one of those and assess, evaluate and offer comments relative to that. We'd be pleased to accept that.

And we look forward to dealing with many, many other issues that are going to be coming before the House—because this is not a one-step approach.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the member for his speech, although I heard very little about the actual bill in his comments.

We have heard from so many small businesses across this province that are really struggling right now. Many have closed their doors. Recently, Victorian Monkey, a space that has been so dear to so many of my constituents in Scarborough Southwest, closed its doors.

It's really disappointing to see what this bill has, despite all of the feedback that we got from businesses across this province.

Does the member think that this is sufficient in terms of helping businesses across our province?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: One quick answer: Absolutely not. Is this sufficient? No. But has there been tremendous action taken, and will there be substantially more action taken? Absolutely.

As I said to the member opposite before, to suggest that this bill was the be-all and end-all, an omnibus approach to it, is wrong. What we need to do is tackle these problems one by one by one. We've taken four or five main areas right here now. We're dealing with putting forth proposals and delivering results.

Might I say, with her reference being a small business—I can tell her that I come from an area that is small business. We're primarily retail, tourism, hospitality, and there's probably about an 80% impact on that. So I know first-hand exactly how our people are feeling and the actions we need to be able to help them out.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Scarborough–Guildwood.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I do want to say to the member from the government side that a lot of the words that were

said were about red tape and the commitment your government has to that. Looking at what was presented in these five pages, where is the actual reduction for small businesses in red tape? In what was put forward today and the regulations that sit behind this legislation and some of the activities, like businesses with size two to nine—is that not going to create and cause more red tape?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: For over 35 years, I was in the retail hospitality business, small business, and there was literally a myriad of red tape. Day after day after day—I could even go through a litany of those, but we'd be here until midnight tonight.

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

Mr. Daryl Kramp: The reality is, this deals with a number of issues that we have to deal with one by one. Right off the bat—how much time do I have, Mr. Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): You don't. I'm sorry; we're out of time.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The clock is at 6 o'clock. That's all the time we have for debate this afternoon. This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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des comptes publics**

Chair / Présidente: Catherine Fife
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Deepak Anand, Jill Andrew
Toby Barrett, Stephen Blais
Stan Cho, Stephen Crawford
Catherine Fife, France Gélinas
Christine Hogarth, Daryl Kramp
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: Deepak Anand
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Fraser
Deepak Anand, Toby Barrett
Will Bouma, Stephen Crawford
John Fraser, Laura Mae Lindo
Gila Martow, Paul Miller
Billy Pang, Dave Smith
Jamie West
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

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

Chair / Présidente: Natalia Kusendova
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Aris Babikian
Aris Babikian, Jeff Burch
Amy Fee, Michael Gravelle
Joel Harden, Mike Harris
Christine Hogarth, Belinda C. Karahalios
Terence Kernaghan, Natalia Kusendova
Robin Martin
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