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20 avril 2021

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Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
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111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 20 April 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 20 avril 2021

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECTING THE PEOPLE
OF ONTARIO ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2021
LOI DE 2021 VISANT À PROTÉGER
LA POPULATION ONTARIENNE
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved third reading of the following bill:

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

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the Minister of Finance care to lead off the debate?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to urge my colleagues again to support Bill 269, the Protecting the People of Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2021.

Ontario is at a critical stage in the fight against COVID-19, and our government is acting quickly and decisively. On Wednesday, April 7, our government declared a provincial emergency and issued a province-wide stay-at-home order to keep people safe while allowing our vaccination program to reach more people. These measures are being taken in response to the rapid increase in COVID-19 transmission, the threat on the province's hospital system capacity and the increasing risks posed by the COVID-19 variant.

It is more important than ever to devote every resource our government can muster to defeating COVID-19, and our government's second pandemic budget focuses on protecting people's health with our plan to defeat COVID-19, and on protecting people's jobs and economic well-being as we continue to fight the pandemic, because as I've said many times, you cannot have a healthy economy without healthy people.

Le deuxième budget de notre gouvernement en période de pandémie met l'accent sur les mesures prévues pour protéger la santé de la population grâce à notre plan de

lutte contre la COVID-19 et pour protéger les emplois et le bien-être économique de la population à mesure que se poursuit la pandémie, parce que, comme je l'ai dit à maintes reprises, pour avoir une économie en santé, on doit avoir une population en santé.

Mr. Speaker, since releasing the budget on March 24, our government has reached out directly to people all across our great province. We did so to talk about the supports we're providing to them during the pandemic, and to get their feedback on how to bring Ontario out of these unprecedented days. At a time when many people have been feeling the strain of the pandemic, we are profoundly grateful to them for taking time out of their busy days to join in the discussion and to share their opinions.

As the pandemic has continued to unfold, people have been very clear that they expect us to focus on two vital priorities: first, protect people's health, and, second, support the economy. The feedback we've received in these town halls indicates that our government is on the right track with our response to the pandemic, because protecting the health of the people of Ontario and protecting people's jobs and our economy is exactly what this budget does. The measures in Bill 269 are important components of our budget and our plan to defeat COVID-19.

The 2021 budget measures will help move forward the next phase of Ontario's action plan—a plan that brings our total COVID response to \$51 billion. That includes \$16.3 billion to protect people's health, the top priority of this government because it is the priority of the people of Ontario.

Protecting people's health is the first pillar of our plan. Top of mind now is getting vaccines into arms, full stop. We're investing more than \$1 billion in a province-wide vaccination plan so that every person who wants a vaccine can get one. We have mobilized Team Ontario and we won't stop until the job is done.

The plan has three phases and activates every available health care resource to get the job done. For instance, we are investing in a program to provide safe, accessible transportation for people with disabilities and older adults with limited mobility to get to their vaccination appointment. We are also supporting community-led vaccination efforts in First Nations and urban Indigenous communities with \$50 million to support the vaccine rollout, including more public health capacity and greater access to testing. Nobody will be left behind.

To execute a rollout of this size, we have brought together health care professionals, medical experts and front-line workers across the province. All of us have a role to play, from the drivers who transport precious

vaccine shipments to our communities to the front-line health care workers who put shots in arms, to the volunteers helping to set up appointments, to the friends, family, work colleagues and neighbours encouraging each other to get vaccines.

Mr. Speaker, along with the vaccines, our government is supporting increased testing. Anyone who needs a test can get a test, and they can get their results quickly. Well over 14 million tests have already been completed, and as vaccines roll out, testing will only increase. Our government is investing more than \$2.3 billion for testing in 2021-22, and this brings our total investment since the beginning of the pandemic to \$3.7 billion.

In particular, we are deploying rapid tests, a key part of our strategy. We will provide around 385,000 rapid tests per week in long-term care, 118,000 in retirement homes and 300,000 in essential workplaces such as manufacturing, warehouses, construction and food processing. This ambitious testing strategy will continue to ease anxiety, make life safer and ultimately save lives. It's an important part of our plan to defeat the pandemic and get life back to normal.

COVID-19 has put a significant strain on our health care system. We're also making sure hospitals have the resources they need. We have invested an additional \$5.1 billion to support hospitals since the beginning of the pandemic, creating more than 3,100 additional hospital beds—the equivalent of six new, large community hospitals. The government is accelerating investments to build, expand and enhance hospitals across the province with a plan of more than \$30 billion over the next decade. Our investments in health care are strengthening the system today and for future generations.

Yet hospitals are not only the front-line of our pandemic battle, COVID-19 heightened long-standing challenges in the long-term care of our province's most vulnerable people. Residents and staff of long-term-care homes and their loved ones have faced incredible tragedy as a result. Our government is taking action to fix long-term care so that our loved ones can live safely, and with dignity and respect. That's why we are investing an additional \$933 million, for a total of \$2.6 billion, to support our commitment to build 30,000 additional new beds. With over 20,000 beds now in development in the pipeline, we are two thirds of the way to achieving the goal.

0910

But it's not just about beds, Mr. Speaker. It's also about the quality of care. We are training and hiring thousands of staff and investing \$4.9 billion over the next four years to deliver on our commitment to increase the average daily direct care for long-term-care residents from 2.75 hours to four hours. This is an ambitious commitment. It will make Ontario the leader in Canada. However, there are many hurdles to making it a reality, including the need to hire tens of thousands of new staff to provide the care, something that clearly can't happen overnight. We will clear the hurdles and we are not waiting to act. We're investing over \$121 million to support the accelerated training of almost 9,000 personal support workers.

Mr. Speaker, while we improve long-term care and retirement homes, we are also making it easier for seniors to live longer in the homes that they love, and with their loved ones. We are investing \$160 million in the Community Paramedicine for Long-Term Care program to bring care and services to the homes of seniors in 33 communities—communities like Orangeville, Merrickville, Waterloo, Brant, York region and Windsor.

To reflect the true character of the Ontario people, the government must act with compassion. That's why better care for our seniors is such an important part and focus of our budget, and it drives our commitment to mental health and addictions treatment and care, because mental health is health, period. This phrase is so simple and yet it represents a monumental shift in our society's recognition that people with mental health and addictions challenges deserve access to the treatment when they need it and how they need it. It has driven so many of our actions since taking office, including the Roadmap to Wellness, our \$3.8-billion, 10-year commitment to mental health and addictions funding, providing more psychology treatment to patients, and the first centre of excellence for mental health in the province's history.

Mr. Speaker, we have a lot of work left to do. COVID-19 has intensified the need for action. To help the thousands of people struggling with mental health and addiction issues, our government is making record investments. That includes an additional \$175 million in 2021-22 to provide more and better care for everyone who needs it. It includes four new mobile mental health clinics to serve rural and underserved communities, a new program to embed mental health workers in police call centres to make sure people in crisis get the right support when they desperately need it, and investments to help those who serve, and who, as a result, can experience particularly troubling mental health pressures, including veterans and OPP staff.

Mr. Speaker, just as the pandemic has exacerbated mental health and addictions challenges, it has also led to a disturbing rise in domestic violence. Our government firmly believes that women and children have a fundamental right to feel safe in their home. The 2021 budget takes steps to make that a reality with new investments to bolster support services for women and children in need. We are investing an additional \$18.2 million over three years to protect and support First Nations, Inuit and Métis women and girls, who can face higher rates of violence than others, and \$18.5 million over three years to support victims of domestic violence and human trafficking survivors find and keep a safe place to live in. We remain committed to supporting the victims of domestic violence, human trafficking and other violent crimes, because this is a government that will always stand up for victims because every law-abiding citizen deserves to be protected.

Mr. Speaker, many know me as a numbers person. Before entering public life, my career was in financial markets, so I know just how important fiscal responsibility, sustainability and transparency are. It was a guiding principle when I was in the private sector and it remains a

guiding principle in my role as finance minister and President of the Treasury Board.

There is no more important time to be honest and upfront with the people of this province than during a period of uncertainty such as we are experiencing now.

Mr. Speaker, in a moment, I'm going to invite my parliamentary assistant, Stan Cho, to speak to this House in further detail about our plan to protect the economy and the measures in Bill 269 that support our government's action plan, and that's why I will be splitting my time with the member from Willowdale.

Before I do so, I would like to talk about our province's fiscal position. My job is to ensure we make every resource available to win our battle against the virus, and we have. The Ontario government is projecting to spend \$173 billion in 2021-22, and when you consider that the government spent \$148.8 billion in 2018-19, it is clear we have spared no expense to defeat COVID-19.

Of course, as it has for governments around the world, this spending has resulted in record deficits. We project the deficit will be \$33.1 billion in 2021-22, and, while this is neither sustainable nor desirable forever, I'm absolutely, unequivocally convinced it is necessary to get through the pandemic and to recover strongly. In fact, I believe the price of inaction would be much, much higher in terms of lives lost, jobs and prosperity, because, as I said, you cannot have a healthy economy without healthy people.

In this budget, we, once again, outlined three economic and fiscal scenarios, to be straightforward about the uncertainty that the global economy faces and the risks it could pose to our province's finances. We will continue to be transparent, with regular updates as we continue the fight against COVID-19.

Now, there is no doubt that our return to fiscal sustainability will take many years. Some say tax hikes or cuts to public services will be necessary due to COVID-19. I say they are wrong. The other path is to get Ontario growing again. I'm convinced that along with a modern government and a federal partner who pays their fair share, economic growth is the key to our fiscal recovery, and that growth will create jobs, provide revenues to support critical public services and ensure a sustainable fiscal position.

Since 2018, we have worked hard to confront Ontario's competitive issues, we have strengthened the foundation of our province's economy, and, to build on that, later this year our government will release our plan to create the conditions for stronger, longer-term economic growth. But, for now, as we deal with the third wave, our focus remains on protecting health and jobs threatened by COVID-19.

In conclusion, since the very beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have made a simple promise to the people of Ontario: Your government will do whatever it takes to protect you. The 2021 budget outlines the historic commitments our government is making to keep people safe, to strengthen our health care system in the face of the pandemic and position it to better support Ontario's growing health needs for the future and for today, because, even after the pandemic is over, the health of the people in

Ontario will continue to be Ontario's and this government's highest priority.

Bill 269 contains vital measures to support Ontario's action plan, and that plan takes us closer to the day when people no longer worry about a virus that can harm their health, take away their jobs or undermine the future of their small business. If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it's that the 14.7 million people of Ontario can accomplish incredible things when we work towards a common goal.

La COVID-19 nous aura appris au moins une chose : les 14,7 millions d'Ontariennes et d'Ontariens peuvent accomplir des choses incroyables lorsqu'ils travaillent à atteindre un but commun.

I know that their hard work, ingenuity and commitment to look after each other will set us up on a path that restores Ontario's place as the economic engine of this country. The Ontario spirit will get us through COVID-19—of this I have no doubt—and, when that time comes, the Ontario spirit will unleash growth unlike anything we've seen in this province ever before. Until then, with grateful hearts, our government expresses its profound admiration and respect to the people of Ontario.

We know the road back won't be straight or easy. Even as we face a very challenging third wave and variants of concern, hope is on the horizon, and we remain absolutely committed to seeing people through these trying days and into a better future.

I'd like to now invite my parliamentary assistant, Stan Cho, to talk about the second pillar: protecting our economy.

0920

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Well, the minister did say he'd be sharing his time, so we turn to the parliamentary assistant, the member for Willowdale.

Mr. Stan Cho: Good morning to all my colleagues in the Legislature today.

On March 18, less than a week before the government tabled its annual budget, a member of this House spoke to the press about what should be included. On March 18, this member suggested that the government should focus on fixing long-term care in Ontario, and asked that the budget provide funding to hire and train personal support workers. Six days later, on March 24, our government did just that. As part of the largest recruitment of personal support workers in Ontario's history, we provided \$121 million to accelerate the training of 9,000 PSWs and extended the wage enhancement for over 158,000 PSWs.

On March 18, this member asked that this year's budget include funding to meet the commitment to provide four hours of average daily care to long-term-care residents. On March 24, our government did just that by investing \$4.9 billion to meet our nation-leading commitment.

On March 18, this member said, "We know that there are some 227,000 people who have either postponed or cancelled surgeries and procedures. That has to be dealt with. There needs to be a solid plan to get those surgeries and procedures done." And on March 24, the government laid out a solid plan, including a \$300-million investment to deal with the surgical backlog.

On March 18, the same member of this House asked the government to help hospitals with their operating deficits. On March 24, the budget provided \$700 million to do just that.

On March 18, the member asked for a new hospital for Brampton. On March 24, our government delivered.

On March 18, the member asked that the government focus on supporting small business, to give them help and hope. On March 24, the government doubled the Ontario Small Business Support Grant, giving businesses up to \$40,000 in cash payments.

Speaker, the member making these suggestions on March 18 was the leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition. So you can imagine my surprise when I learned the members opposite would not be supporting the government's budget. After all, it delivered on every single one of the priorities their party leader had outlined just days before the budget was tabled in this very Legislature. So somewhere over the course of six days—six days—the members opposite changed their minds.

I thought to myself, there must be things in this budget that the opposition objects to. There has to be. There must be parts of this budget so egregious to the members opposite that they would vote against the very measures they were calling for the government to implement.

And over the past three weeks of debate, I've been in this chamber and in committee. I've listened very carefully, and I've waited and waited. I waited to hear what it was in this budget that the opposition objected to. But I've heard nothing. For three weeks of debate, the opposition has not raised a single issue with what is in this budget. Their only objection—their only objection, it seems to me—is with what they don't think is in this budget.

Now members opposite are going to vote against this budget, are going to attempt to vote down the measures, many of which they themselves have called for, that this government is putting in place to support their constituents. The opposition hasn't outlined a single problem with what's actually in the government's budget, but for purely partisan gain, they are going to vote against it.

Sadly, these partisan games are not a new phenomenon. Last year, our government invested \$2.8 billion in our fall preparedness plan for testing and contact tracing to support hospitals and purchase flu vaccines, \$1 billion to purchase PPE and \$1.5 billion in pandemic pay for front-line health care workers. The NDP and the Liberals voted against. In this budget, the government is investing a further \$1 billion for vaccine distribution, \$2.3 billion for increased testing and \$1.8 billion to support hospitals. The NDP and Liberals are voting against.

Last year, this government invested \$1.75 billion to increase capacity and build new long-term-care beds. The NDP and Liberals voted against. In this budget, the government is investing another close to \$1 billion to build 30,000 long-term-care beds. Two thirds of those beds are already in development. After years of propping up the Liberal government that built just 600 beds over the course of nearly a decade, the NDP plans to vote against this increased funding.

Speaker, when it comes to supporting Ontario's entrepreneurs, small businesses and job creators, last year, this government spent \$4.8 billion to lower commercial and industrial hydro rates, reduce property taxes and eliminate the tax on jobs for the smallest of small businesses. The Liberals and NDP voted against all of it. This year, the government is doubling the small business grant to provide struggling small businesses with immediate support, a program that has already distributed more than \$1.4 billion to over 100,000 main street businesses in the first round alone. The Liberals and NDP are voting against it and, instead, want small businesses to shoulder the cost of a paid sick leave program that's already being provided by the federal government.

Perhaps the reason the uptake on the federal paid sick days program in Ontario has been so slow is because the Ontario Liberals and NDP have for weeks been trying to convince Ontarians that the program doesn't exist. The members opposite often talk about undermining public trust and confusing communications, yet the NDP and Liberals have done nothing but confuse the public by repeating the false claim that paid sick leave does not exist in Ontario and undermine trust in this federal program.

They've failed to mention that this government was the first in Canada to protect workers from losing their jobs if they needed to self-isolate or look after an ailing loved one. Instead, they've done everything they can to suggest that Ontario workers don't have access to paid sick leave when they absolutely do.

So what does a Liberal-NDP COVID-19 response look like? Based on their voting record, less money for hospitals, fewer long-term-care beds and more small business bankruptcies. Talk is cheap, Speaker, but when it comes to actions, the members opposite haven't missed an opportunity to vote against increasing spending to protect people and support jobs.

Ontarians are rightfully exhausted. It's been an impossible year, and we are facing a harder spring than any of us imagined or hoped for. Our government has had to move quickly to make tough decisions with limited information and few good options at times. With variants of concern ripping through our cities and a slower-than-expected vaccine supply from the federal government, I believe that the difficult choices being made are only in the best interests of the people we serve, to protect the health and safety of our communities. But no one—no one—on this side of the House is under any illusion about the devastation these measures cause small businesses, the hardship they cause for families or the strain they place on the mental health of Ontarians.

0930

But instead of moving forward with investments we know will help, policies and funding they themselves have called for, the NDP and the Liberals will once again put their partisan interests above all else and vote against doubling the Small Business Support Grant, vote against giving parents \$400 per child, vote against an additional \$175 million for mental and addictions funding. Why, Speaker? Well, during second reading debate, the member

from Ottawa South complained that the budget “is barely 200 pages.” A \$51-billion total investment to protect the lives and livelihoods of Ontarians—but not enough pages for the member from Ottawa South.

The members opposite claim that this budget cuts funding. It was the first thing the Leader of the Opposition said on March 24 in her press conference. And we’ve heard numerous times these past weeks from members opposite that the government is cutting education funding. But I’ll ask the members opposite who are in the chamber now: Which page? Which page of the budget shows this cut to education funding that they keep talking about? Because I’ve read this budget cover to cover, all 211 pages, and what I can see is that on page 7 it shows, in black and white, an increase in base program funding for education this year, in 2021; again next year, in 2022, in 2023 and in 2024.

On page 9 of the budget—and for those watching at home, if you’re seeing the budget online, you’ll have to add 20 to the page numbers, because they count the index; so on page 9 of the physical copy, 29 of the virtual copy—there’s a nice chart there for members opposite that shows that base program spending across all ministries increases every year between now and 2024. And in case the members opposite skipped over those pages, they can also find the year-over-year increases in education funding on page 11, page 164 and page 174.

All of that increase in funding is on top of the billions of dollars that this government has invested during the pandemic to protect students, to hire additional teachers, to keep class sizes small, hire more cleaning staff, hire public health nurses for schools and provide rapid testing. In truth, Speaker, contrary to the claims made by the opposition, the budget shows on page 174, 194 online, that the base funding for education increases from \$30.56 billion last year, a record amount, to \$31.26 billion this year.

Hon. John Yakabuski: That’s more, isn’t it?

Mr. Stan Cho: That’s actually an increase of \$702 million, or 2.3%. If you look at the inflation rate on page 129 of the budget, 149 online, Ontario’s inflation is projected to be 1.7%. The increase to education is above the rate of inflation. So not only is there not a cut to education funding, but increases to education outpace inflation.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Wow. And they’re against it.

Mr. Stan Cho: And the opposition stands against it.

Speaker, this government is investing in public education, and we believe that the investments we’re making will provide better outcomes for students. I don’t expect the opposition to agree with that. We can and should have a robust debate in this chamber about how to get the very best education for children in Ontario. But to claim that the government is cutting education funding is a bit more than disingenuous.

The NDP and the Liberals believe that the measure of success of any public policy or government program is the amount of money that you throw at it, but on this side of the House, we believe that it’s the outcomes that matter, that we should measure the success of Ontario’s education

system not by how much it costs but by the quality of education that our kids, our students, receive. We believe that spending taxpayer dollars should buy the people of Ontario better outcomes, whether that’s in education, health care, transportation, and we believe that there is always room to improve the way that the public sector operates.

So, Speaker, while this government is spending historic amounts to do everything possible to protect the health and safety of Ontarians, to support families, businesses and communities, we also know that Ontarians deserve to have their money spent to provide them with the best results possible. That’s part of the reason why being transparent and accountable is so important to this government.

I’ll remind the members of this chamber that we are the only government in Canada who has, even during this time of global uncertainty, charted a path to financial stability. The previous provincial Liberal government, during the best of economic times, failed to meet eight of their last 14 financial reporting deadlines—eight of their last 14, Speaker. By contrast, this government hasn’t missed one.

The role of the opposition is to criticize. The members opposite have brought up the hawk in this very chamber many times, to keep a critical eye on the government. I understand that. I respect that. But while this government has been fighting COVID-19, the opposition has been fighting the government. Speaker, now is the time to work together to support the necessary investments in things like hospitals, vaccines and long-term-care homes—priorities that the opposition themselves called for just a few short days before the budget. If the opposition thinks that the government should be spending more, then stand with us. Stand with us in asking the federal government to pay their fair share of the Canada Health Transfer.

The Ontario Liberals have a number of their former caucus colleagues who sit as Liberal members of Parliament today. Give them a call. Ask them why, in yesterday’s federal budget, they once again failed to provide the funding Ontario desperately needs. Stand with us, and with all the provinces and territories, in calling on the federal government to immediately increase the Canada Health Transfer to cover at least 35% of health spending. Speaker, today the Canada Health Transfer covers 22% of health care spending in Ontario. An original commitment of 50% stands at 22%. Over the next two decades, that will decrease to just 18%, a gap of \$30 billion a year in funding for Ontario alone.

While this government is making unprecedented investments in health care, it’s the federal government that will be reducing health care funding in Ontario by \$30 billion a year. Where is the NDP’s outrage about that? Where is the Ontario Liberals’ outrage?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Where are they? Like, really, though, where are they?

Mr. Stan Cho: Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Excuse me, I’m sorry to interrupt. The member for Niagara Centre knows the rules. I would ask him not to repeat his last statement. Thank you.

I go back to the member from Willowdale.

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you very much, Speaker. So instead of working with this government—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): My apologies. It has been pointed out I've made a mistake. It's Niagara West, not Niagara Centre. You know the rules more than the member from Niagara Centre. Don't do it again. Thank you.

Back to the member from Willowdale.

Mr. Stan Cho: Mr. Speaker, I look forward to going into both Niagara West, Niagara Centre and Niagara Falls—great areas of the province. I really look forward to this when COVID-19 is behind us.

In the meantime, we have an opportunity here to support Ontarians, but instead of working with this government—and I want to remind the NDP that they worked with the Liberal government in 2011 when they voted in favour of Liberal budgets; in 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014. But instead of working with us to fight the COVID-19 virus, members opposite want to work together to fight this government.

In voting against this budget, the members for Brampton East, Brampton Centre and Brampton North will vote against a new hospital in Brampton, will vote against a new medical school in Brampton, against a new public school in Brampton, including the creation of an additional 73 child care spaces, and against more than \$71 million for 5,128 small businesses in Brampton. Speaker, they'll vote against these things their constituents need, to score cheap political points.

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The members for Windsor–Essex and Windsor West will vote against the new Windsor Regional Hospital, will vote against the expansion of mental health in-patient beds at Windsor's Hôtel-Dieu health care, and against more than \$19 million to support 1,429 small businesses in the Windsor area. Speaker, they'll vote against these things their constituents need to score cheap political points.

The members for Niagara Falls, Niagara Centre and St. Catharines will vote against \$10 million in support for Ontario's wine industry, against \$600 million to support Ontario's tourism sector, and against more than \$20 million to support 1,414 small businesses in the Niagara region. They'll vote against these things their constituents need to score cheap political points.

The members for Ottawa Centre, Orléans and Ottawa–Vanier will vote against a new children's treatment centre at CHEO, against \$2 million for francophone non-profit organizations, against \$2.4 million to train 300 new PSWs in the Ottawa region, and against more than \$80 million in funding for 5,186 small businesses in Ottawa. They'll vote against these things their constituents need to score cheap political points.

The member from Waterloo, who has stood in this House for the past year and talked about the importance of supporting small business, who has told main street businesses appearing before the finance committee that the opposition is looking out for them—that same member will vote against doubling the small business support grant for those very small businesses, including voting against

the more than \$10 million for almost 700 businesses in Waterloo; will vote against \$10 million in additional funding for the Digital Main Street program to allow businesses to retool to sell online; will vote against making child care more affordable for women and caregivers trying to re-enter the workforce; will vote against two-way, all-day GO service; will vote against almost \$1 billion in training and employment supports; will vote against an additional \$2.8 billion to expand broadband across Ontario.

Speaker, the member from Waterloo will vote against perhaps the most important thing we can do for our economy: The member will vote against \$1 billion to get vaccines into the arms of every Ontarian, our best hope for reopening those small businesses that she claims to support.

Interjection.

Mr. Stan Cho: I hope they change their minds.

Speaker, since the very beginning of this pandemic, this government has been there for Ontarians and for Ontario businesses. This whole process hasn't been easy. We've had to make difficult choices, no doubt. No one on this side of the House is claiming that the government's response to this global pandemic has been perfect; it hasn't. But Speaker, around the world all governments agree that there is no playbook against this pandemic. There's no guide for this crisis.

When this government has made mistakes, we've learned from them. We've worked quickly to remedy them. We've moved fast, been iterative, evolved. Most importantly, we've listened to the experts and to Ontarians. Throughout this crisis, a crisis that's lasted longer than any of us were prepared for, we've only ever acted to protect Ontario.

Speaker, it's easy to criticize, and there are at times valid criticisms, but what I sincerely find most troubling is that in this Legislature it has become increasingly clear that members opposite are more interested in their own political advancement than they are in working to improve legislation like this budget and help Ontarians. As I've said before, and I'm reminded in this Legislature often, it is the role of the opposition to hold the government to account, to criticize the government to better serve the people we are all in here to serve collectively. It is not the role of the opposition to root for failure.

There are members opposite who have offered well-reasoned and thoughtful suggestions. The member for Scarborough–Guildwood, for example, brought forward a number of amendments at committee last week around Invest Ontario. I really appreciated that because we were able to have a very meaningful discussion around these amendments, and her feedback has sparked real conversation, dialogue about how we can ensure good, equitable governance in this new critical agency—an agency that attracts investment to Ontario. I appreciated the member's work in offering up suggestions on how this government can work better to serve Ontarians through this budget bill, and I extended my offer to work with her, together, moving through this to make sure we can achieve those

better outcomes for all Ontarians. That is exactly the kind of dialogue and debate we should be having in this Legislature.

In contrast, the Ontario NDP, after spending two weeks saying that the government budget measures weren't good enough, to my surprise offered a grand total of zero amendments in finance committee—so no problems found inside the budget, but nothing of constructive value to offer to the budget. This government is doing everything that it can to pilot our province through this storm and we need the opposition's help, their suggestions, their ideas and even their criticism to improve our response. In these times of great uncertainty, we need all hands on deck, but that only works if the opposition actually wants the response to succeed. The leader of the NDP first calls for a host of measures before the budget, and then, after the government introduces those very measures, attempts to vote them down; criticizes the government for not doing enough, but offers no suggestions, no amendments for the bill.

I'll remind the Legislature that this government, within days of the first cases of COVID-19 in Ontario, made \$17 billion available to fight this pandemic, immediately. As Premier Ford has said, we have spared no expense over the past year to protect the health and safety of the people we serve, as evidenced by our \$51 billion pandemic response cited in this budget; as evidenced, in the page numbers cited earlier, in our \$186 billion spend to protect our core programs and services during these very difficult times; as evidenced by the \$16.3 billion invested into our health care system, \$5.1 billion into increased capacity and addressing the surgical backlog, \$1 billion for vaccines, and \$23.3 billion to protect our jobs and our economy. It's never too late to do the right thing. It's never the wrong time to do the right thing. So I hope that the members opposite will change their minds.

There is an opportunity. Hope does spring eternal. As we see brighter days on the horizon here in our province and around the world, I have hope in this Legislature today as well. I have hope that the opposition will change their minds, will support their constituents, and will support small business, our health care system and our long-term-care sector, all of which have been hit so hard by this globally uncertain situation that nobody asked for. I hope that they will change their minds and vote in favour of this increase in spending to protect health, to protect jobs here in Ontario and to protect our future. I hope they will work with us to fight this pandemic instead of fighting the government for partisan gain. And, Speaker, I hope that we can all agree that what Ontario needs now, during these difficult days in particular, is for its leaders to stand united, to work together, to display that Ontario spirit the Premier talks about so often.

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It's been just under 1,100 days since I've had the privilege of being voted into office. Every single day, I'm reminded of just what an honour it is to stand in this place, to represent the fine people of Willowdale. I cannot help but be reminded of my family's story, which is the story

of so many in this chamber: the story of hard work, the story of sacrifice, the story of tough times to provide a better life for the next generation. Speaker, all of that has been threatened by this pandemic.

As our Premier and as our government has shown from the very beginning, we have spared no expense to provide that support, and it has not been the time for politics. So, Speaker, I am sincerely, in earnest, pleading with the members opposite to put our partisan differences aside.

There is no criticism you can find in the budget. There are no constructive additions you have provided outside the budget. It stands to reason that you will support this budget. I sincerely hope, for the sake of the people of this province today, for the sake of our next generation, for Sullivan, for those to follow afterwards, for our core programs and services, for Ontario to remain the best place to live on the entire planet, that you will vote in favour of those investments into health care, into long-term care, into our economy. If you're not going to do it for today, please let's do it for tomorrow and truly display what is rightly called the Ontario spirit.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to ask a question of the President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, whose remarks I listened to intently. He said the Ontario spirit will get us through the pandemic and claimed to be a numbers guy. So my question is about that. In terms of the sections of the budget on social assistance and income support, the overall funding to children, community and social services is flat and not keeping pace with inflation. The increases are less than inflation. There's no mention for support for children with autism.

So I'd like to know some numbers from the numbers guy. How many people are desperately struggling on ODSP and OW? How much money do folks relying on social assistance need each month to get by? How much is the average rent? How much do they have left at the end of the month? What does it cost to survive in this province? How many Ontarians on ODSP and OW deserve to be ignored and further marginalized by this government? And how many folks on social assistance will be able to pay rent, buy food—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. To the member from Willowdale to respond.

Mr. Stan Cho: I will direct the member opposite's attention to page 9, which clearly shows those investments into the very core programs and services that she is mentioning. Nothing more, but—in the out years, every single year out to 2024—investments in every single line ministry. If she wants a clearer breakdown of that, it's available on pages 164 through 174 inclusive, showing every single out year on those investments to the Ministry of Social Services.

You will also see the increase, the doubling of the funding, for autism supports. You will see increased investments into those social services that we all know protect the most vulnerable in our community.

Speaker, this goes back to my central point, which is that the budget clearly demonstrates these investments, clearly shows our government's priority into investing in today, but also tomorrow. If the members want to challenge those figures based on the objective black-and-white numbers that we are referencing in the budget, please do so. But in the meantime, I will direct the member's attention to those very page numbers to see those investments.

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

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Good morning, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to vote in favour of this budget, because in 2018 I voted Conservative and for a Conservative budget. Here we have the parliamentary assistant admitting that this budget was crafted around measures requested by the NDP.

Why has this Conservative government, who claims to be fiscally responsible, tabled a budget that has no tax relief, has record debt and has made it illegal to open your small business?

Mr. Stan Cho: I shared this story before, but at nine years old, when my parents' store was very busy, I asked for some stuff I probably shouldn't have, and my parents reminded me that when times are good, you put away for a rainy day. Sure enough, the very next week, the store flooded. The store was closed for two weeks. But it is because of that fiscal prudence that my parents were able to weather the storm.

The storms are here, and that's why, in our first two and a half years in government, our government chopped the proposed Liberal deficit in half. That is why we were able to spend today to protect the health and safety of the people we serve. I, for one, will not apologize for investing into the health and safety and protecting Ontarians until we are through this pandemic.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Good morning, Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to ask a question to the member for Willowdale and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance.

At the region of Durham, we have an upper-tier government there, and one of the aspects that they're spending a lot of time on right now is their economic recovery plan. The reason why is that, like many municipalities, many of the businesses in tourism, hospitality and cultural sectors have been affected by the pandemic. Would the member from Willowdale talk about what our government is doing to help those particular sectors through this Ontario budget?

Mr. Stan Cho: There are a couple of really important points that the member from Whitby brings up there, not the least of which are the supports for the tourism and accommodations sector we know has been hit very hard. Our pandemic response has been \$624 million in additional relief.

But the member also touched on something very important, that our front-line municipalities have played a

pivotal role in getting us, in piloting us through this very difficult time. That's why we've announced a series of tax relief measures, permanent reductions to the small business taxes, up to 30%, an elimination of the EHT for 30,000 of the smallest small businesses in our province—that's a tax on jobs—without affecting the bottom line of our municipalities.

We understand that this is a balanced approach. Like a boxer, you have to be ready during the pandemic and ready to pounce forward when we are through to recovery. That's why this government has moved prudently, both fiscally and socially, to make sure that we can achieve just that.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: My question is to the Minister of Finance. It's about the recent Canadian Federation of Independent Business report that more than 25,000 small businesses have gone under during this pandemic, and that speaks to the failure of this government to support small businesses.

I'm hearing from many small businesses in my riding that the criteria for the supports leaves them out. It leaves out new businesses. It leaves out businesses whose income between April 2019 and 2020 does not show a dramatic decrease. So many tens of thousands of more small businesses are on the brink of collapse because of this government's refusal to change the criteria, and this budget does not change that criteria.

Why not? Why aren't you supporting small businesses? How many more tens of thousands of small businesses in Ontario are going to have to go under before you take action?

Mr. Stan Cho: We know that small businesses are going through a difficult time. We've said that in this House from the very beginning. That's why we have provided a blanket measure of support, in conjunction with all levels of government, from the very beginning of COVID-19. The latest iteration, the small business grant that the member references, has provided over \$1.4 billion in direct relief to 120,000 small businesses in this province.

It was interesting to hear the member say that this government is not supporting small businesses, when it is that member and the party that has voted—not about a third round of small business supports, but it voted against the second round of small business supports; voted against an extension of a program for the tourism and accommodations sector; voted against broadband infrastructure for small businesses; reductions to the EHT, the tax on jobs; reductions to small business property taxes; reductions in hydro costs for these hard-working small businesses.

It takes more than words to actually support these small businesses. I hope the member from Spadina-Fort York will support small businesses, like the Score on King, and make sure that they are able to weather this storm and vote in favour of this budget.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: One of the important aspects of this legislation is, of course, health care, which we saw crumbling under the former government for many years. I think we've seen substantial investments. I know in my community in Niagara, whether it's Hotel Dieu Shaver, whether it's the new South Niagara Hospital, whether it's the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital, that Niagara has never seen such investments in health care as it has under this government, and I believe that this budget, especially since the pandemic hit, is continuing that legacy.

So could you speak a little bit to these historic investments, and why they're necessary as we see aging demographics and, of course, the pandemic just creating more pressures on our health care system?

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Mr. Stan Cho: I really appreciate the question from the member from Niagara West, because there is nothing more important than the health and safety of Ontarians. As the Minister of Finance has said numerous times in this Legislature, you cannot have a healthy economy without healthy people.

Speaker, I want to direct the member's attention, and those watching at home, to the pages in the budget that outline two key priorities. It's not just about the pandemic response, which totals \$16.3 billion and that's many of those measures that I talked about in my comments; it also points to our record spend to that end, to accomplish those health outcomes throughout the out years in this budget. It's a very important distinction to have. There's a pandemic response, but then there's your "when life is back to normal" response.

The member touches on a crucially important point: We have an aging population, we have a growing population, and our health care system is the envy of the world and something that we should all be very proud of here in Ontario. Those record investments are going to continue to make sure that we protect the health and safety of those in this province, not just for today but for tomorrow as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for one quick question and a quick response.

Ms. Jessica Bell: In my riding of University–Rosedale, we have a huge, growing small business community that has just been gutted by the pandemic. We've had shutdown after shutdown, and a tiny amount of government support to help these small businesses get through. We just did outreach to the small businesses in our riding. We surveyed them and said, "How many of you have applied to the small business support program and how many of you have actually got your money?"

Of the businesses that have applied—who are eligible, and there are a lot who are not—80% have not received their money. So the small business program is not working. What are you going to do to make sure it works?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have 25 seconds for a response.

Mr. Stan Cho: I fondly recall University–Rosedale. My first job was actually at Korea House restaurant on

Bloor Street. I've spoken to the owners of PAT supermarket; I've spoken to many small businesses in that vibrant area of our city who have said that our support has helped them weather the storm. And 120,000 small businesses, to answer the member's question directly, have received over \$1.4 billion in direct support, something that can—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you very much.

Mr. Stan Cho: I only had 20 seconds, Speaker. Sorry about that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): When we divide the time, we try to do it equally.

We have time for further debate.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I rise today as the House leader for the official opposition to participate in the debate on the budget bill that is before us this morning. I am joining this debate on behalf of my colleague the member for Waterloo, who is the finance critic for the Ontario NDP and is not able to be in the Legislature this morning, Speaker, because we have implemented safety measures to deal with the unprecedented crisis that we are living through in this province. We have divided our caucus into cohorts so that if one cohort experiences COVID transmission, another cohort will be available to continue to attend this Legislature and fight on behalf of the people of this province.

These safety measures that have been implemented are necessary because of what has happened in this province—what was on its way to happening long before this budget was released, but in particular what we have seen over the last couple of weeks. It seems like a lifetime ago, actually, Speaker, that this government tabled its budget in this Legislature, given all that has happened with the third wave in this province.

What this government has not and continues not to be able to understand is that nothing that's in this budget matters unless we can deal with the crisis that is before us. We are on the brink of a catastrophic overwhelming of our health care system, Speaker. If the projections actually come true—and the track record has been very solid in terms of what the scientific experts, what the medical experts have been telling this government. If those projections appear, where we have 10,000 cases in the province and we have thousands of people in ICU beds—if we confront that reality face to face; if effective measures aren't put in place to prevent that reality—our health care system is going to be gutted. Our health care system is going to be completely overwhelmed, and the process of rebuilding that is going to be enormous. It is going to be enormous to get through the next days and weeks of this third wave and have a health care system that is still functioning and that is still there for the people of this province.

I have to say, Speaker, yesterday I stood in this place and I participated in a one-hour debate on a bill that the government had brought forward dealing with red tape reduction. The title of the bill is Supporting Ontario's Recovery and Competitiveness. I want to just say up front

that many of the comments that I made yesterday—I'm going to be making those same comments today, Speaker, because, really, there is only one debate we should be having in this place right now. People in this province are looking to this Legislature for leadership. They are looking for government to listen to experts, to listen to their science advisory table, to listen to physicians—ICU physicians, public health physicians who know what has to be done, who have been telling this government what has to be done—and this government has continued to ignore that advice.

We saw that in rather spectacular fashion on Friday, when Dr. Brown from the science advisory table presented a stunning scenario of the catastrophe that is about to unfold in this province. He made some very specific recommendations about the measures that the government needed to put in place urgently, immediately, to prevent that catastrophe from taking on an even greater scale than we are currently looking at. One of the recommendations that he included was support for essential workers, support for the businesses, the non-essential businesses that must close if we're going to prevent workplace transmission.

And what did the government do two hours later? We saw the Premier stand up and ignore those urgent recommendations from the science advisory table, and instead propose giving the police extraordinary powers to stop citizens and ask for their address and where they're going—basically, Speaker, to reintroduce carding into the province. We saw the government announce a closure of playgrounds and outdoor recreational amenities. Nowhere in Dr. Brown's presentation did he recommend that people be prevented from going outdoors and participating in recreational activities. That was not a recommendation. What was a recommendation, as I said, was support for essential workers through a program of paid sick days and support for the non-essential businesses that must close. Once again, we saw this government introduce measures to require some businesses to close, but they don't go far enough.

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I have to commend Dr. Lawrence Loh, the medical officer of health for Peel region, who has been a leader. This government can certainly take some lessons from Dr. Lawrence Loh about what leadership means in a time of crisis. Dr. Lawrence Loh has been sounding the alarm on the need for paid sick days from the beginning of this pandemic. He is in a region where a study showed that of 8,000 essential workers in Peel with COVID symptoms, 2,000 of them were going into work sick. One quarter of the Peel essential worker workforce who had COVID symptoms were going into work sick; 80 of those workers actually had a COVID-positive test confirmed. They were going into work sick because they didn't have a choice.

We know that many essential workers are racialized workers. They're immigrant workers, they are low wage, they live paycheque to paycheque, and staying home while they are sick is not an option. It's not an option, because what it means is not being able to pay the rent, not being able to support their families, and that's an impossible

choice for a worker to make. If you have symptoms of COVID, you have to decide, "Do I want to go into work and potentially infect my co-workers or follow the advice of public health, which is to stay home?" They have to make that choice of what to do. They shouldn't have to be financially penalized for following public health advice.

That's what Dr. Lawrence Loh has always known. Today, he stepped up where this government has failed to act, has used his authority under section 22 and has called for the closure of all businesses with five or more cases of COVID-19 within the last two weeks. He has called for those businesses to close down for 10 days. He has also called, in the absence of any government support, for the employers of those businesses to provide paid sick days to their workers.

It's extraordinary, Speaker: This government continues its constant narrative that there are paid sick days, that the federal government's program, the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit, is a paid sick days program. It is not. A paid sick days program involves waking up in the morning, feeling unwell, calling your employer and saying, "I can't come in to work today. I'm going to go and get a COVID test. I'll let you know when I'll be back," and having your paycheque arrive just as it would have if you had not made that call. That is a paid sick days program.

The federal program is only available to certain workers. You have to have earned at least \$5,000 in the previous year. To access that program, again, you call your employer, you say, "I'm not feeling well," and the employer says, "Okay, as of today you're on unpaid leave." Then you have to go online and file an application for the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit and hope you qualify, but you won't if you haven't already lost 50% of your regular work hours.

I see my time is up.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Yes, I'm sorry to interrupt the member for London West, but unfortunately the time for debate on this matter this morning has expired.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): You'll have an opportunity later today, I would think, when the bill is called again.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have received an impassioned letter from a critical care nurse at our local hospital in Oshawa. She writes: "I have been watching this tsunami of COVID cases in this third wave with great trepidation.

"The ON government has said they didn't know it would be this bad, they needed to see the effects in the hospitals before finally acting (too little too late). There is absolutely no accountability on their part for ignoring the

provincial modelling presented by science and health experts and creating this crisis in our health care system.

“I am devastated by the rising COVID cases in our community and our province due to the government’s poor communication and negligent mishandling of this pandemic. Their ongoing refusal to protect Ontarians with paid sick days and their callous cuts resulting in an inefficient public health system that can properly test/trace/isolate are abject failures of leadership. Their vaccine rollout has demonstrated systemic inequities in marginalized communities and is abhorrent. Their lack of accountability for their decisions and their actions is unforgivable....

“Critical care units here in Durham region have moved several critically ill Durham region residents to centres in Kingston and Ottawa to try to ensure critical care services are available here for the many COVID and non-COVID patients requiring our services. Emergency measures to redeploy non-ICU staff have been issued to help us manage this third wave.

“I have been a registered nurse for 34 years and a proud critical care nurse for 25 of these years. I am gutted by what this ON government has allowed to happen to our health care system. They must be held accountable for choosing ideology over science, for listening to business and lobbyists over health experts.”

Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to our front-line services.

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Hon. Rod Phillips: I rise in the House today to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of Durham public health, and in particular Dr. Robert Kyle and the front-line team who support those who are hard at work administering vaccinations in the town of Ajax and elsewhere in Durham.

Tomorrow, a mobile vaccine clinic will be at Bolton C. Falby school in the town of Ajax. That’s located at 80 Falby Court. The clinic will require no appointments, and I encourage everyone in the area who is eligible to roll up their sleeves and get vaccinated.

In Durham region, as of this Sunday, 158,947 vaccines have been administered, including 1,834 by mobile clinics such as the one that will be at Falby school in Ajax tomorrow. In addition, pharmacies, primary care clinics and Lakeridge hospital continue to provide vaccine appointments. Durham public health have in the past few months set up and operated eight mass vaccination clinics across Durham region, and this effort has not gone unnoticed by our community. As well, today, those aged 40 and over can get access to the AstraZeneca vaccine at their local pharmacies. In Ajax, 16 of our local pharmacies are providing vaccine booking appointments online and on the phone.

In addition to thanking our front-line public health staff, I also want to thank all the pharmacists, technicians and others involved in the distribution of vaccine through our

local pharmacies and through our public health and primary care units.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Chris Glover: Today, I’m going to argue that the refusal to implement paid sick days by this government and last week’s decision to increase police powers are both examples of systemic racism.

We know that workplaces are the main transmission points. Just today, I was at a press conference with the Ontario Medical Students Association. An emergency room physician, Dr. Stephen, pointed out that two thirds of the COVID cases in Peel region can be traced to workplace transmission. He also said that one in four workers reported going to work while symptomatic, because if they did not, if they lost their paycheque, they would not be able to pay the rent or feed their families.

The decision last week to increase police powers was incredibly traumatizing to particularly Black and Indigenous communities. A resident from my community, Paul David, wrote on Facebook: “It’s hard to understand if you present as white, but I now have to prepare what to do, say, avoid, how to behave whenever I leave my home.”

And our colleague from Kiiwetinoong: The increase of police powers reminded him of the powers of the Indian agents on the reserve to refuse or give permission for First Nations people to leave those reserves. That happened for decades.

My question to the government is: How could you possibly come up with this police measure? What is the proportion of Black and Indigenous members on the command table?

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And I will argue again that refusing to implement paid sick days that would primarily benefit low-income, racialized communities and the decision to increase police powers are both acts of systemic racism.

FOX 40 INTERNATIONAL INC.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: One of the premises in any business is to either find a need and fill it or simply create the need. For 15 years, back in the day, I refereed basketball at high levels at all-Ontario high school games as well as men’s leagues consisting of former college and university players. When the stands were filled with cheering fans, their noise would drown out the sound of my whistle, making it difficult to stop play. You see, the old-style whistle had a cork pea. When you blew it really hard, nothing would come out, and when it got frozen or wet or had some dirt inside, it would lose its efficiency.

Enter Ron Foxcroft. Ron was a former basketball official who experienced many of my same issues. His business acumen was second to none as he knew there was a need to build a better mousetrap. Instead, he created what is known today as the Fox 40, a pealess whistle with a very high shrill to it. I had to make sure that when I used it, I didn’t blow it in somebody’s ear.

The pealless whistle has become the whistle of choice for the NHL, NBA, NCAA, NFL, arena football and the Canadian Football League. I'm proud to say that the Fox 40 and the mini Fox 40 were invented while I refereed. To this day, it was the absolute best whistle I ever used.

In over 30 years of business, the company has grown and is now comprised of a Canadian head office with a US-based sister company, Tri-Foxco USA. Fox 40 whistles are sold in over 140 countries.

Congratulations to Ron and his team, who, by the way, hail from Hamilton, Ontario.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Michael Mantha: My role as the MPP for Algoma–Manitoulin is to make sure that the voices of people across my riding come to floor of the Legislature—voices like Melissa. Melissa is single mom dealing with three children at home. Her biggest challenge this week was the return to home virtual learning for children; however, she is stuck going to work. She cannot afford, and will not receive enough on CERB, so she's having to make the decision: "Do I quit my job and come back home and lose my benefits?" These are the realities of what certain individuals are facing.

Seniors across Algoma–Manitoulin are still struggling with booking appointments. They have no access to computers; they only have telephones. They are sitting on the phone for enormous amounts of time only to be told that there are no spaces available. They feel like they are desperate and really forgotten by this government. The frustration level, as far as what seniors are seeing on the daily news, is from what's happening in other parts of the province, particularly in southern Ontario, where they see individuals who are younger who are getting access to receiving vaccines while they are still waiting for vaccines.

Listen, northern Ontario has done their fair share. The virus is not spreading throughout northern Ontario as in other areas. People are staying at home or doing their jobs. They are concerned with individuals who are not respecting the regional transportation and travel that is going on.

What they are asking for is an equitable distribution of the vaccine throughout this province.

SHELLEY VAILLANCOURT

Mr. Jim McDonell: Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, we have many dedicated individuals who help those in need. Shelley Vaillancourt recently marked 31 years as executive director of the Alzheimer Society of Cornwall and District. She has been a tireless advocate, administrator and educator for dementia-related concerns. I know this first-hand, as my constituency staff and I have had the opportunity to be coached personally by her to become a dementia-friendly office. She is a great example of the many mental health professionals in my riding and our province who have brought this subject of mental illness out of the shadows and into the light.

The role that Ms. Vaillancourt and others like her have in the community has also taken on extra importance during this pandemic, as many seniors struggle against isolation effects.

As always, I look forward to shining the light on deserving people like Shelley, for without them, our province would not be the great place to live, work and raise a family.

I want to thank Shelley for her long and rewarding career and wish her the very best in retirement.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, to say that the last year has been hard on London West businesses would be an understatement. I have been hearing from the owners of all kinds of businesses: restaurants, recreation and fitness studios, personal care services, arts organizations, locally owned retail and more. They've depleted their savings. They've taken on debt. Some of them have mortgaged their own homes. Many have struggled through with no government assistance at all because they haven't qualified for government supports. These small business owners are barely hanging on, and in too many cases, they've already closed for good.

The Ontario Small Business Support Grant was supposed to provide a lifeline, but it excluded many businesses. Even eligible small businesses that had their grants immediately approved have been waiting months for the grant to arrive, despite the promise of a 10-day wait. Business owners who have had problems with their applications told me they've called the program and sent emails over and over and have received no response. Some are assured that their file will be escalated, but then nothing happens. One constituent filed an application early and waited so long that the business was forced to close before the funding arrived.

It did not have to be this way for London businesses. Had this government followed expert recommendations, we wouldn't be watching small businesses close while lockdown restrictions drag on.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: It is with deep concern that I rise today in the House to advocate for the health and safety of my constituents in Scarborough–Guildwood. For more than a year now, Scarborough has been locked in an all-encompassing struggle with an invisible enemy that does not discriminate. It has long been established that Scarborough is a COVID-19 hot spot, and the recent prioritization by postal code further confirms this, with literally all of Scarborough designated as a COVID-19 hot zone.

As I stand here today, however, it is my responsibility to report to this House that on April 14, the Scarborough Health Network's mass immunization clinics at Centennial College and Centenary Hospital were forced to close due to the lack of vaccine supply. Local residents, like 70-year-old Ranjeet, who came to the Centennial clinic on his

bicycle, could not get a booking. This is not only a logistical and an organizational failure of leadership; this represents a moral failure, which will have dire consequences.

People throughout Scarborough are looking to the government to guide the pandemic response. With a positivity rate of 24%, with ICUs overflowing—they've already been transferring people for many, many months—this is a high-priority area. Scarborough is being neglected and needs protection now more than ever.

To the residents of Scarborough—Guildwood, I want to say thank you for all your efforts in this struggle. I will continue to do everything I can to advocate for more vaccines.

ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: I am pleased to share with this House that our government continues to support cultural organizations in my riding and across Ontario through the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries.

In particular, the Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund recently awarded \$45,000 to the Canadian Arabic Orchestra based in my riding of Mississauga East—Cooksville to support their programming for the 2021-22 season. Additionally, the Mississauga Children's Choir received a Resilient Communities Fund grant of \$18,000 through the Ontario Trillium Foundation to support their programming for the upcoming season.

Speaker, cultural institutions like the Canadian Arabic Orchestra and the Mississauga Children's Choir are at the heart of sharing and building upon Ontario's rich history of arts and cultural diversity. These institutions help us celebrate the many cultures and traditions that make up the mosaic of Ontario.

Despite the recent challenges, many cultural and arts organizations have shown remarkable resilience by adapting their programming for virtual platforms. I encourage everyone to check out the respective websites of your favourite cultural and arts organizations to see what virtual programs they are offering during our lockdown.

Let us all continue to work together to support our cultural and arts institutions across Ontario.

1030

VOLUNTEERS

Mr. David Piccini: In honour of volunteer week, I would like to highlight the extraordinary work of volunteers in my riding of Northumberland—Peterborough South. I would like to specifically acknowledge the remarkable work of Cobourg Rotary and so many community-based volunteers.

Mr. Speaker, when our community began to receive COVID-19 vaccines, Cobourg Rotary did not wait a minute, coming together with a can-do attitude to help set up one of the most efficient mass vaccination clinics in Canada. This has now expanded to three other Rotary

Clubs taking the initiative in Minden, Fenelon Falls and Haliburton throughout our public health unit. It has attracted interest province-wide and, indeed, nationally.

Anyone eligible who has had the opportunity to get vaccinated at the Cobourg Community Centre knows what a great system we have. The system's foundation is backed by a strong network of over 600 volunteers in Cobourg and 300 in the other three communities. We are fast approaching a thousand-person army to support this initiative.

This effort would not have been possible without the leadership of Gord Ley and Brian Reid, who were integral in the planning and early operation of the site. I'd also like to acknowledge other members of the planning committee: Linda Essak, Paul Allen, Ann Grozier, Lynda Kay, Helen Lackey, Patti Ley, Richard Brule, Dr. Bob Scott, Roger Tessier, Dr. Mark Essak, Nancy Bruce and Kym Reid.

Speaker, what starts as a drop—and what a mighty drop this has been—has now had a ripple effect across so many communities in our province. So to Cobourg Rotary and all the volunteers who have been critical in this initiative: Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our members' statements for this morning, but I understand that the Leader of the Opposition has a point of order she wishes to raise.

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

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion. Agreed? I heard a no.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Point of order.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to pass private member's motion 152, calling on the Ford government to revoke regulation 298/21 and the unprecedented and potentially unconstitutional powers it has extended to Ontario's police services.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to immediately pass private member's motion 152. Agreed? I heard a no.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Point of order.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to immediately pass private member's motion 153, calling on the Ford government to implement paid time off for vaccination, helping facilitate the timely vaccination of Ontario's workers as part of the fight against COVID-19.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to immediately pass private member's motion 153. Agreed? I heard a no.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Point of order.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to immediately pass private member's motion 154, calling on the Ford government to implement a full shutdown of Ontario's non-essential businesses where the risk of COVID-19 spread is high and extend adequate financial supports to help the workers and businesses impacted by the interruption.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to immediately pass private member's motion 154. Agreed? I heard a no.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Point of order.

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

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

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to immediately pass private member's motion 136. Agreed? I heard a no.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Don Valley East on a point of order.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to move a motion regarding the immediate passage of Bill 247, the Paid Personal Emergency Leave Now Act.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Don Valley East is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion to immediately pass Bill 247. Agreed? I heard a no.

It is now time for oral questions.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Right now in Ontario's ICUs there are some 770 or so patients, people with COVID-19, who are literally struggling to breathe. Ontario is in an absolute crisis with this virus. Yesterday, against all evidence, the government claimed that they were following expert advice from the science table and from other doctors and experts about how to handle this crisis.

Of course, we now know that Dr. Loh has, in fact, started to shut down businesses where COVID-19 is spreading. If, as the Premier claims, all of the appropriate measures are already in place in Ontario to stop the spread of COVID-19, why did Dr. Loh then have to take the action that he decided to take today?

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

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Of course, we saw the news this morning with the local decision by Dr. Loh. We're working closely with public health.

But I have to say, we are truly disappointed with the federal budget that we heard yesterday. In fact, the federal government worked with the provinces at the beginning of this pandemic to ensure that job-protected leave was the responsibility of the provinces. That's why we moved forward, the first in the country, to ensure there was job-protected leave, including job-protected leave for those who are getting vaccinated. And the federal government was going to step up with paid sick days. Mr. Speaker, \$100 billion more in new spending federally—no improvements to the sick pay program, but I want every worker in the province to know that we have their backs.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Dr. Loh, the Peel medical officer of health, actually had the courage to do today what the Premier has not had courage to do. He's filling, literally, a leadership void that's been left by the Premier of this province. The members of the science table and other experts are speaking out. In fact, Nathan Stall, science table member, said this: "Another heroic move by Dr. Lawrence Loh." Oh, that we could have a heroic move from our Premier, Speaker. Member of the vaccine task force Isaac Bogoch said this: "This will really help."

Now that Dr. Loh, the Peel medical officer of health, has done the right thing, has chosen to act to save lives, will the Premier step up and provide direct financial support to the businesses impacted and the workers impacted by Dr. Loh's courageous and correct decision this morning?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the question, but to be clear, this is an authority that the chief medical officer of Peel has had since well before the beginning of this pandemic, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister of Labour just highlighted, we are disappointed that the federal government did not extend further protections to workers. It is something that we will look at. It is, of course, something that the Minister of Labour has just said, that it is important to ensure that workers who are infected with COVID, that they know that we have their back. But as I said, look, ultimately, this is a power that the chief medical officer of health of Peel has had since the beginning of the pandemic.

With respect to supports for businesses, I note that the Leader of the Opposition and the NDP provided absolutely zero amendments to the budget bill that was presented by the finance minister. They had an opportunity to provide amendments. They, instead, supported that bill, and I congratulate them for it.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Dr. Loh in Peel had to step in because the Premier marched us right into the third wave

with his eyes wide open, and he is now marching us in the wrong direction. He continues to march this province in the wrong direction. All of the experts are saying the same things. His own experts, doctors, nurses—people on the front lines of the health care system—are all very clear. What essential workers need are vaccines, not spot checks. What they need is paid sick days, paid time off when they're sick and to get vaccinated, not playgrounds being closed.

1040

Speaker, will this government do their job, finally do the right thing by Ontario's workers: listen to the advice of experts, save lives and do what's necessary to stop the spread of COVID-19?

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

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Mr. Speaker, getting needles in arms is the top priority for this government. I'm proud to say that 25% of adults in this province have now been vaccinated. We need to do everything to ensure that we get more vaccines delivered to the province of Ontario to ensure that those essential workers, that everyone in the province of Ontario gets vaccinated. That's how we're going to move to defeat COVID-19.

The responsibilities of the province, and all provinces and territories, was to ensure that there was job-protected leave. That was the agreement. The federal government was going to step up with paid sick days for workers. They spent, in new spending, more than \$100 billion yesterday and not even a fraction to deal with the concerns that Ontario has been raising when it comes to protecting the health and well-being of workers.

But I want to assure every worker out there that we have their backs and we're going to be there for them until we defeat COVID-19.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's clear to workers that their government has abandoned them in the fight against COVID-19—their Ontario government, Speaker. Their Ontario government has abandoned them.

But I want to ask another question of the Premier, and the question is to do with the postal code hot spots that were identified by the government that are priorities for vaccinations. They claimed that the decision they made last week was directly from the advice of their science table recommendations. My question is, did the government actually implement the recommendations on the hot spots that came forward from the science table: yes or no?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Yes, we did receive recommendations from medical experts on the identification of the hot spots. Some of the hot spots we didn't proceed with because we needed to take into consideration other information, such as hospitalizations in the past; ICU admissions in the past; unfortunately, deaths in the past; vaccine hesitancy issues with respect to language; socio-

economic issues as well; and barriers that were preventing people from coming forward to receive vaccinations.

So yes, we did receive the information from the medical experts. We then added to the additional information, which was what ultimately ended up in the postal codes that were identified as hot spots that we are dealing with by allocating 25% of the vaccines off the top to fight COVID-19 in those hot spots for the benefit of all of the people in Ontario.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Today's Toronto Star has a headline that says this, "Ontario Ignored Its Own Science Table's Advice on Several COVID-19 Vaccine Hot Spot Postal Codes." Five higher risk postal codes were taken off the list and eight lower risk areas, most of which are in PC ridings, were added to the list. In fact, Dr. Anna Banerji said this on that decision: "Someone's intervening.... It's not based on science and evidence."

My question is, who changed the list and will they change it back?

Hon. Christine Elliott: What I would say to the leader of the official opposition, through you, Speaker, is that somebody's talking about something they know nothing about. In fact, what happened is what I indicated in my previous answer: The medical experts at the science table gave us some information about postal codes that they thought should be identified as hot spots. We then took that list, which was then presented to the Vaccine Distribution Task Force. We added additional information, such as the socio-economic data, the barriers that existed to people receiving vaccinations, because we want to make sure as many people receive the vaccinations as wish to have it. We wanted to make sure that we could identify those hot spots, work with community agencies to bring people in for those vaccinations, and that is how the information resulted in the hot spots that were identified by our government as the areas where we should put the additional 25% of those vaccines going forward.

Interjections.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, lives are at stake here in our province. The ICUs are filling up; they're full. They're full of young people. They're full of pregnant women. They're full of entire families who are sick with COVID-19.

What we need is vaccinations going to all of the hot spots, Speaker. We need paid sick days and paid vaccination time off so that people can keep themselves and their co-workers well. We need strong public health measures in our province. All of the experts have been giving this government the exact same advice. The science table, the vaccination table, everyone is telling the government—front-line doctors and nurses and health care workers, who are exhausted and terrified, are giving the government the same advice.

When, instead of listening to the anti-public health and the anti-science wing of the PC caucus, will this government actually listen to the experts, the scientific experts who are giving them advice?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Since the start of this pandemic, our government has been guided by our world-class public health experts, who have been providing us guidance to safeguard the health and well-being of all of the people of Ontario. We know that we need a balanced and straightforward approach. We've been listening to all of the experts. For example, the COVID-19 health coordination table is led by Dr. David Williams, our Chief Medical Officer of Health, by Helen Angus, the Deputy Minister of Health, and by Matt Anderson, the president and CEO of Ontario Health. This table reports directly to the Ministry of Health and includes representation from other ministries as well: from long-term care; children, community and social services; seniors and accessibility; and the Solicitor General. We've also received modelling that has been extremely helpful in guiding the way for our government to take the steps that we have, related most recently to the declaration of the state of emergency and the stay-at-home order.

We have always followed the advice of our medical experts and will continue to do so until we are out of this pandemic.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. Everyone but this government understands the urgency of paid sick days to protect lives in Ontario. They claim it's not their responsibility, which we heard yesterday and again this morning. They attack the federal government for not tweaking the federal program, acknowledging what we all know: that the federal program isn't adequate for workers who need paid sick days.

The finance minister said in this House yesterday, "We also need to protect essential workers who need to keep working during this crisis." Speaker, why do the Premier and his finance minister ignore all the evidence that the best way to do that is to bring in paid sick days for Ontario workers?

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

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Mr. Speaker, we've been advocating for months to improve the federal sick pay program. That's why we reached out months ago and urged Minister Qualtrough. I know the Premier talked to the Prime Minister to ensure that payments got into workers' bank accounts faster. Now, payments are between three and five days. We advocated for greater flexibility. We advocated to fill in the gaps of this federal program.

But, Mr. Speaker, there was a budget yesterday in Ottawa. We wanted to see our borders protected, more secure borders. We wanted to see more vaccines for the people of this province, and we wanted to see an improvement in the paid sick leave program by the federal

government. But let me assure all workers in this province that we will be with them. Together, we're going to defeat COVID-19, and we've got their backs.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, instead of expecting a sick worker to go without pay while applying for a program that doesn't replace their full wage, instead of attacking the federal government at every opportunity, this Premier should be focused on getting Ontarians the supports they need.

Speaker, paid sick days would mean workers who get sick would get automatic, seamless support from their employer. It would mean essential workers would know their province has their back. When workers can stay home if they're sick, they protect their colleagues, their families and the whole community.

Will this Premier stop blaming the federal government, stop his ideological opposition to paid sick days and bring in a program of paid sick days, just as health experts recommend and workers desperately need?

1050

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Mr. Speaker, we were the first jurisdiction—one of the first in all of North America—to bring in job-protected leave for any worker in self-isolation, in quarantine. If they're home looking after a son or a daughter because schools are closed, you can't be fired for that. We were the first jurisdiction to bring in job-protected leave for anyone who has to get a vaccination; it was two weeks ago that the NDP government in British Columbia reached out to us to figure out how to bring in job-protected leave for those getting vaccinated and, of course, they moved yesterday.

But it was the federal government's responsibility—that was the deal with all territories and provinces in the beginning—to bring in paid sick days for every worker. There are gaps that exist. The federal government did not move yesterday, but I can assure workers out there we've got their backs.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is to the Minister of Finance. In my riding of Flamborough–Glanbrook, people recognize the importance of protecting workers and keeping them safe during this pandemic. That is why I'm very proud this government passed legislation at the start of the pandemic creating job-protected leave. This leave ensured no worker would lose their job if they stayed home to self-isolate or to care for a loved one, and that was just the beginning. Premier Ford joined our federal and provincial partners in signing an historic \$19-billion Safe Restart Agreement, which included \$1.1 billion to provide Ontario workers with 10 paid sick days.

This government has continued to ask the federal government to make improvements to the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit. Yesterday, the federal government's budget was an opportunity to introduce improvements. Can the Minister of Finance tell this House why the federal

government needs to amend the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit to support all Ontarians?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: First off, I'd like to thank the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook for that excellent question, and I thank her for being a strong advocate in her community.

Mr. Speaker, our government's advocacy for Ontario has delivered real, meaningful support for people and employers across our great province. Working closely with the federal government, this Premier has already successfully negotiated 20 additional paid sick days, starting from 10 and doubling it to 20, as well as improvements to the speed with which workers receive their sickness benefits.

For months, Ontario has continued advocating for additional improvements to the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit, to protect Ontarians' health and that of their co-workers when they are ill or worried they may have COVID-19. Workers need to know they have immediate access to this program. The government will continue to plan for Ontarians and the recovery sickness benefit they deserve. I hope all members of this House will support our efforts to protect workers in Ontario.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: It's great to hear the government of Ontario continues to advocate to improve this very important benefit. Members of my riding will be happy to know that they can apply for up to 20 paid sick days using the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit and expect payments in only a few days, thanks to the work of this government.

We have heard that the province has successfully negotiated improvements to the benefit already. We know the federal government is aware of this government's request to amend the benefit to provide immediate access to relief for workers. Yesterday's budget was the right opportunity for the federal government to show support for workers right across Ontario. Can the Minister of Finance tell us why the federal government decided not to improve access to paid sick days for all workers in Ontario?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you for that important question. The federal government shares our commitment to protecting people from this virus and beating this pandemic once and for all, and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Minister Freeland on the release of budget 2021. However, as the COVID crisis intensifies, we are disappointed to see that there was no action announced in yesterday's budget to the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit.

Mr. Speaker, every member of this House needs to stand up for the workers in Ontario, and this government continues to fight hard for improvements, while other members of this House play politics with the health of Ontarians during a pandemic. Mr. Speaker, I, along with our entire government, remain steadfast in our province to protect all workers. We will continue to advocate on behalf of Ontario and push for changes to the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit all Ontarians expect and deserve.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Sara Singh: My question is for the Premier. For months, experts, including members of the Premier's own science table, have been sounding the alarm about dangerously high ICU levels, and today we learned that there are over 760 people fighting for their lives in Ontario ICUs. But the Premier failed to act. They failed to implement paid sick days. They failed to vaccinate workers in hot spots, and now ICUs in communities like Brampton are overflowing. Pediatric hospitals are sacrificing their beds. Patients are being transferred to hospitals around the province outside of their communities, and doctors and nurses are being put in the horrific position of having to make decisions on who will receive life-saving supports and who will not.

Speaker, why—with all of the evidence in front of this government, all of the warnings from their own science tables and medical experts—does this government continue to ignore the crisis in our ICUs?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: We have been listening to the experts all along. We have been listening to their evidence.

I think one thing is really important, Speaker, and I would say to the member opposite, through you, that the member is alleging that there is a triage protocol in place in Ontario; there is not. There is not.

What we are doing is building capacity in our hospitals. We are making sure—there are two aspects to what we need to deal with here. We need to blunt the transmission of COVID-19 in communities, as well as, right now, we need to build capacity in our hospitals, which we are doing. We are in contact with the CEOs of the hospitals on virtually a daily basis. They are working very hard to create spaces. We are creating capacity so that everyone in Ontario who needs to be admitted to hospital and needs to be in an intensive care bed will have a bed available for them.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Ms. Sara Singh: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the Minister of Health, that response shows us how out of touch with reality this minister is. Doctors are sounding the alarm bells and this government continues to ignore their pleas for help.

The government is following a pattern of denying the problem and acting too late. Now the government is begging other provinces for help, but refusing the federal government's assistance and the assistance of the Red Cross. Speaker, health care systems in other provinces are also fighting COVID-19. They need their health care workers just as much as we do.

It was this Premier's responsibility and this Minister of Health's responsibility to help protect people here in Ontario, and they failed to do that at every step of this pandemic. This is a national and global failure, and it is upsetting and heartbreaking to know that they could have acted and they chose not to.

With months to plan for this crisis, why did this Premier fail to address the issues causing ICU capacity to rise, and

why does the government think it's another government's responsibility to come and clean up their mess?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll ask members to please take their seats and allow the Minister of Health to reply.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Again, through you, Mr. Speaker, I would say to the member opposite that what you're suggesting is simply not the case. Since the beginning of this pandemic, we have been working hard to make sure that we have both the health human resources—

Ms. Sara Singh: There are people dying—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Christine Elliott: —and the physical capacity in order to deal with what's been happening. We have created—

Interjections.

Hon. Christine Elliott: I don't know if the member opposite really wants to hear me—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the Minister of Health to take her seat. I'm going to ask the member for Brampton Centre to come to order. I'm going to ask the government House leader to come to order—always innocent.

I'm going to recognize the Minister of Health to conclude her response.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you, Speaker. To continue, since the beginning of this pandemic, we have created over 3,100 new hospital beds, which is the equivalent of six new community hospitals.

We have also added 14% to intensive care capacity, which is significant in the context of this pandemic. We have also added resources in order to be able to deal with the health human resources that we need. We have allowed for the deployment of people from one sector to another.

1100

Finally, I would say with respect to what's happening with other provinces and other organizations coming in to help us, we're very grateful for the help that's being offered by the other provinces and we're very grateful to the federal government for their offer of assistance from the Red Cross as well. We know that we need help right now. We have the physical capacity. We need some more health human resources and we are using those resources to make sure everyone who needs help will get help in our hospitals.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier. The Premier has continually said during this pandemic that we have followed the advice of health experts every step of the way during this pandemic. Let's review.

The science table warned the government in February about the risk of new, more contagious variants and a devastating third wave, and they advised that you could prevent that third wave and further hospitalizations and lockdowns if you just kept public health measures in place. The Premier didn't. The science table gave the postal codes in hot zones where the COVID fire was burning the

fiercest and the government made a list of its own, almost twice as long, leaving off five postal codes that were very clearly hot zones. And then the science table asked the Premier to limit the number of essential workplaces and implement paid sick days. Instead, the Premier gave them shuttered playgrounds and police checks.

How can Ontarians continue to trust the Premier will protect them when he repeatedly denies the science?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, we have followed the recommendations of our medical advisers at every step along the way during this pandemic. For one thing, we had to start a lab system, which wasn't connected, which allowed us to test almost 13 million tests already. We have also acted decisively on the recommendations of the Chief Medical Officer of Health by implementing the province-wide stay-at-home order and declaring the state of emergency. Additionally, by assembling our world-class vaccine task force that's led by Dr. Homer Tien of Ornge and listening to the health experts, we've also been able to implement a vaccine plan that has seen virtually four million tests already implemented. We should reach that total by the end of today.

We are delivering the vaccines, 25% extra on top of the original. That is going to be received by the areas that have the vaccination hot spots. We are following the health advice that has been given to us at every step along the way in the pandemic, and we will continue to do so until everyone in Ontario who wants to receive a vaccine will have received one.

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

Mr. John Fraser: While I don't appreciate the fact that the minister did not address the three things I raised in my first question, I do appreciate the fact that she's here to answer questions every day.

Today, there are 768 people in ICUs. Peel's medical officer of health has had to step in and take action to protect essential workers, which this government didn't do. We're in a crisis in Ontario. In the words of Dr. Peter Jüni from the science table, "We need to stop having political considerations guide this pandemic. It hasn't worked in the past.... It hasn't worked in other jurisdictions. Why should it work in Ontario?"

While ICU admissions continue to rise, the Premier's priority this Thursday night is a \$1,000-a-ticket fundraiser in the middle of a third wave. What planet is that okay on? Ontarians deserve a Premier that is solely focused on getting us through the third wave. So Speaker, through you, when will the Premier follow the science, implement paid sick days and protect essential workers?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you for the question. As the honourable member knows full well, this government has been working since the beginning of the pandemic in order to fight this head-on. He will know full well, seeing that he was the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health in the previous government, that we were left with an ICU capacity that was per capita the lowest in North

America, and we moved very, very quickly to increase that capacity not only with the amount of beds but with the health human resources that were needed.

He will know, because he was part of the team in the previous government, that they left us without the capacity in our long-term-care system—400 beds. We've increased that by thousands and we've increased pay for our personal support workers in that area. We've increased health and human resources. We've put 16 billion extra dollars into health care over and above what they did. We were on the defence for the first part of this pandemic because of the situation the previous government left us in, and he is responsible, in part, for those decisions.

What this Premier has been doing is making the investments so that we could tackle this virus head-on, and not only tackle it, but defeat it. We have done great things in the province of Ontario, the people of the province of Ontario together, and we'll defeat it.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is for the Minister of Finance. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a trying time for Ontarians across the board. Families have been unable to gather, seniors have been living in isolation, and businesses have had to shut their doors in an effort to keep our communities safe. But the area under the most strain has been our health care system, and yesterday's federal budget made no commitments for the long-term sustainability of Ontario's health care system.

Can the Minister of Finance inform this House of what Ontario needs to see from this federal government?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you again to the member for that question. The member for Flamborough—Glanbrook is absolutely right. The federal government tabled the budget yesterday, announced billions of dollars, but did not include any enhancement of the Canada Health Transfer.

While collaboration and new funding has helped to address key challenges over the course of the pandemic, COVID-19 has also underscored some long-standing challenges facing the health care system that require urgent action on the part of the federal government. Enhancing the CHT remains one of our government's top priorities.

Currently, the Canada Health Transfer covers less than 22% of Ontario's health care spending, and this share is expected to decline over the next decade, while demand for services increases. Ontario needs a strong federal partner to ensure we can improve wait times, reduce surgery backlogs, provide access to more beds and better treatments and come out of the pandemic with a stronger, more resilient health care system.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: I'd like to thank the minister and our Premier for their continued advocacy on behalf of Ontarians, and thank you to the minister for the significant investments made to our health care system included in our government's budget last month to get us through this

pandemic. From long-term care to the province's ICU and hospital bed capacity, our government has identified where our system needs more support.

Can the minister elaborate on why an increase to the CHT is vital to Ontario's future?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Our government's budget last month focused on protecting people's health with our plan to defeat COVID-19, as well as protecting people's jobs and economic well-being as we continue to face the pandemic together. Because, as I've said many times, without healthy people, we cannot have a healthy economy, and the past year has shown us that we need a long-term, committed partner with the federal government to address health care challenges that Ontario is facing.

Our need for services will only increase, and it is unfortunate that the federal government would not take this opportunity to meet the urgent, unanimous request of all of Canada's Premiers and territorial leaders to significantly increase federal health care funding to cover at least 35% of provincial-territorial health care spending. We will continue to advocate, and I hope everyone else will, on behalf of all the people of Ontario.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Michael Mantha: My question is to the Premier. This government is once again playing games with northern Ontario's post-secondary education. After refusing to provide funding and help Laurentian University, forcing them to slash nearly 70 programs and fire over 100 professors, we now discover that this government was working a backroom deal to let the Northern Ontario School of Medicine sever its ties from Lakehead and Laurentian universities and become a stand-alone institution.

This decision is very concerning. This partnership has had significant benefits for the medical students, the universities and for northern Ontario communities at large. The president of Lakehead University shared in a letter that the university has not been consulted. Can this government tell us why Lakehead University was informed of the decision after it was made?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant, the member for Northumberland—Peterborough South.

1110

Mr. David Piccini: I just want to address the two issues the member asked about. First and foremost, we do understand the very difficult and personal situation that students and families and staff of Laurentian University are currently in. But I think it's really important, Mr. Speaker, that we make it abundantly clear that not only did this government provide increasing funding to our institutions; not only have we stood tall, with over \$80 million in supports for Laurentian, offering an additional \$1 million for the midwifery program; but after this very difficult reality of the financial situation that this institution is in, we made it clear that 90% of students are not affected by these decisions. For the 10% who are, we're working

aggressively with the institution, which is working in turn with those students to ensure pathways to graduation.

I'll address the second question in my supplementary.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: I return to the Premier. On April 7, we saw two former mayors of Thunder Bay and Sudbury call on the government to make the Northern Ontario School of Medicine an independent degree-granting education institution. It suddenly became policy just a week later. Considering that the president of Lakehead was not informed, it is safe to assume that the government probably did not consult with First Nation communities who have close ties with the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. Can the government provide some level of transparency as to why this decision was made and tell us whom they actually consulted with?

Mr. David Piccini: Mr. Speaker, we did introduce legislation that, if passed, would establish the Northern Ontario School of Medicine and the Université de Hearst as two new independent, degree-granting universities in northern Ontario. Both institutions provide a high quality of education, and this is making it possible for students to access medical health care and health care professions training in French at these top-notch institutions.

He asked who we consulted. Perhaps he might want to speak to members of his own caucus. The member for Thunder Bay—Atikokan said that it is in the best interests of northern Ontarians that NOSM be secured against any disruptions and that northern Ontario's universities be properly supported so that they can in turn continue to support residents in the cities they are located.

Mr. Speaker, we absolutely agree. That's why we introduced this legislation that, if passed, will have these two stand-alone institutions offering degree-granting in the north, expanding opportunities for northern Ontario students.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Roman Baber: My question is to the government House leader. On Friday, the Solicitor General said:

"Moving forward, police will have the authority to require any individual who is not in a place of residence to first provide their purpose for not being at home and provide their home address.

"Police will also have the authority to stop a vehicle to inquire about an individual's reason for leaving their residence."

When asked about that yesterday after question period, the House leader said, among other things, that he appreciates it was a challenging weekend, certainly with respect to communication, and that it wasn't the government's best weekend communication-wise and that they can do a better job communicating. My question is: Will the government House leader apologize to Ontarians for his suggestion that the mobility restrictions enacted last Friday were a miscommunication, and will he apologize for his government's attempts to impose martial law in Ontario?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As I mentioned yesterday, we have refocused O. Reg. 8/21, "Enforcement of COVID-19 Measures." If a police officer or other provincial offences officer has a reason to suspect that you are participating in an organized public event or social gathering, they may require you to provide information to ensure you are complying with these restrictions. It is critical for all Ontario citizens to respect the stay-at-home order to stop the spread of COVID-19 and the very transmissible variants of concern.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Roman Baber: The government House leader always talks about his government listening to the experts. They hid behind the experts for every failing policy decision while abdicating leadership. On Friday, the government shut down almost all outdoor recreation, including soccer and baseball fields, tennis, golf and more of the things that bring joy and health to kids and adults. But according to the government's own experts, the risk of transmission outdoors is negligible and, in fact, this particular government action was against their advice. Doctor after doctor expressed astonishment at this government's misunderstanding of the virus. Ontarians are wondering how and why the government would come to such an ill-informed decision.

So my question to the government House leader: Will he listen to his experts, to all experts unanimously, and to common sense and walk it back—and not just the playgrounds, but all outdoor recreation? Will you let them play?

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

The government House leader to respond.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the question from the honourable gentleman. I recall that he was a very enthusiastic supporter of all of the measures that we took in this place from, I believe it was February—or actually March 2020, Mr. Speaker. He was—

Interjection.

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

Government House leader, conclude your response.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I remember he was a very enthusiastic supporter of the economic measures that we brought in. He was an enthusiastic supporter of the initial lockdown, which went much further than some of the other lockdowns that we have had. He was an enthusiastic supporter of when we brought in a number of other restrictions. I believe in March, he voted with us; April, he voted with us; May, he voted with us; June, he voted with us. When we extended the session into July so that we could continue to have an accountable government, Mr. Speaker, he voted with us. I believe in September, he voted with us; in October, he voted with us; November, he voted with us. I believe in December, colleagues, he might have voted with us as well, and for parts of January—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. That concludes the answer. The next question.

BORDER SECURITY

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Mr. Speaker, yesterday the federal government's budget did not include any measures to protect our borders and our citizens from COVID-19. For example, the week of April 4 through 10, the data available shows that no fewer than 39 international flights landed at Pearson airport with confirmed cases of COVID-19. On these flights, combined, more than 450 rows of passengers are considered affected by the confirmed positive cases. Mr. Speaker, depending on the size of these planes, we are talking about between 1,300 and 2,700 people.

The spread of COVID-19, our dangerous variants of concern, is only made worse by cases coming in from other countries. Mr. Speaker, will the government call on the federal government to secure our airports, as the federal government should have done months ago?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you again to the member for Flamborough–Glanbrook for that very good question. Mr. Speaker, everyone knew that the new variants were a threat, but the federal government did too little, too late. Canada could have avoided a third wave with stricter border measures that kept the variants out or with more vaccine supply sooner to better protect people.

In the face of weak border measures and limited vaccine supply, Ontario is doing what is necessary to slow the spread of COVID-19. By first pulling the emergency brake and then implementing a stay-at-home order, we have reduced the mobility and avoided the worst-case scenario, but we need the federal government to step up and take real action in securing our borders.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: Mr. Speaker, the data from last week, April 11 through 17, shows that at least 16 international flights landed at Pearson airport with confirmed cases of COVID-19. On these flights, combined, more than 120 rows of passengers are considered affected by the confirmed positive cases. The spread of COVID-19 and dangerous variants of concern is only made worse by cases coming in from other countries.

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: The member is absolutely right. Our government has been doing its part, but the provinces cannot meet this third wave alone. We need the federal government to step up. We need more vaccines and tighter border restrictions to prevent more variants of concern.

While other countries, like France, are banning flights from hot spots, the federal government did away with enhanced screening for passengers from Brazil, where one of the new variants originated. To ensure we're able to beat this third wave, the federal government needs to get serious about closing our border, make testing mandatory for interprovincial travellers at airports and get more vaccines into more arms in Ontario and across the country.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Premier. I have surveyed local businesses to find out how the Ontario Small Business Support Grant is helping the business community in University–Rosedale. Many businesses aren't eligible, but for those who are eligible and who have applied for financial aid, 80% of the businesses that answered this survey have not received any money.

1120

Your program is broken. It's broken for Habibah Surani, an esthetician and small business owner of 15 years, who was told in January the money would arrive any day, but Habibah is still waiting and nobody is returning her calls—just like the thousands of other small business owners in my riding.

Premier, when will small businesses in University–Rosedale finally receive the support they are eligible for?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Flamborough–Glanbrook and parliamentary assistant.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Mr. Speaker, our government understands that small businesses need our support, which is why we introduced the Ontario Small Business Support Grant, and we have made over \$1.5 billion in payments so far to over 100,000 small businesses across the province.

As part of the budget announcement, our government is providing an additional round of payments to eligible businesses. Small businesses that are eligible for the Ontario Small Business Support Grant will automatically receive a second payment in an amount equal to their first. For small businesses, this means no additional application, no submission of new forms; it will be automatically deposited this spring. If a business received \$20,000 through the grant program, they would automatically receive another \$20,000.

Our government will be there to support small businesses during these difficult times. We will have their backs.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is back to the Premier. Quite frankly, I sent this survey to 14,000 people in my riding and every single BIA, and of the people that answered, and there were many of them, 80% of the people who were eligible and who have applied have not received their money. This government does not have their backs.

It has taken 11 months and two province-wide shut-downs for this government to finally offer some support, and now we are in our third state of emergency and there is still no money flowing to business owners in crisis: no money for Eric Freeland of Eglinton Dog Walker, who said he was horrified by how disorganized the program is; no money for Bill Sawah, a taxi driver, who wants to know why more small businesses can't be approved; and no money for Vik Gulati, who owns Canada Watch Imports and who's been waiting for aid since January. Vic told me that when he called the government helpline, the staff on the phone admitted that the whole program is a mess.

Premier, you starve people. When will small businesses in University–Rosedale and across Ontario finally receive the support they are eligible for?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the member opposite that our government has already issued over \$1.5 billion in payments to over 100,000 small businesses across Ontario.

While the process saw a high volume of applicants, we understand the extreme sense of urgency many small businesses are feeling during this difficult time. We are working to further accelerate the processing of applications to ensure that businesses get the support they need as quickly as possible and have taken many, many steps to speed up the process. We have tripled—tripled—the number of public servants that review applications and have increased the resources required to process them in a timely and responsible way. As part of our 2021 budget, our government is providing an additional round of support to help eligible employers impacted by necessary public health restrictions.

As more Ontarians get vaccinated, this government will be there to support small business recover, rehire and rebuild stronger than ever before.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: My question is for the Premier. For over a year, this government has suggested that any question or criticism in this Legislature regarding the government's use of lockdown restrictions was beyond reproach. It was all based on science, they said, and as instructed by the doctors. The government was powerless to do otherwise.

Last Friday, we saw otherwise. The Premier and Solicitor General announced the banning of parks and playgrounds and then, less than 24 hours later, they changed their mind. Within days, Ontario's science advisory table publicly stated that no such advice was given.

Will the government finally admit that its lockdown restrictions for the last year that have resulted in Ontario just now entering a phase of peak transmission have been decided entirely by them, not by any anonymous doctors and not based on any pseudo-science as they have claimed?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Actually, no, Mr. Speaker. The member will know, because she did sit in caucus for a number of months and was privy to many of the same discussions that all members of the caucus have had and, of course, members of the opposition have had in the many briefings that we have provided them, including with Dr. Williams—and, of course, the Solicitor General has attended, along with Dr. Williams and other public health officials, the select committee on emergency management with respect to COVID response. So the member will know full well that much of what we have been doing day in and day out, not only leading into the crisis to renew our public health care system after the 15 devastating years of Liberal government—she will know that all of the actions

that we have taken throughout this pandemic have been focused on one thing: keeping the people of the province of Ontario safe. And she will recall, of course, that in those many caucuses, she also had the opportunity to discuss the data that was provided by public health officials.

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

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Debating and voting on lockdown restrictions and other powers provides for better decision-making, but all of that was stripped away last year with Bill 195, the reopening Ontario act. Just yesterday, Global News reported, following the government's disastrous announcement banning parks and giving the police unprecedented carding powers, that a government MPP said on the record that caucus is never consulted on lockdown measures or reversals. The Premier doesn't want feedback from this Legislature, or his own caucus, or the doctors or the scientists on this province's advisory table.

Will the Premier finally admit that using Bill 195 to skip the legislative process on the use of lockdown restrictions, in exchange for decision-making done in secret and behind closed doors, was a mistake and has resulted in worse outcomes for Ontario?

Hon. Paul Calandra: If I recall, the member opposite voted against that measure, and I commend her for that. She voted against the measure that she is now talking about, and ultimately left the caucus as a result of that. She was—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Of course, that was, unlike the member for York Centre—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member for York Centre to come to order one last time.

Government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you, Speaker. As I said, the member opposite had an opportunity to make a decision on the ROA, the bill that she talked about. She voted against it, and I commend her for doing that. She felt that it was important for her to do that. That's, of course, unlike the member for York Centre, who voted in favour of that bill, colleagues, and a number of the other measures.

We think that the measures that we have brought forward have protected the people of the province of Ontario, have really given us the opportunity to keep as many people in the province of Ontario safe, despite the challenges that we inherited from the previous Liberal government and despite the failings of the federal government when it comes to vaccines and border issues.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Joel Harden: Yesterday, just after midnight, around-the-clock checkpoints were set up at the five bridges and two ferry crossings that connect Ottawa and Gatineau, at the behest of this government. Speaker, they did not consult our mayor. They did not consult our chief

of police. The checkpoints yesterday caused chaos, resulting in 90-minute delays for some commuters, including nurses and teachers who our office has spoken to.

Speaker, no one in Ottawa asked for these changes. People in Ottawa and Gatineau live and work on both sides of the river, and every day 180,000 trips are made between the two cities. The mayor and the chief of police are both calling on this government to immediately walk back these measures for something no one in the city asked for. Will the government listen? Will they stop the wasteful checkpoints and focus instead on all those resources going into a paid sick day program right now?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I think it's important for people to understand that, in fact, Quebec has also enforced a border restriction, because we understand that the variants of concern have a very rapid transmission rate and we need to do everything in these extraordinary times to protect our health care system and our intensive care units.

I will say that when the Premier and I spoke to the chiefs of police on Friday, we did reinforce how critically important it was to ensure that the border crossings were protected. We are working collectively with Manitoba and Quebec to ensure that that is in place and that the citizens in our respective provinces remain safe.

1130

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

Mr. Joel Harden: Speaker, the people of this province are crying out for leadership. They're crying out for a government that is going to deliver the emergency measures our opposition caucus has put on the table time and again. And what are we getting distracted by? A government that comes with ideas out of nowhere, not guided by experts, and then retracts them a day later. In Ottawa, we suspect this is going to be the latest half-brained casualty of checkpoints, where our officials were not consulted, that probably won't last the week. That's what our mayor believes.

My question for the Premier—and I would love to hear an answer from the Premier—is he going to invest this waste of resources into a paid sick day program, into a vaccination coverage and testing program that we actually need, not these useless checkpoints?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: For the member from Ottawa, allow me to quote from Mayor Watson.

On April 1: "Don't Travel Between Ottawa and Gatineau During the Four-Week Shutdown, Mayor Watson Urges...."

"For the moment, I'm asking that residents of Ottawa stay in Ottawa until the situation stabilizes in the city." I agree.

Jim Watson on December 31: "Ottawa's Mayor Urges Skiers to Avoid Trips to Quebec Hills...."

"We don't have any legal means at the city to prevent that from happening, but I think out of an abundance of caution people should ... stick to their own community and that helps us flatten the curve." I agree with Mayor Watson.

March 24: "Mayors of Ottawa, Gatineau Ask Residents to Limit Interprovincial Travel...."

"Please stay home, but if you must cross the river to help out family or friends," remember "to take every necessary precaution."

I support Mayor Watson's words.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Michael Coteau: My question is to the Premier of Ontario. Premier, since the beginning of the pandemic, people have been flooded with information and research, sometimes contradictory and often rapidly changing. But there were a few things that everyone seemed to agree on, and one of them was the effectiveness of paid sick days—everyone except this Premier.

Time is running out and we need action. Premier, even if you have personal doubts about the effectiveness of paid sick days, why not try something that all experts are saying will save lives?

Speaker, through you, why has the Premier consistently ignored the advice of mayors, public health officials, his own science tables, doctors, nurses, opposition parties, the majority of Ontarians and perhaps even members of his own caucus?

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

Hon. Monte McNaughton: The very first initiative our government took was to bring in job-protected leave for every worker in the province. If you're home in self-isolation, if you're in quarantine, if you're a mom or a dad who has to stay home and look after a son or daughter because of the disruptions to the school system, you can't be fired for that. We went further. We eliminated the need for sick notes in Ontario. We also were the first province in the country to ensure that people had job-protected leave to go and get vaccinated.

But we worked with the federal government. We implored the federal government in the months leading up to this budget to improve the sick day program for workers across the province. We were extremely disappointed, because all the provinces had the responsibility to ensure that they brought in job-protected leave; the federal government said that they were going to take care of sick pay. Clearly, there are gaps there, but I can assure workers out there that we have their backs.

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

Mr. Michael Coteau: I'm talking about paid sick days, I'm talking about paying bills, and this minister opposite is talking about sick notes. There has been a complete failure by this government when it comes to leadership. Leaders, Premiers, Prime Ministers—they go into those positions because they have to make tough decisions. Sometimes, especially in crisis, they need to change their minds and actually do the right thing.

The issue isn't partisan and it's not about the Premier. No one cares about how he goes about making sure that change is properly done, and we don't care who gets the credit. We just want what's right for Ontarians to be done.

Speaker, my question, through you to the minister: Will the Premier do the right thing and commit to allowing a free vote for my bill that's coming up this Thursday, Bill 247, so members of his caucus can vote with their constituents and their communities?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'd be remiss if I didn't say that it is certainly nice to see the honourable gentleman. I know he's been working very hard seeking the federal nomination in his riding—so talking about cutting and running when things get tough.

But he can do me a favour: Since he is seeking to be a federal member of Parliament and leaving this place, if he is successful, he can bring a message to the federal government to do a better job on vaccines. Help get those vaccines here quicker, and he can do a better job on the borders. We have heard time and time and time again that our borders are a problem, Mr. Speaker. So, if he could take—

Interjection.

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

Government House leader, conclude your response.

Hon. Paul Calandra: If he could take that message to the Prime Minister, that we need our borders secured, that would be a wonderful message for him to do that.

I am disappointed that he chose the easy path, the path of leaving and abandoning the people of his riding at a time when they needed him most, in seeking a nomination for a different level of government. But I can assure the people of that riding that the Progressive Conservative Party will make sure that they are represented accordingly now and after the next election.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: On a point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the fact that Bill 269 had no amendments delivered by the official opposition and the need for a number of supports to flow quickly, I seek unanimous consent to pass Bill 269 at this time.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent of the House to pass Bill 269 immediately. Agreed? I heard some noes.

This House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1136 to 1500.

PETITIONS

NOISE POLLUTION

Ms. Marit Stiles: It gives me great pleasure to present this petition on behalf of my constituent Maria Costa. This is a day of action, actually, for this community that I'm going to read this petition on behalf of. It reads as follows:

“Stop Overnight Construction at the Davenport Diamond.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Metrolinx has been carrying on with overnight construction 20 hours a day, from 7 a.m. to 3 a.m., six days a week;

“Whereas this construction has deprived local residents of sleep and had an extremely negative impact on their mental health and well-being;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Minister of Transportation and Metrolinx to stop construction at the Davenport Diamond at 11 p.m. each night.”

I could not support this petition any more, Mr. Speaker. I'm very supportive. I'm going to sign my name to it, and then I'm going to hand it to the Clerks to table it.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: This is from the Family Council Network 4 Advocacy.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas quality care for the 78,000 residents of” long-term-care “homes is a priority for many Ontario families; and

“Whereas the provincial government does not provide adequate funding to ensure care and staffing levels in” long-term-care “to keep pace with residents’ increasing needs and the growing number of residents with complex behaviours; and

“Whereas several Ontario coroner’s inquests into” long-term-care “home deaths have recommended an increase in direct hands-on care for residents and staffing levels and the most reputable studies on this topic recommend 4.1 hours of direct care per day;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the LTC Homes Act (2007) for a legislated minimum care standard to provide an average of four hours per resident per day, adjusted for acuity level and case mix.”

I fully support this petition, sign it and deliver it to the table.

ÉDUCATION POSTSECONDAIRE DE LANGUE FRANÇAISE

M. Michael Mantha: J'ai une pétition du Regroupement étudiant franco-ontarien. Cette pétition est titrée : « Pour une université de la langue française dans le nord-est de l'Ontario. »

« À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

« Alors que l'Université Laurentienne a annoncé, le 12 avril 2021, son plan de restructuration, qui incluait la fermeture de 69 programmes (dont 28 programmes francophones), la dissolution de la Fédération laurentienne, et la mise à pied de plus de 100 professeur(e)s, et que ces annonces ont un effet dévastateur aux niveaux social, économique, et humain pour la communauté francophone du Moyen-Nord;

« Alors que la communauté franco-ontarienne exige des institutions postsecondaires de langue française depuis les années 1960, et que les manifestations du 1^{er} décembre 2018 ont montré l'engagement et la volonté d'avoir des institutions postsecondaires gérées par, pour, et avec la communauté francophone;

« Alors que le 12 mars 2021, l'Université de Sudbury et l'Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario ont annoncé le souhait que l'Université de Sudbury devienne une université de langue française et laïque;

« Nous, soussignées, pétitionnons l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario pour qu'elle entreprenne les actions suivantes:

« —assurer dans les plus brefs délais le rapatriement à l'Université de Sudbury de tous les programmes et les cours offerts en français, et le transfert de toutes les ressources matérielles, physiques, humaines et financières (incluant de façon non limitative les archives, bourses, dons et droit d'auteur) en lien avec l'offre de services en français et la programmation francophone de l'Université Laurentienne, disponibles et offerts en date du 9 avril 2021;

« —mettre en place un moratoire d'un an, renouvelable, sur tous les programmes francophones de l'Université Laurentienne et de ses universités fédérées offerts en date du 9 avril 2021, afin d'assurer qu'ils puissent être offerts dans leur intégralité d'ici la fin de la transition des » services « et programmes francophones vers l'Université de Sudbury;

« —établir une commission de mise en oeuvre qui sera chargée d'assurer le transfert des programmes vers l'Université de Sudbury et d'appuyer cette dernière dans son développement, dans un contexte de pérennité de l'enseignement postsecondaire en français dans le nord de l'Ontario; laquelle considérera en priorité les besoins des étudiant(e)s francophones actuel(le)s et futur(e)s;

« —s'assurer, par tous les moyens, que les étudiant(e)s actuel(le)s des programmes francophones touchés par la restructuration de l'Université Laurentienne puissent obtenir un diplôme dans le programme au sein duquel ils/elles étaient inscrit(e)s en date du 9 avril 2021, sans cours ou coût supplémentaires à ceux déjà prévus initialement. »

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECTING THE PEOPLE
OF ONTARIO ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2021
LOI DE 2021 VISANT À PROTÉGER
LA POPULATION ONTARIENNE
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 20, 2021, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

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

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It's interesting to reflect on the recent developments that have occurred in Ontario since I last held the floor on this bill, which was just about six hours ago. I was standing in this House speaking to Bill 269, the Protecting the People of Ontario Act, and I was just commenting—applauding the courage and the leadership of Dr. Lawrence Loh, the medical officer of health for Peel, who will be issuing a section 22 order to direct all businesses with five or more cases of COVID-19 within the last two weeks to close down for 10 days. Dr. Loh did that, Speaker, because of the complete absence of any kind of coherent policy response from this government on Friday to the apocalyptic, frankly, information that was provided by the science advisory table to this government about what is going to happen in this province if we don't take strong and effective measures to deal with COVID-19.

One of those measures is to be very, very rigorous in requiring non-essential businesses to close and to support those businesses and, in particular, to support the workers in those businesses. Dr. Loh and many, many others in this province—all medical officers of health; in fact, all public health boards in the province—have been united in urging this government to bring forward a program of paid sick days as another very important public health measure to stop the spread of COVID-19 in workplaces.

1510

In this third wave, we have seen workplaces become the major site of COVID-19 transmission, unlike the second wave, when long-term-care homes were ravaged by the virus spreading through them. There were definitely workplace outbreaks during the second wave, which is why public health experts and others have been calling for measures like paid sick days, like a strict closure order for non-essential businesses, but, in particular, in the third wave, workplaces have become the major source of COVID-19 transmission.

Quite honestly, this government won't have an opportunity to deliver on its budget—as inadequate as the budget measures are—if we have to deal with the consequences of failing to control the chaos that is currently unfolding in our health care system because of the variants of concern and because of the rapid increase in cases—

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, Speaker—just to inform the House that there will be a ministerial statement tomorrow on the Ministry of Energy. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you very much, Speaker.

This morning, I was applauding Dr. Loh's courage and leadership.

Over the break, before we returned to this Legislature, Toronto Public Health also issued a similar directive—that they will be closing businesses temporarily that have had five or more cases of COVID-19 in the last two weeks. Those businesses will be forced to close down for 10 days.

Both of these health units are acting in a similar fashion to what we saw in British Columbia recently, which also took a similar action to close down workplaces for 10 days where employees have tested positive for COVID-19.

These extraordinary measures, these extraordinary exercises of authority by the Peel and Toronto region health units were required because of this government's complete failure to rise to the occasion, to listen to the experts, to listen to the recommendations of the science advisory table and take the strong and effective public health measures that are necessary to deal with COVID-19.

Just before coming into this chamber, I saw a media report from the Toronto Star that stated, "Under pressure, Ontario government scrambles to launch a provincial sick leave program." More than a year since this pandemic began, after months of unrelenting advocacy from worker advocates, from mayors, including former leaders of the Progressive Conservative Party, municipal councils, boards of health, medical officers of health, ICU physicians, emergency room physicians, public health professionals—after all of these people had come together to urge the government to act, this afternoon we finally read that the government is looking to launch a provincial sick leave program.

I hope they are reviewing the legislation that I introduced in December, that we debated in February and that they voted against when it was debated and voted on on March 1. Think, Speaker, of what an opportunity that would have been for this government, had they acted then in response to all of the urgings from all of the experts and municipal leaders and employers. Small businesses were asking for this, as well. If they had acted then, imagine the lives we could have saved, imagine the deaths we could have prevented. What we know from looking at the statistics from WSIB is that the enforcement approach this government has favoured is not working. It has not done what is necessary to curb the spread of COVID-19 in workplaces.

WSIB reported that there were just over 11,000 total COVID-19-related claims in 2020. In just the first three months of 2021, there have been close to 9,000 COVID-19-related claims allowed. That's almost 80% of WSIB claims from last year over the whole period of COVID-19, from March to December; 80% of those—the same number—have already been submitted in just the first three months of 2021.

We also know from WSIB that the COVID-19-related workplace deaths this year are already 64% of last year's total. There were 28 total deaths in 2020. There were 18 WSIB deaths just in the first three months of 2021. And that doesn't take into account the harrowing stories that we have heard from ICU physicians, from emergency room physicians who have talked about the agony of seeing so

many essential workers in ICU, coming into emergency and having to be admitted into an ICU bed. Often, they are racialized workers, they are low-wage workers, they are younger workers. They are often in their 50s. It's a very different pandemic that we have seen unfold in the third wave than in the second wave.

It's heartening, I guess, that the government is looking at the evidence and is, hopefully, listening to the experts. We won't know until we see what they bring forward. But the evidence is saying that the approach this government has taken is not working to control the spread of COVID-19, and that is certainly what needs to happen in this province.

I also wanted to point out a survey that was conducted just last week. A survey was conducted from April 7 to 12, so the second week of April. It found that, by a margin of more than 4 to 1, Ontarians in general support the implementation of paid sick days for Ontario workers; 70% support five days of paid sick leave; 64% support 10 days of paid sick leave. This is not just a policy that is important to health care professionals, that is obviously important to workers, but it's also something that most Ontarians, almost three quarters of Ontarians, understand would be important to help deal with transmission of COVID-19 in workplaces.

An interesting finding of this survey is that there is a strong partisan divide, with Progressive Conservative supporters who are more divided on the issue—so less likely to support paid sick days. All other parties' supporters were overwhelmingly in favour.

It is shameful that for so long, this government resisted a policy initiative that was known to be effective—and we know it because it was used in the United States.

1520

In the United States, from March to December, they had a federal paid sick days program that required employers to pay their workers who had to stay home with COVID-19, who were sick from COVID-19. It required employers to pay those workers, to be reimbursed by the federal government. Evidence showed—they did an evaluation after, and it reduced cases by approximately 400 cases per day in the states that had new access to paid sick days, where there wasn't already a state mandate for employers to provide paid sick days.

So I'm hoping that this government is reviewing the evidence, listening to the experts and doing the right thing.

It has been an extraordinary couple of days that we have witnessed in this province. As the government made its big announcement on Friday, the ashen-faced Premier, struck by the enormity of what he had just heard, announced that Ontario is taking this very, very seriously and is going to be giving police additional powers to stop and surveil and enforce their way out of this pandemic. They also announced that playgrounds and outdoor recreational amenities were going to be shuttered, because that's how seriously they take this pandemic. Even though no expert who participated in the science advisory table, no physician who has been very vocal on social media talking about what needs to be done—none of those people had

recommended the closure of playgrounds and outdoor recreational amenities. In fact, they had talked about the much lower risk of transmission when people are outdoors, compared to the high risks of transmission when you have warehouses and factories, distribution centres where workers are highly congregated and working in indoor settings. Often, those workers are taking crowded public transit to work. They're working in crowded workplace settings, sometimes with not enough access to PPE, poor protection measures, and then they're going home to crowded living conditions, often multi-generational residences, because of the pressures in this province on housing. So of course they are at higher risk for COVID-19, and of course they need policy responses—like paid sick days, like paid time off to vaccinate, like mobile vaccination clinics going to these workplaces—that don't require the employer to fund and organize and deliver, but are led by the province. These are the kinds of things that are going to be important to help workers in Ontario and to curb the spread of COVID-19.

I say all of this in the context of the bill that we're looking at today, which is kind of a surprising bill. It has 10 schedules, so it is a bit of an omnibus bill—some of this, some of that, a mix of different acts that are amended—but the policy objective of this bill is to implement the government's budget that was tabled here back in March. There's very little in this bill, actually, that would help in implementing the government's budget. Perhaps the schedule that comes closest to being tied directly to some of the new budget initiatives is schedule 10, because that is the schedule that deals with the new tax credits that were announced in the budget: the tax credit for child care and the tax credit for training. But really, there is very little in this bill that addresses either the current crisis we are facing in this province or the package of measures the government put forward in its budget document.

I want to take some time to review some of the feedback that was provided to the government when they held public hearings—actually, it wasn't provided to the government; it was provided to all MPPs who participated on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs when this bill went before that committee for public input, so that citizens could come and share some of their thoughts on the legislation to implement the government's budget, and also on the budget document itself.

I want to quote esteemed economist Sheila Block from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Many of us will be familiar with Sheila's work, which is very, very insightful and valuable in really understanding the impact of policy measures that the government takes and the needs of people in this province. Sheila pointed out that "Ontario entered the pandemic with the lowest hospital spending per capita costs of any province, and we also have the lowest number of registered nurses per capita. The terrible toll of an underfunded health care system without surge capacity"—and we're certainly seeing that right now; we're actually having COVID-19 patients treated in hallways—"has been felt throughout the

pandemic, first with the tragedies in long-term care in the first and second waves, and now with the tragedies we see looming in hospitals and intensive care units. But instead of learning the lessons of this pandemic, this budget will tread water for one year on health spending, and retreat on education spending."

I have to say, Speaker, for a document that is supposed to reflect and respond to the priorities of the people of this province, this government's budget has failed miserably in those two areas that I just mentioned that Sheila Block identified in her presentation: on health care spending and on education spending. If there is anything that citizens count on their government getting right, it is health care and it is education.

Oftentimes, there is this false dichotomy that this government likes to present: that it's either health and well-being and good-quality schools or it's the economy, that you can't have both. What they don't comprehend—and I can't comprehend why they can't comprehend it, but they don't seem to be able to make the link between health and well-being, good schools, an educated population and the health of our economy.

Speaker, on all three fronts—health care, education and the economy—this budget fails miserably.

Sheila's reference to the tragedies in long-term care during the first and second waves is an important one that we need to reflect on.

Again, what this government has not done in this budget, certainly not in this bill, is ensure that we have a long-term-care system that enables residents to be cared for with dignity, with respect, with quality care; that has enough staff to be able to support those residents; that has appropriate oversight mechanisms in place; that ensures that the money residents pay to go into a long-term-care system does not go into the pockets of private sector, for-profit operators but rather goes into ensuring a high-quality, publicly funded or non-profit long-term-care system.

1530

This budget does nothing to deal with the crisis in long-term care. It talks about hiring more PSWs, but honestly, the target that this government has set for itself is dismally low. You only have to look at the example of Quebec, which was able to mobilize thousands of new PSWs and bring them into their long-term-care homes in a very short period of time, to see how low the bar is that this government has set for itself in terms of creating a sustainable PSW workforce. CUPE had identified the need for 20,000 PSWs over four years. This government's commitment is 6,750 staff each year.

But more troubling, there's no commitment included in this budget to continuing the wage increases for PSWs. We know how inappropriately low the wages for PSWs already are. There was a terrible story out of Ottawa of two PSWs who were living in a homeless shelter where they contracted COVID-19. They were living in a homeless shelter because of the housing crisis; they couldn't find affordable housing. They were living in a homeless shelter and going to work every day, dedicated to supporting the

residents they served in a long-term-care home. What kind of economy relies on paying PSWs such low wages that they can't even afford a place to live? It's despicable that a government would allow that to happen.

This government has talked about our health care heroes. They introduced a pandemic pay program that was nothing but problems for the health care institutions that received the pandemic pay, because it divided worker from worker. It suggested that some workers are deserving of pandemic pay, and other health care workers who are doing very, very similar jobs, side by side, were not deemed worthy of pandemic pay.

So PSWs were one of the professions that received pandemic pay, and this government continued the wage top-up until June—just another couple of months—but has refused to make that wage increase permanent. That is shameful, because PSWs—people realize this. After seeing what happened in long-term care, after reading the report of the Canadian military, people recognize how fundamental PSWs are to the functioning of our long-term-care system and how the entire system falls apart when there are not enough staff to feed residents, to change their soiled clothing and sheets, to assist them when they have fallen—all of these things. If there aren't enough PSWs around, no resident is going to get the kind of quality care that they deserve.

The other thing missing in this budget was—the lack of commitment to reinstate comprehensive resident quality inspections in long-term-care homes. Once again, I'm going to refer back to the report of the Canadian Armed Forces. That was a real wake-up call for so many people about the appalling lack of oversight in this province that would have allowed conditions to deteriorate to the point that was documented in that Canadian Armed Forces report.

I also want to talk about hospital funding. Sheila Block mentioned that Ontario has the lowest hospital spending per capita costs of any province. We know hallway health care has been the defining feature of health care in this province for quite some time. It was certainly that way under the Liberals. And I think that under this government, when we get through this pandemic, it will become even worse, because they have failed to make the kinds of investments in hospital funding that are necessary to deal with the backlog and to ensure that patients who need health care services in hospitals are able to access them.

This government, in their budget, committed funding to reduce surgical backlogs, but basically they maintained the same level of funding that they had already allocated in their previous budget. They did nothing to actually look at what kind of funding would be necessary to deal with that backlog of cancelled cancer surgeries, cancelled heart surgeries, all kinds of hip and knee replacement surgeries, all kinds of surgeries that people need. People are suffering because these surgeries have had to be cancelled because of COVID-19, but this budget falls \$420 million short of what would actually need to be invested to clear the surgical backlog. Actually, that calculation of the shortfall between what this budget allocates and what is

actually needed was made prior to the most recent devastation of the third wave. So I expect, with the additional cancellations that will continue to mount as our ICUs continue to be stretched to the breaking point, the shortfall is going to be even greater, once we get through COVID-19, in terms of the kind of funding, the level of funding, that would be needed to address that backlog.

I want to talk a bit about education, the other area that Sheila Block mentioned in her presentation. What we see in this budget is a cut to education of \$791 million. It is extraordinary that the government would think that this is a good time to—there's never a good time, in my opinion, to reduce funding to public education, because we know that the health of our province, the health of our economy, rely on a strong public education system. So I don't think there's ever a good time, but if there was ever a worse time to decide to cut education funding, it would have to be in the aftermath of this once-in-a-century pandemic that has caused such havoc in our province and that will have long-term impacts on the academic success of our kids, on their mental health and well-being.

The need to be aware of the additional support that children will require when they get back into in-person learning in the fall is critical. This is not the time to be cutting public education. This is not the time to be sending kids back into schools that continue to be in a state of significant disrepair because of a capital backlog that was allowed to grow year over year under the Liberals and that has continued under the Conservatives.

1540

School boards are going to be hard-pressed to try to move their budgets around, because they were forced to use reserve funding to deal with some of the extraordinary pressures of the pandemic. They will have to try to figure out how to balance the budget, because that is a requirement, by legislation, of all school boards in the province. They will have to try to make those determinations in the context of a cut to provincial funding.

I also want to talk about child care, which is under the Ministry of Education. This government provides a tax credit, and that is enabled by schedule 10 of the bill that we have before us today. The tax credit is a one-time top-up of what this government calls the Ontario Childcare Access and Relief from Expenses tax credit. It will increase annual support for parents who are eligible for the credit to \$1,500 a year, from \$1,250 a year.

Speaker, when you think about the cost of child care—it has been a long time since you and I have had children in child care. Child care in this province is more expensive than in any other province in Canada. Our large urban centres in Ontario are often at the top of the list, when you look across the whole country, in terms of the cost of child care. So \$250 a year will do nothing to help parents afford child care, for one thing, and it will do nothing to help parents access child care, because there are no spaces. It is such short-term thinking on behalf of this government—that they think they can buy support from parents by giving them an extra \$250 a year from a child care tax credit instead of actually investing in ensuring the stability

of our child care sector, instead of investing in creating spaces, instead of investing in the highly professional early childhood educators who staff our child care centres and, by the way, who have not been prioritized for the vaccine.

These child care workers are in emergency licensed child care as we speak, providing emergency care for the children of front-line workers, if those spaces are available. In my community, I'm hearing from a lot of front-line health care workers who need access to emergency child care while the schools are closed, and there are simply not enough spaces to meet the demand for emergency child care.

The other kind of offer that this government has made to parents is the cash payment of the student grant program. Parents will be able to get a cash payment of \$400 per child, \$500 for children with special needs. Certainly, this cash payment was developed by this government as a way to recognize the additional costs that families have had to carry because of the shift to emergency remote learning as schools were closed. Sheila Block, in her presentation to the finance committee, pointed out that these cash payments represent a "whopping" \$1.8-billion expenditure to the Ontario treasury. She went on to say, "Seldom in Ontario have I seen an expenditure so large that lacks any discernible policy objective and is in no way targeted. These cash payments deliver the same benefit to families with parents who have lost jobs and incomes, and those who have seen their wealth increase."

Speaker, the government has to have an equity lens when they are developing budget policy. They have to think about the impact of the policies that they are bringing forward on different kinds of families in this province, people from different communities, from a regional basis to racialized, immigrant, LGBTQ—they have to think in an intersectional way about the impact of policies. To make a flat cash payment of \$400 per child to every parent of a school-aged child in this province does nothing to deal with the structural inequities that so many families in this province face.

Let's think about those essential workers I talked about at the beginning of my remarks, who live in Peel region, who work at Amazon or go into a transportation logistics—or whatever that's called—centre or go into a warehouse. As I said, these are essential workers who are often racialized or immigrants. They often live in crowded housing, with different generations in the same household. Think about how they have been struggling during this pandemic. Think about what it would be like to be trying to supervise a child who is trying to learn online. Many of these families were unlikely to have had access to technology at the beginning, so the school boards mobilized to get technology out to families so that kids could access the online learning. From that family's perspective, as a parent, they're trying to help their child through this process of remote learning on new technology that they've never seen before, in a crowded household, worried about what happens when the parent who is an essential worker comes home. If that parent has been exposed to COVID-

19, what would happen in the household if one of the family members had to self-isolate? Where would the other members of the household go? How would this whole process of self-isolation work?

Speaker, that \$1.8 billion that was allocated to the student education grant could have, I suspect, been much more finely targeted to assist the families who are most in need.

1550

Going back to Sheila Block's comment that it provides the same benefit to families who've lost jobs and those who have seen their wealth increase: We have seen in this pandemic that some companies have done extraordinarily well—the Amazons of the world. Amazon is doing extraordinarily well. Sobeys is doing extraordinarily well. Other small businesses are struggling. They continue to struggle. They are struggling even more with a third lockdown that I would argue didn't have to happen. If the government had listened to the advice of the science advisory table back in February, when Dr. Brown first projected the kind of devastation that we are experiencing right now—if they had listened and continued to hold fast to the stay-at-home order instead of moving to ease restrictions, we might not have been in this place.

Going back to my comments just a short while ago about the three pillars—health care, education, and the economy—what's not good for the economy is this cycle of cases rising, lockdown; reopening too early, cases rising, lockdown; reopening too early, cases rising, lockdown. That is not good for an economy. That is not good for those small businesses that have had to try to cope with all of these directions coming out of this government and the failure of this government to really ensure that the supports businesses need are there.

This budget does not provide the kind of small business support program that would actually work to assist businesses. This morning, my colleague from University–Rosedale talked about the fact that 80% of the small businesses that have applied for this government's small business grant program have not received their grant; they have not received any funding. I've heard from many businesses in my community that have written or contacted my office to say that either they went to apply and found out they're not eligible, or they are eligible, they applied as soon as the program went up, and they haven't received any of the support that was promised to them.

As this period of lockdown drags on, the stress and anxiety that small business owners are facing is only going to increase, and the call from the small business community for direct support from this government is only going to get louder, and rightly so, because they will need help in order to ensure that they can survive this pandemic and be there for our communities when the pandemic is over.

Speaker, I want to spend my next minute or so just with a plea to this government to listen to the science, listen to what the researchers are saying and make evidence-informed policy decisions. Don't close down playgrounds because you think that's where COVID-19 is transmitted.

Look at the data that says COVID-19 is transmitted in workplaces and take measures that are going to address what the data is telling you. Don't take a police response to a public health emergency. We are not going to be able to police our way out of COVID-19. We need strong and effective public health measures.

Support public education: This is not the time to be taking dollars out of our public education system. This is the time, more than ever, to invest to ensure that students will have the supports they need and that schools are safe, my goodness, for the return to school—although we know that teachers are there as we speak, teachers of students with special education needs. Every student in this province, every education worker in this province deserves to be safe when they are in a school.

So make those kinds of investments that are so necessary for the well-being of our province, for the health of our society and the health of our economy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We will now have an opportunity for questions and comments.

Mr. Stan Cho: In her comments, the member from London West said that now is not the time for cuts to education. I agree. Our government agrees.

On page 7, you'll see a record level of funding for the education system: last fiscal, \$30.2 billion; this fiscal, \$30.6 billion; and next year, a record increase of \$700 million, to be \$31.3 billion.

The member just spoke for an hour, at length, about this document, so she must have read the budget.

My question—through you, Speaker, to the member opposite—is, what page is this cut on in this document?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Page 7 of the medium-term fiscal plan indicates that base program funding is projected to increase. However, the government is ending almost all COVID-19-related support, which means that the overall education budget will decline by \$791 million. We are going to have a need to continue to ensure the safety of schools for a long time to come. We are going to have to invest in ventilation systems in our schools. We are going to have to invest in supports, in additional education workers in our schools to assist the children, the students with the experiences they've had—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Wrap it up, please.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: —of remote learning over the last year.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): When I say, “wrap it up” or “conclude a response,” you still have 10 seconds. You don't have to sit down right away.

Next question.

Mr. Joel Harden: I want to thank my friend from London West for those remarks.

As I listened to you, I was thinking about essential workers, because they seem to be a big focal point for us right now. We're worried about their safety. I want to ask you about someone in Ottawa Centre, Kherin Dimalanta. She is an essential worker caring for two ICU physicians in Ottawa. She's here in Canada, a Filipina, on a temporary worker program. She's finding out, if you can believe it,

member, that her OHIP benefits may run out at the end of this month because of an immigration issue.

To me, it boggles my mind that we're having a discussion about cutting health care, cutting education, not helping essential workers like Kherin.

I'm wondering, given your reading of this bill, if you could help us understand why the government decided to focus on an austerity agenda and not helping essential workers like Kherin.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I think we all know that austerity is in the DNA of the Conservative Party. We certainly saw that under the last Conservative government that was in office, and we see it now under this government.

I think what the experience of COVID-19 has revealed more clearly than ever before is that until all of us are safe, none of us are safe. Our safety, collectively, as a society, as a community, relies on essential workers, who are going to work every day, who are taking public transit to and from work, who are going shopping, who are out in the community. Our collective safety relies on those workers being able to access paid sick days so that if they have a symptom, they can stay home without risking their paycheque.

1600

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I listened intently to the member opposite, particularly in her remarks here. She was commenting on the \$38-billion deficit from last year to the \$33-billion deficit from this year, and yet commenting somehow that this is a time of austerity, which seems to me a little bit strange considering how significant those deficits really are.

I'm just wondering: How much debt would the member opposite want to be passing along to future generations? What sort of debt would you like to see included in this budget, if you consider a \$33-billion deficit austerity?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Governments have an obligation to invest to ensure that the fundamental systems that we rely on are there to enable us to function successfully as a province and as an economy. If we don't have access to a strong health care system, if we don't make the investments in public health, if we cut public health budgets, we've seen what happens. We've seen what happens when there are weakened supports in place.

We need to ensure that the investments are there. We know that, with supports, the small business community can ensure that Ontario returns to competitiveness and there are more people paying taxes and ensuring that our province can provide these supports.

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

Mr. Stan Cho: I'm glad to have another opportunity to ask a question.

The member just said we need to ensure that the fundamental systems we rely on are there.

I'll try a different part of the budget since I didn't hear an answer to my last question. Page 9 shows that base program spending increases every year. If you want to go

to a more detailed outline of those items, you can go to pages 164 to 174, which will show the actual line items on the program spending increases to health care every year. This is on top of COVID-19 spending—increases to education every year; increases to social services every single year, every year out until 2024.

To the member opposite: What page number are the austerity measures on, or these cuts you mention that are there for health care?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, this is a time of unprecedented crisis in our province. What Ontarians were looking for from this government was a budget that would give them the help they need to make it through this pandemic, and the hope that there is going to be a future for themselves and their children once the pandemic is over. They didn't see that in this budget. They did not see the hope that they need to feel that our health care system will be strong and accessible after the pandemic, that public education will be strong and available to children, and that women will be supported to get back into the labour market. This budget has shown that it is completely out of touch with the priorities of the people of this province.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I would like to ask the member from London West to delve a bit more into the conversation around education and the supports required. She very clearly outlined that the overall budget for education is set to decrease by \$790 million, which is tantamount to a cut. Despite the protestations of the members opposite, if there's not as much money, then there's not as much money.

I would like to know what happens without government investment to replenish the school board reserves? What does that look like for folks and families?

Also, to the teachers, ECEs, special education workers, education workers, those who are essential and doing unimaginable work that the community appreciates—how could this government better support those who work with and care for our kids during this pandemic?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I appreciate the question from my colleague.

As she knows, as I think all Ontarians know, the NDP has been relentless in our push for a reduction in class sizes to a cap of 15 students. We've been relentless in our push for improved ventilation in schools. We've been relentless in our calls for a comprehensive program of asymptomatic testing, so that when parents send their kids to school in the morning, they can be assured that they are going to be safe.

What this government is doing by communicating to school boards that they have to reduce staffing levels to where they were before COVID-19 for the next school year—what that means is cuts to potentially thousands of education workers. That means all of those caring adult professionals in a school system, who students need to support their learning, will no longer be there when school returns in September.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I don't think we have time for another question and answer.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

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 Mr. Phillips assumes ballot item number 83 and Mr. Pettapiece assumes ballot item number 96.

PROTECTING THE PEOPLE OF ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2021

LOI DE 2021 VISANT À PROTÉGER LA POPULATION ONTARIENNE (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Speaker.
Remarks in Oji-Cree.

Speaker, it's an honour to be here today to represent the people of Kiiwetinoong and to speak on their behalf on this budget bill.

Before the budget was tabled, the NDP, our caucus, laid out a series of asks that have not been met by this budget. One of the things is the hospital sector, of course—with increases of base funding and eliminating all hospital deficits, and also to give hospitals funding to eliminate the backlog of surgeries and cancer screenings. We have to understand that many patients are waiting in pain for surgeries that have been delayed and delayed.

Also, it's important to know that for students in schools—we asked to help students recover pandemic learning lost by hiring additional teachers and education workers, guaranteeing smaller classes and no layoffs. Also, I think the ask was to help students overcome the difficult pandemic year with new mental health supports in every school.

To help jobs, the economy, the workers, we asked to fund paid sick days and guarantee paid time off to get the vaccine—I heard that quite a bit these last few weeks, on these two items.

We also need to be able to provide small businesses with expanded rent and payroll supports until businesses are back on their feet.

I know that this government's pre-pandemic budget made deep, painful cuts—including cutting out as many as 10,000 teachers and education workers, taking away supports for children with autism, and slashing public health units.

And when we talk about long-term care—achieving four hours of daily hands-on care for every long-term-care resident, hiring 10,000 full-time PSWs in long-term care and giving them higher wages and paid training, and also to immediately reinstate comprehensive resident quality inspections in long-term care.

In Sioux Lookout, we were promised 76 new long-term-care beds, and we have not seen that promise fulfilled by this government, despite funding for long-term-care beds in almost all areas of Ontario.

In the riding of Kiiwetinoong, I think we have something like 20 long-term-care beds, in Sioux Lookout; there are about 34 in Red Lake.

Then, the only thing that we have is 13 long-term boil-water advisories in First Nation communities.

1610

The Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win Health Centre has reached out to your government about the long-term-care facility project, with no response. The most recent Ministry of Long-Term Care announcements of approved long-term-care projects across the province have left the community feeling very undervalued by this government. In Kiiwetinoong, we are people too. It's very evident from the latest announcement that the Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win Health Centre long-term-care project is not a priority for this current government. Is it because we're First Nations? Is it because we're NDP? I don't know that. Our elders have waited far too long for this project to advance. We need your support to get the funding required to get these beds for Sioux Lookout. What happens is, once elders leave for long-term care, they come back pretty much in a casket, because they never get to go home.

Speaker, there is much more I don't see in this budget. We keep on harping on how it does not include paid sick days, even time off to get vaccinated, or anything that real people are concerned about. I know people are dying every day in this third wave. We are in a third wave of this pandemic that we have been living through for over a year now, and we are still asking for common-sense public health measures to be implemented, with no answers.

Given this government's track record known to me, looking from the outside of this government, looking from a different lens, as an Indigenous person, as a First Nations person, looking from far northern Ontario, it is very clear to me that this budget does mean nothing for northern and Indigenous communities. Sure, I hear good words, I hear nice words, spinning of words, but without any real action, again, it does not mean anything.

Time and time again, when I come to this colonial place—as First Nations, this is a very colonial place. This system was never built for me. This system was created to colonize, to oppress Indigenous people. I keep bringing up this issue of clean drinking water. I have mentioned time and time again that there are First Nations across Ontario under long-term boil-water advisories. “Long-term” means anything over one year. I have 15 long-term boil-water advisories in my riding of Kiiwetinoong. I have one community that is on its 27th year of long-term boil-water advisories; Neskantaga First Nation has been under that—it's a quarter of a century with no access to clean water to drink, to shower with, or even wash your hands with.

We are so lucky. We take water for granted when we go to the back and take a drink, and I just did that earlier. Even this water—I went to the back and I did that, because, again, it's safe, and we take that for granted.

I don't see any infrastructure investments within this budget. I'm on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs—and you've heard these stories and these presentations. Some of my colleagues who are across the way have been there with me. Even the former finance minister is here. I will say this: He was the only person who, when Neskantaga members came here—there were people here, and we need to be able to address that. These are real issues that we are addressing. Access to clean drinking water is a basic human right. An entire generation of Neskantaga has been raised without clean water.

I often wonder how it's possible, in a rich and developed country like Canada, in a rich province like Ontario, to treat people like this, for you to look away and say, “That's not our responsibility. That's a federal responsibility.”

I know this:

(1) It's because of the lack of political will. If they wanted to do it, they would do it. If they wanted to invest \$50 million in the water and sewer system, it would be done. But there's no will. I don't know what it is—if it's because we're First Nations, we're brown, we're on-reserve. I thought we were part of Ontario.

(2) It's possible it's because the government regularly underfunds the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs as well as the Indigenous Drinking Water Projects Office. With such underfunding, how can we begin to do the real work of providing clean drinking water to many First Nations across Ontario who live under the legacy of boil-water advisories? How can we get proper water and waste water infrastructure to those communities who need it when this government says, “Ask the federal government”? It's almost like we're not part of Ontario.

I know what this government will say to me about the water crisis in First Nation communities. They say to me to my face, “That's the federal government's problem; it's not the province's.” They say that's a federal issue and only the federal government will be able to help communities like Neskantaga.

I had this one girl, nine years old, and another boy, 12 years old, crying—that was November 2020, when Neskantaga was evacuated. They wanted two things: (1) They wanted to go home, and (2) they wanted clean drinking water in their community. To this day, they don't have it.

I must remind this government once more that the province of Ontario is a signatory to Treaty 9. We have to, as a government, start respecting the treaty. Treaties are nothing when they are not honoured. And where is the honour of the crown? Ontario is looking away and pretending the problem doesn't exist when asked about all First Nations in Ontario who don't have clean drinking water.

1620

With this budget, the government is clearly avoiding its responsibilities once again and looking away, when it should be looking towards us and thinking how they can be real treaty partners.

When we use jurisdiction as an excuse, when we play jurisdictional Ping-Pong with the health and the lives of

children—that nine-year-old and that 12-year-old I'm talking about—that is structural violence. That is structural racism. That is racism. Period.

I wanted to make a statement on that, and I think it's very clear. I don't see anything about that. When we had our discussions in the finance committee, they talked to me and said, "We'll work on reserve infrastructure for you," but I don't see anything.

Speaker, northern businesses are suffering because of the effects of COVID-19. There are about 250 resource-based tourism businesses in northwestern Ontario. In any other year before COVID-19, these businesses would have had successful summer seasons, hosting thousands of tourists from the States. In fact, 90% of their business market is American. With the border closed since March 2020, these businesses have been suffering tremendously.

I'd like to provide an example of Sioux Lookout, which is home to over 25 tourism businesses. A typical lodge or outfitter lost approximately \$525,000 in revenue from May to July, in comparison to 2019. The combined loss for hotels in the community is more than \$3 million, and this does not take into account the greater economic effects that businesses have on their local economy. The loss of the tourism industry has had an effect on everyone.

The budget does little to support northwestern Ontario businesses. This government needs to be reminded that Ontario cannot be open for business if there are no businesses left in Ontario.

What these businesses need is a meaningful financial way to reflect the unique nature of their customer base. However, this budget is a missed opportunity. It could have been a chance to save more businesses in the north from tremendous financial hardship and many bankruptcies. But yet again, the government has decided that one size fits all when it comes to business, and businesses in the north are not being heard.

I mentioned that I'm on a committee, and I was able to hear some of the witnesses who came forward on the topic of Ontario's small business support program and other small business supports. For example, one of the things they talked about is tailoring Indigenous business grants to marketplace conditions, taking into account how they have been impacted by the pandemic, and also creating supports for the businesses that were created immediately before the start of the pandemic and which currently do not qualify for government programs.

Another one that's a big issue for us is mental health supports, housing and also determinants of health in Sioux Lookout.

Across the north, there have been different needs in our communities. There are many factors that shape our health, including the living conditions that we experience, and these conditions are social determinants of health.

We have to understand that our health is also determined by the health and social services we receive and our ability to obtain quality education, food, housing and other factors.

We have to understand that across Kiiwetinoong, access to education, food and housing supports is unequal

compared to the rest of Ontario. In Sioux Lookout, in a town of 5,200 people, 10 Indigenous people without homes died in the winter of 2018. Although First Nations people make up roughly 40% of the town's population, the Kenora District Services Board estimates that the homeless population in Sioux Lookout is more than 90% Indigenous.

This is all to say that at the end of the day, we cannot dehumanize the process of making budgets. Our decisions have an effect on real people and their lives, and we cannot forget them when we are making decisions here in this Legislature. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have an opportunity for questions. I recognize the member from Willowdale.

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you to the member for Kiiwetinoong for those comments. I respect the member greatly—I think he knows that—and I always have great conversations with him, including our time in finance committee.

I've heard lots of criticism from the opposition, but not about what's in the budget. In fact, you heard that in my last line of questioning—that I couldn't get an answer as to the specific content of what was troubling in the budget to the opposition. I would have thought, in finance committee, with the member opposite, that we would have received a series of amendments from the NDP on maybe what to add to the budget or constructively change about the budget.

My question to the member is, simply, can you explain why the opposition didn't put forward any amendments at all? You can criticize what's in the budget, but you can't add constructively to the budget. I'm just wondering why that is.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Simple answer: Because you always vote it down.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: My friend from Kiiwetinoong knows that brevity is the soul of wit, in that last answer. And I have yet to see this government take an amendment from the opposition caucus at committee or in this place, so it's a fair reaction.

I want to ask my friend from Kiiwetinoong, given what you said about the Neskantaga people, who I had the great fortune to meet thanks to you, with the rally that was here some months ago: What kind of investment could we have seen in this budget to bring clean water? What could this budget concretely do? I know you know this research much better than all of us. What could this government have done beyond press conferences with zero content?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you for the question.

I know that water is such a basic human right for everyone in Ontario, and First Nations like Neskantaga are treated differently by this government. I think there could have been investment right on-reserve from this government on infrastructure, such as a water treatment plant and a distribution system. That could make a big difference—and just send that bill to the federal government.

We've got to start treating our First Nations people like Ontarians. Lastly, we've got to treat them as human beings. Meegwetich.

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

Mr. David Piccini: It's always a pleasure to rise and ask questions.

Thank you to the member opposite for his speech.

One of the measures that we've put in the budget and that this government has built on is not only a \$59-million micro-credentialing strategy, but expanding OSAP eligibility for our Indigenous institutes.

I've had a great opportunity, with our Indigenous institutes, to work in my capacity as parliamentary assistant on culturally sensitive learning material.

I'm pleased to say that we've seen a 40% increase in enrolment for our Indigenous institutes.

My question to the member opposite is, does he support continued supports for our Indigenous institutes and measures to expand OSAP eligibility for Indigenous learners at our Indigenous institutes?

1630

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you for the question.

One thing I'll say is, this government needs to stop saying "our Indigenous people." I say that with respect. You do not own us. I want to make that clear.

Interjection.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: No, I'm just saying that it's really—but I think one of the things that we need to be able to address is, Indigenous learning, Indigenous curriculum-writing, is so important. One of the first things that happened is they cut Indigenous curriculum-writing back in August 2018. I think that we need to bring back those things, whereby we actually learn the real history of this country, the real history of Ontario, how colonization works and how oppression works.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I would just start by saying that perhaps if the government would support Laurentian University and if we didn't see the demise of that, we would actually see all that incredible work that has gone on there to bolster Indigenous learning and programs come to some good, instead of it all disappearing.

Anyway, my question to the member is—and I thank him for his remarks. One of the things that's most disappointing to me in this budget is the lack of any acknowledgement of what our children and youth are going through in this moment, and always. I wondered if he would speak to how children and youth are being impacted in the communities he represents and what this budget could be doing to better support them.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: One of the things that we face as First Nations communities—especially the fly-in communities—is, our students have to leave the communities to attend high school. When you're 12, 13, 14 years old—depending on the age, they have to leave the communities, because we have no high schools.

Again, student mental health is something that we need to be invested in. Not only that, but because of where we are as First Nations in fly-in communities, we need to be able to invest in learning about the land and going onto the land. It's important that there should be investments in learning on the land.

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

Mr. David Piccini: I appreciate the opportunity to rise.

Thank you again to the member opposite.

The member opposite spoke about important mental health funding, so I'll again tie it back to the ministry that I have the very fortunate opportunity to serve in and talk about additional investments made to post-secondary institutes in the province of Ontario for mental health funding—in fact, the doubling of that funding. I'll tie it back to important threads and themes within Indigenous institutes.

Again, I'll ask the member opposite: Do you support expanded OSAP eligibility for Indigenous learners in the province of Ontario? And do you support continuing to increase funding and supports for Indigenous institutes, as the government has done over the last year?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you for the question.

Certainly, we have to understand, as First Nations, there are outer circles and inner circles. In outer circles, you get the funding, but you're not actually providing the services on-reserve, direct to the people who need them. I think sometimes universities or even institutions are used like that. It makes them look as if they're doing something, when in fact they're taking away resources directly from the communities. I think those are one of the mechanisms that—it's almost as if you're doing this incremental change. But incremental change continues to colonize people. Incremental change perpetuates the crisis in our communities.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's always a privilege to be in the House when the member for Kiiwetinoong is here. He brings a real perspective that a lot of us are privileged to not even think about in this House. He brings the perspective of housing. He brings a different perspective of individuals with the basic need of water in their community. I always enjoy the time that I spend with him in the House. I wish I could spend more time with him in the committee work that he has done extensively since he has been here as elected.

He answered the question of the member from Willowdale in regard to whether there were any amendments that were put forward: "Why weren't there any amendments from the NDP that were put forward towards the budget?"

My question to the member is, have you ever been part of any committee work where the government actually accepted one of your amendments?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Back to the member from Kiiwetinoong, who has 30 seconds to respond.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Yes, there was actually, I think, one amendment, one thing I had submitted, and they changed the wording around. But that was only one time since I've been here—three years.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): It is time for further debate.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be sharing my time with the member of Ottawa South.

Donc, je vais faire ma présentation en français. Je saisis donc l'opportunité de prendre la parole sur le projet de loi budgétaire au nom de la population d'Ottawa-Vanier que je représente avec beaucoup de fierté. Je dois dire que les résidents d'Ottawa-Vanier m'ont interpellée de nombreuses fois pour me faire part de leurs priorités, et je suis également allée à leurs rencontres autant que possible dans le contexte de la pandémie. Ils m'ont fait part des problèmes qu'ils auraient voulu voir adressés par le gouvernement dans ce budget. Alors, même si le budget apporte certaines mesures d'aide, il ne tient pas suffisamment compte, vraiment, des effets dévastateurs de la pandémie sur toute la province.

L'année dernière a aggravé les inégalités dans notre province de façon vraiment très évidente. Les femmes—et de façon plus particulière les femmes racialisées, les femmes occupant des emplois à faible revenu, les nouveaux arrivants—ont été affectées vraiment de façon disproportionnée. J'espère vraiment que le gouvernement de l'Ontario va être la première province à reconnaître ce fait en collaborant avec le gouvernement fédéral pour élaborer les détails d'un système de garde d'enfants accessible afin que les femmes puissent planifier leur réintégration sur le marché du travail en Ontario.

Les bénéficiaires du Programme ontarien de soutien aux personnes handicapées ne peuvent pas joindre les deux bouts avec les paiements qu'ils reçoivent actuellement, et la pandémie ne fait qu'aggraver ces disparités économiques. Ce budget ne mentionne pas une seule aide pour les personnes handicapées.

Nos conseils scolaires, nos travailleurs de l'éducation et nos travailleurs des services de garde ont désespérément besoin de classes plus petites et de plus de soutien. Au lieu de ça, le budget coupe près de 790 millions de dollars dans l'éducation; ça a été mentionné déjà plusieurs fois. Et en apprenant cela, les conseils scolaires n'ont pas eu d'autre choix que de commencer à mettre à pied du personnel et de décider comment ils allaient pouvoir s'adapter.

Les soins de longue durée ont été profondément touchés au cours de la dernière année et il est devenu très clair que les préposés aux bénéficiaires ne sont pas assez appréciés pour le travail inestimable qu'ils accomplissent. Malheureusement, ce budget ne s'engage pas à augmenter de façon permanente leur salaire ou à améliorer leurs conditions de travail, ce qui pourrait permettre en fait d'attirer plus de personnes dans cette profession, ce dont on a vraiment besoin, puis d'encourager ceux qui se dévouent déjà à demeurer dans cette profession.

Les petites entreprises s'adaptent sans relâche aux directives de santé publique et nous avons déjà perdu un grand nombre de ces petites entreprises à cause de la

pandémie. C'est très dommage que le gouvernement ait décidé de prioriser les grandes entreprises au lieu de nos petites entreprises locales.

La pénurie d'enseignants francophones fait rage dans cette province et nous, les francophones, continuons de vivre sans un accès équitable aux services essentiels dans notre langue. Et le budget ne contient pas de plan concret pour adresser cette lacune.

Le processus de reprise économique est le moment idéal pour apporter des changements importants aux systèmes que nous avons actuellement en place. Ce n'est pas le moment de regarder le passé, de chercher qui blâmer pour les systèmes actuels ou de contourner les vrais problèmes. C'est le moment de reconnaître que le changement est nécessaire, souhaité et bienvenu dans cette province.

1640

Les Ontariennes et Ontariens demandent :

—des congés de maladie payés;

—un soutien aux travailleurs essentiels, aux femmes exclues du marché du travail et aux Ontariennes et Ontariens marginalisés;

—des investissements significatifs dans les soins de santé, les soins de longue durée;

—des investissements en éducation et de l'aide aux étudiants;

—des mesures de protection de l'environnement et l'annulation d'un projet d'autoroute 413 inutile qui enlève des ressources importantes dans d'autres secteurs;

—une priorisation des petites entreprises dans la reprise économique de l'Ontario;

—un accès équitable aux services dans les deux langues officielles;

—des logements abordables;

—un plan pour lutter contre la pauvreté.

Pourquoi est-ce qu'on ne voit pas ça dans le budget?

Les Ontariennes et Ontariens sont fatigués. Ils sont frustrés et ils se sentent abandonnés par leur gouvernement. Ce budget aurait été l'occasion de montrer clairement que leur gouvernement était là pour eux. Au lieu de cela, ils ont obtenu des demi-mesures, des priorités mal placées, des idées sans objectifs mesurables et vraiment juste un mépris pour tant d'appels urgents au soutien.

Alors, monsieur le Président, je ne peux pas appuyer ce projet de loi, parce qu'il n'aide pas adéquatement les Ontariennes et les Ontariens.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member did say she was sharing her time. I turn to the member from Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: I want to start with something a little unusual for a budget: I'm going to say what I like in the budget.

There are two things that I like in particular. One is local. It's 1Door4Care, which is at CHEO. It's very important, something I've worked on in government. I know the member from Ottawa West-Nepean did a lot of work to make sure that it moved forward, and I want to give him kudos for that. It's really important to the

families in eastern Ontario and Ottawa. Also, the expansion of community paramedicine, something I also worked on while in government: I think this further expansion, which went further than we did, is a great thing and it's going to serve people in communities really well. So that's it.

If there were only those two things in the budget, I'd be there. But what I'm concerned about is what's missing in the budget. A budget is a document that's a picture of what you're going to do. It's a road map. What concerned me is there are not too many milestones on that road map.

I look at public health: There's no real mention of public health. It's the same government that was going to drastically cut public health a couple of years ago. There's no mention of continuing to support or increasing support for municipalities to make sure that important programs are there. Now, we know just how important—all of us know—public health is.

As well, there's no mention about the kind of vaccination programs that we may have to be on in the next two to three years. It's incredible that that's not there, just incredible.

The other piece is long-term care. The most critical thing again that's missing has to do with staffing. There's no commitment to permanently raise the wages of PSWs—no commitment. No commitment to creating full-time jobs—well, there is a commitment; it's until the end of June. But the Premier keeps kind of saying, "Yes, we'll extend it another three months." That's not going to solve the problem. It's the same government that spent \$42 million on security guards and \$14 million to recruit and retain PSWs. I can't support this budget for that reason.

Home care: Did anybody find home care in the budget? I couldn't find it. That's incredible. If we're talking about aging and frailty in our communities, how can home care not get a mention, not have a plan, basically get ignored? We want to help seniors stay in their homes, so they need a plan for home care. It just doesn't cut it.

LTC inspections: no commitment to increase inspections. This government went down to 27 RQI inspections every year. It did nothing for the residents, didn't help them. Maybe it helped somebody else, but it didn't help them, and we saw the results of that.

Mental health and addictions: I know the government has invested some money in mental health and addictions. It's not really clear. But there's another pandemic that's going on in Ontario right now, and that's the opioid crisis. More and more people are dying every day: more sons, more daughters, more moms, more dads, more friends. That pandemic is going to keep going beyond this pandemic, and if we don't try to slow it down with things like safe consumption sites, treatment, counselling, it's going to get worse, and we're going to have an even bigger problem on our hands. There's nothing in the budget that addresses that, or nary a mention of the second pandemic here in Ontario.

And now the economy: We know that women have been disproportionately affected by this pandemic. The polling is there. They're bearing the brunt of this

pandemic, and the government's solution to that is, "We're going to set up a panel." Really? "We're going to set up a panel." I think we know what we need to do.

Child care: I was really disappointed to see the Minister of Education's tepid response to the federal government's plan—incredible. This is something that we should try to promote and celebrate because we need to make sure that women can fully participate in the workforce. Right now, the pressures of this pandemic are falling disproportionately on them—full-time jobs, flexible hours.

Which brings me to the last thing that's missing in this budget—I know the government is musing about this right now, one year in—and that's paid sick days. In 2018, every Ontario worker had two paid sick days. One of the first things this government did was to take those away, along with minimum wage and a whole bunch of other workers' protections. Those two paid sick days, had they been in place, would have saved lives. They would have saved lives, and this government has dithered and refused to fill the gap. Simply, they just had to put those two back as a start.

You all knew there was a gap. You all knew that it didn't show up on people's paycheques. You all know that somebody who works in a low-wage job, has kids at home to feed, maybe their mom with them, they're just struggling, and they need that money on the paycheque. That's why they were there. They can't wait two weeks.

The Premier likes to say, "I delivered the CRSB." Well, I'd like to remind you that the Premier said, "I'd rather not have that. I'd rather spend it on something else, because workers in this province are protected enough." And now he has temerity to say, "I'm the hero." There's nothing in the budget to address that, and if you address it in the next couple of days, it's going to come a year too late for too many people, too many families who've suffered.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is to the member from Ottawa South. This government has set up the most extensive vaccine rollout plan in the country, but with the very real concerns of supply shortages because of the federal Liberal government, and seeing the effect of the supply shortage at our vaccination centres, it is very difficult to keep up with the demand when the supply simply is not there. We have the avenues to put needles in arms. We have worked tirelessly with our partners at both municipal levels and with public health units.

My question to the member opposite: Without the consistent supply of vaccines to supplement the large capacity we have put in place, what does the member suggest we put in the arms of Ontarians?

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you for that question, really. This government started out by not vaccinating residents in long-term care while other provinces were. And they took two weeks longer to take Pfizer into long-term-care homes to vaccinate the most vulnerable. And then they were two weeks behind every other province, taking half a million doses to get a first dose into every resident in long-term care. That's not success—not even close.

1650

And then the website that was supposed to be ready March 1, well, it got delayed. Now your government has gone out and actually said, “The science table is helping us out and they’re advising us,” and you’ve created hot zones, but you took what they had and you added to it, and now you’ve got hot zones in places where they shouldn’t exist.

You can’t get vaccines into the right places and the right arms, and you’ve got a million in freezers. The vaccines that work the best are the ones that go in people’s arms. That’s my advice to your government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Ottawa Centre has a question.

M. Joel Harden: Ma question est pour mon amie d’Ottawa–Vanier. Vraiment, pour moi, je suis bien impressionné par vos commentaires sur la question des besoins des personnes handicapées en ce moment. J’ai eu la chance de lire le budget de ce gouvernement, et je suis d’accord : il n’y a rien dans le budget pour les personnes handicapées. Avez-vous des suggestions pour les amis au gouvernement pour les personnes handicapées, qui souffrent en ce moment?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Merci au député d’Ottawa Centre pour sa question—en français, en plus. J’apprécie l’effort.

Effectivement, il y a beaucoup de gens d’Ottawa–Vanier qui m’ont interpellée, qui m’ont parlé. J’ai même tenu un genre de forum avec ces gens-là pour essayer de comprendre c’est quoi les défis auxquels ils font face. Premièrement, au niveau de l’argent qu’ils reçoivent mensuellement, ce n’est pas suffisant. Ça ne leur permet pas d’atteindre aucun niveau d’indépendance. Ce sont des gens qui sont obligés de rester avec leurs parents parce qu’on tient en considération le revenu de leurs parents pour déterminer le montant auquel ils vont avoir droit.

Ce sont également des montants qui ne correspondent même pas à ce que le fédéral donnait, le 2 000 \$ par mois, qui était considéré comme le minimum pour être capable de vivre décemment. Alors, ils ne gagnent même pas ça, puis avec la pandémie, ils ont des dépenses de plus qui ne sont pas couvertes. Ils ont des « case workers » qui s’occupent de leur cas qui appliquent les règles de différentes façons. Donc, il y a un manque de clarté au niveau de l’application des règles—donc, beaucoup d’amélioration sur ce front-là.

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

Mr. David Piccini: It’s always a pleasure to rise to ask a question. My question is for the wonderful member from Ottawa Centre. Mr. Speaker, that member knows the health care file well—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Ottawa South.

Mr. David Piccini: Ottawa South—sorry. My apologies. He is a wonderful member as well.

My question is to the member for Ottawa South. He knows the health care file well. Under the previous government, we know that 611 net new long-term-care

beds were built over a decade, which left this province with dilapidated LTC infrastructure and woefully underprepared for this pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, I’m pleased to say that in this budget, there are significant investments to structure for long-term care, and locally I’ve got 232 net new beds being built in my riding, which is one third of what his government accomplished in a decade. Will he acknowledge that they did not leave this province prepared to face the COVID-19 pandemic?

Mr. John Fraser: Well, that’s quite the question—a bit loaded, eh?

Look, I think I should remind you that between 2003 and 2018, there were 30,000 new and renovated beds built in Ontario. I’d also like to remind you that we actually permanently raised the wages of PSWs by \$4 an hour. We made that commitment. That’s something you have been unable to do.

The biggest problem right now in long-term care is having a skilled and trained workforce that’s stable, and that they’re paid a decent wage, and that they have benefits. That’s the thing I was talking about missing from this budget. We can build as many buildings as we like, but when we don’t have the people there to care for the people that we care for most, it’s not going to work.

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

That’s your 10-second warning. You don’t have to sit down right away.

The next question?

M. Michael Mantha: Ma question est pour la députée d’Ottawa–Vanier. Dans la mienne, ma circonscription d’Algoma–Manitoulin, c’est évident : la plupart des gens qui appellent à mon bureau de circonscription, c’est pour avoir de l’aide, des besoins pour les aînés qui sont à la maison et aussi dans les maisons de longue durée.

Quand on regarde ce qui est présenté ici dans le budget, il y a des suggestions où on pourrait regarder à ce que le Québec a fait, où ils ont engagé des préposés bénéficiaires agressivement. Ils ont poursuivi ce programme-là agressivement. Ils ont fait la même chose en Colombie-Britannique. Ils ont poursuivi ça agressivement. Ici, en Ontario, on est tombé en arrière. Est-ce que tu vois de quoi dans les suggestions du budget qui a été proposé qui va adresser les besoins dans nos maisons de longue durée et des gens qui veulent rester dans leur domicile, pour nos aînés?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Merci pour la question. Effectivement, les efforts du gouvernement envers les soins de longue durée, envers les préposés aux bénéficiaires sont très tièdes, pour être très généreuse. En fait, si on veut vraiment adresser la crise, il faut être plus agressif, et ce n’est pas une augmentation de salaire temporaire qui va attirer des gens dans la profession. Comment est-ce que moi, sur les bancs de l’école, je vais décider de choisir une profession qui va avoir un salaire coupé dans quelques mois? Ce n’est pas quelque chose qui est encourageant, pas du tout.

Ma belle-soeur est préposée aux bénéficiaires—toute sa carrière. Ça prend des gens avec des qualités très spéciales,

un don de soi inqualifiable qui ne se compare à rien. Ces gens-là doivent être reconnus pour le travail qu'ils font, et on en a besoin maintenant, pas dans quatre ans, pas dans 10 ans. On en a besoin maintenant. Puis pour que les gens puissent rester à la maison, il faut également avoir des conditions de travail pour que ces préposés puissent se déplacer puis aller rendre des services au domicile.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I'd just like to ask the member opposite—I heard some of the passion in the member's voice. But I have to say, in my riding of Niagara West, the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital was cancelled by the Liberal government in their 2012 budget, as well as a number of other projects that were cancelled—health care projects that matter to the people of Niagara and many other constituencies across this province.

I have to say, Speaker, since our government has come to office—including in this budget: new West Lincoln Memorial Hospital, new South Niagara Hospital, new Hotel Dieu Shaver hospital. Those are three new facilities coming just in the Niagara region, let alone talking about others, including Brampton.

So how can the members opposite stand and look in good conscience at my constituents, after they cancelled the hospital they fought for for decades, and say that this is a budget that leaves people behind?

Mr. John Fraser: Here's what I know: There was a crane at every hospital in my city, and almost every hospital in this city and hospitals in Niagara. I know they were there.

I have this one last thing to say: What I don't understand, because I hear the government is going to do paid sick days, is why it takes a year of screaming and kicking. Why does it take a year of almost everybody in Ontario telling them that it's the right thing to do? One hospital exec said to me, about this government, "If you keep punching them in the face, they'll do the right thing." I don't think that the people of Ontario should have to do that. I don't think anybody should have to do that here.

And yes, you did hear passion in my voice, because I care about what's happening here. I care about what's happening to workers in this province, essential workers who have been left to hang out to dry by this government.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm pleased to be able to add my voice and share many voices from the folks across the Oshawa community and, broadly, Durham region, on Bill 269, which is the Protecting the People of Ontario Act, or the budget measures act.

Speaker, there's been a lot of talk so far about the priorities of the government, whether they meet the needs or address the needs and wants of folks right now who are struggling across the province. Unfortunately, what we see here is a budget that does not actually give hope to so many who were desperately looking for it. That was something that was very clear when the government first introduced the budget: that people had been hoping to see themselves

reflected, and they did not. A single mom, who is trying to figure out how to be a parent and a stay-at-home worker and an educational assistant and all of these things—how is she going to have a clear path forward? And what kind of help would she have from this government? It isn't in this budget.

1700

When we're hearing from small businesses that are saying, "I was so relieved when I heard about a grant. We've been asking for direct funding, and when we heard about the Ontario Small Business Support Grant, we were relieved." When they applied and were told by the government that they were successful in their application, that they could expect \$10,000, that they could expect \$20,000—and they're still waiting three months later, because unfortunately, that hope doesn't pay the rent. That hope doesn't pay the bills. We have a budget here that falls short. I'm looking forward to sharing many of the letters and voices from folks across my community.

This morning, I had the opportunity—because we're at third reading. Just to recap for the folks at home, we've had this debate in second reading, when the government introduced the budget. It has now been to and through committee. It's back out the other side, and the government wants it to pass immediately, and maybe so that we could all go home. I hope they've changed course on that plan.

This morning, I listened again to the President of the Treasury Board, the Minister of Finance—he wears both of those hats now. He said, "The Ontario spirit will get us through" the pandemic. I'm going to say this a couple of times: "The Ontario spirit" is something you put on a T-shirt; it is not something you use to pay the rent; it is not something you use to keep your businesses open. Unfortunately, the Ontario spirit doesn't come with a dollar figure. Maybe the government can tell me which page "the Ontario spirit" is on that will pay the way for people in this pandemic. That's rhetorical; I don't think there is a page number with that on it.

I would like to break this down and personalize it. There has been a lot of conversation around the needs of families and small business and workers, health and safety, but women are desperately left out of the budget and out of the priorities of this government. For all the talk about a she-cession and a she-covery—we don't see that talk reflected in the pages. I'm sure that the government members opposite can tell me what page number the word "she-covery" is on. I don't remember seeing it; however, I'm happy to stand corrected on that point. I'll tell you, Speaker, despite an entire section in the budget motion—in the pretty picture book, not the budget measures act that we're debating today—that talks about how women struggled the most during the pandemic, the only new thing in the budget to address this disparity is a task force that the government will eventually get around, hopefully, to forming. I'm going to say that's not good enough; however, they don't need to be my words. I have community members who can make that case.

I have a letter here that is from a retail worker. His name is Logan—and why I want to share a few front-line,

essential voices with the government is because I don't know if they answer their phones. On this side of the House, when we talk about real people and we share real stories about the struggle—whether it's a rushed eviction from somebody who is on a phone in a phone booth—the government seems to think we're making it up or that we're somehow disingenuous because we're actually able to recount real, live experiences. I don't know why they don't know these things, because we all got elected to do the same thing, and that is to represent our communities. The government, at the beginning of their term, made such a big show and such a big spectacle, I guess—well, not a spectacle. They were so excited that they were getting rid of phones, and they made them sound archaic—those phones that had hard lines, as opposed to cellphones and whatever. “Oh, my goodness, so archaic.” What that means is that nobody answers the phone; nobody has to. There's an accountability piece that they also did away with—that archaic accountability.

Even our offices, when we're trying to get help for the constituents who are reaching out so desperately, it can take, depending on the ministry—some of your ministries are excellent in terms of their liaisons and those who get back to us. We've got great relationships. And there are a few others, who shall remain nameless today, who do not return those calls, who take forever to return an email. I'm happy to share with different ministers which ones of you need to remind yourselves that you have a job to do—and it is indeed answering the calls of individuals in the broader community, and those calls should be reflected in legislation. But I digress.

I have a letter from Logan, who wrote, “I wish I could say good morning today, but I can't. I'm one of your constituents and I am terrified.

“I am currently a retail worker in Durham region, as well as someone with a pre-existing lung condition....

“I have seen first-hand how little regard people have for the public health measures, and I use the word measures lightly because he's done nothing but half measures, that are ineffective, and he eases them up to make money. Our Premier has decided the lives of Ontarians are secondary to money. He has decided that he would rather we die, and/or get severely ill, with a virus that had documented lasting effects that we don't know when they will end or if we will have them for life, rather than take the necessary steps to bring the virus count in Ontario to zero.

“Our Premier ... is secretly (and not so secretly) systemically dismantling environmental protections and more green initiatives in favour of big business and his backroom deal buddies.

“I don't know what I hope this email will accomplish because I know your hands are tied. The PCs (if you can even call them progressive) have a stranglehold on our Parliament until the election next year....

“But I'm genuinely scared I won't live to even see the next election because I can't afford to not go into work. I have \$50,000+ in student debt from OSAP....

“Please continue to advocate for stricter health measures, support for students and green initiatives because I

am struggling to see the silver lining in things more and more every day.”

I appreciate hearing from Logan, but I am sorry that I can't give him a better answer. I can't say, “Turn to this page in the budget and there you shall find hope that you can take to the bank.” It's not there.

Speaker, I'd also like to share—actually, I should save that for a day when we're talking specifically about housing. I've got a good letter from Cassandra—ah, forget it; I'm here. Cassandra wants me to know, “I am a front-line worker who has worked tirelessly throughout this entire pandemic to provide care, compassion, a shoulder to cry on, a listening ear, to hold their hand or simply just to hug during a trying and scary time for my residents. My family and I have unfortunately been looking for somewhere to call home since mid-February. Our current landlord has sold our home and has verbally asked us to leave for May 1.”

Speaker, she goes on to explain how challenging it has been to look for an apartment. There's such competition for spaces that they haven't been able to secure one. She said, “I know too many people looking for a place to go with no luck and are extremely worried their families are going to be homeless. I am worried this will happen to myself and my family. I don't want to be on the street with children and a mother-in-law with cancer.”

Speaker, this is one of our front-line workers, and they're not finding themselves reflected in this budget or in the priorities of this government.

We have talked a lot about paid sick days. I'm looking forward to the conversation we'll have tomorrow as the opposition, I believe for the third time, is bringing forward an opposition day motion to again press this government to do right by Ontarians and have provincial paid sick days, the permanent paid sick days that are so needed.

I have a few letters here that I'm going to share today to, again, make the case for the need for paid sick days. The government hates listening to us, or chooses not to listen to us; I don't really know—but they don't seem to believe us that there is a need for a provincial intervention when it comes to paid sick days.

I have a letter here that I was copied on but that went to the member for Whitby. It's a long letter, but I'll just read one section. It says, again, to the government member, “We've known for weeks—if not months—that the majority of new COVID-19 cases are occurring in workplaces and congregate settings. Where is the paid sick leave? I'm exhausted and frustrated by” the Premier's “insistence that the CRSB is paid sick leave. Surely, you can see this is not the case. Please tell me why paid sick leave isn't a good idea, because I haven't found a single source that suggests this wouldn't help the dire situation in which we find ourselves. Certainly, coming from your riding in Whitby ... you have constituents in manufacturing who would benefit from such a program.”

I'll leave it there. He goes on to address the shortcomings in vaccinations, that there are needs across the community, but this is specific to paid sick days.

Another constituent, Ashley, is a worker and deemed essential right now. She said, “I am an employee at” a

dental lab “that makes appliances for dental offices (such as retainers, crowns etc.).... I am a lab technician.

“Due to” this “government’s lack of care and attention towards this deadly pandemic we haven’t received: paid sick days, enough vaccines, frequent COVID test availability appointments, or temporary COVID relief pause on bills such as car insurance, rent, and OSAP relief.

1710

“This week, despite having my first dose of the Pfizer vaccine—I am forced to miss out on a week of work due to having a COVID scare. I am awaiting an appointment for a COVID swab on Thursday.

“Missing this week of work will cause me to lose 25% of my monthly income. 25% of my monthly income pays my car insurance and my gas. But, because of” this Premier’s “refusal to implement paid sick days I will be losing these funds that are necessary to my day-to-day life.

“I am grateful that you, and your caucus colleagues have been fighting for paid sick days. I am begging the ... government to open their eyes to the reality of all Ontarians’ lives right now and implement permanent paid sick days.”

These are real people, folks, who are trying to get by in the community on a good day. Right now, they’re actually trying not to get sick; they’re trying to stay well. They’re trying not to spread this virus to their loved ones, and they’re on their own.

I spoke earlier today and asked a question of the President of the Treasury Board, and I got an answer from the member from Willowdale, about ODSP and OW. I will say that there’s not anything in this budget that supports them. They don’t have what they need to get to the end of the week, let alone the end of the month, let alone during a pandemic. When you have transit costs and when you have rent needs and food needs and everything else—the basics; forget that everything is more expensive or what have you with the pandemic. These are folks who should not be left out. They should see themselves reflected here in the budget. Overall funding to children, community and social services is flat, and it isn’t keeping pace with inflation. The government can point to what will sound like a big number on TV, but when you break it down, it isn’t keeping up with the need. So, yes, you can confuse folks with big numbers, but compare it to the need and it falls short. I don’t know how many folks on social assistance will be able to pay their rent, buy food or pay for transit using the Ontario spirit. Stores don’t take that. So these comments from the folks on the other side, “The Ontario spirit will get us through the pandemic”—not for the folks on ODSP and OW.

Also, unfortunately, in this budget, we don’t see what we need to see about autism. I’ll take a little side journey here, but I’ll connect it, folks; don’t get excited. On the order paper, I have seven written questions—I know that my colleague who is the critic responsible, the member from London–Fanshawe, also has a number of questions; we’re looking forward to those answers—about the autism pilot program, asking specific questions about funding, what families can expect. We have 42,000 children with autism; 600 are being chosen for this pilot project, and

maybe it expands to 8,000 by the end of 2021. That is a paltry number compared to the 42,000 children. There are a lot of answers we’d like to see. We needed to see the numbers in this budget that would reflect the needs in the province, but alas, we don’t see it.

This is not based on a letter; this is based on a conversation and a relationship that is built, because so many of us who work with families of children with autism are getting to know them very well and personally.

Tina is a mom. I may get some of the details of her story a little bit wrong—but Tina has two children, both on the spectrum. Tina, I believe, because I know her, was a go-getter in the working world. Now, understandably, her children have significant need. She is not able to be in the workplace because of everything that goes with being a parent of children with autism. Certainly, we don’t see anything in this budget that would allow for single parents, that would allow for moms who are doing all of the juggling with children learning from home, with children with special needs—we do not see that those families are getting what they need here.

To that point, Julia wrote me a letter. I’ll just pull a few pieces here. Julia says she will be working virtually from home full-time. She has two school-aged children, five and seven years old, so they’re little. “They are ... supposed to be participating in virtual school and are too young to do it without assistance. I am also a single mom and given the recent restrictions I do not have access to another person to help me navigate trying to juggle all of this at the same time. I was turned down for emergency child care. The last school lockdown I had to take a leave which required me to take a pay cut, which I just can’t afford at this point. I’m really reaching out for help in hopes there is some type of support or solution.”

These are the realities being faced by folks, especially women, who are taking on the role of parent, worker, caregiver, what have you. Again, we don’t see a clear plan for the she-covery or the ability to be nimble and respond to these needs. She has a very specific challenge. It doesn’t neatly fit into a box. So we do need to recognize that there are challenges to face, but people should look to the government and us for hope, and unfortunately, as we’re debating the budget, we don’t see that.

I’ve heard from families about the need for help when it comes to seniors’ care. Yes, long-term care has been part of the conversation for a long time now, but this budget certainly doesn’t have any commitment to wage increases for PSWs beyond June 2021. We all know that’s needed. Where are the resident quality inspections in long-term care? Where’s the recommitment to that? I would love to see a commitment to phase out for-profit long-term-care homes. The major for-profits are super excited, and they do not want you to make any commitments favouring public and not-for-profit, because they would stand to lose so much money. I’m sure you play golf with them—although not right now.

Speaker, I’ve heard from nurses who are saying, “The third wave of COVID-19 is a tidal wave that demands urgent and immediate action from our government....

“We ask you to do what must be done!”

Hearing from nurses, critical care nurses—I read a statement this morning from a critical care nurse. We need to see funding and support for hospitals that meet the need. The funding has to meet the need that they are begging for. This is an evolving situation, so you need the hospitals to have what it is that they need to serve folks across the communities during the pandemic and going forward.

Speaker, I've spoken a lot about the Ontario small business grants and the different businesses that have applied and three months later still have not gotten their funding—people who have two businesses and are told to pick one, which would tell me they're both eligible. "Pick a favourite." How is that helping? We have folks who are asking to be considered eligible when they were left out the last time. I heard from a residential contractor who was never eligible, who makes a very strong case, because he has a business in the community and is in need of help and has not had enough to get by.

Speaker, fun fact—I shouldn't be flip. I've heard from Kandi, who owns Hair Kandi. I talked about her in the Legislature. She applied for the OSBSG, was successful in her application and still has yet to see the money, but yesterday she got a "Thank you for submitting your application for this Ontario Small Business Support Grant. You have received an OSBSG payment"—which is false—"so the province of Ontario is currently in the process of a post-payment audit." She gets called for an audit. She doesn't have the money. Do better.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: Mr. Speaker, through you to the member: There were a lot of things that you talked about that you didn't like about this. The way the process works is that it goes to committee, and if there are things that need to be changed, we ask for amendments. There wasn't a single amendment from the NDP. You abdicated your responsibility. Why?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm so glad to be asked this question. I would like to point out to the members opposite: We are here to debate Bill 269, which is the budget measures act, which is 10 schedules, 10 sections, and it actually isn't the pretty picture book that the government has been talking about in terms of the budget motion. So what comes before committee are these 10 schedules, none of which are the priorities that I've just identified or that the folks across the province have identified. So I can't amend a schedule to say, "Give us paid sick days," when there's nothing in here, if it's the Employment Standards Act or what have you. You can't amend something that isn't in your budget. So you can talk all day around what you are setting out to do, but if you don't put it in the implementation steps, if it's not in the budget measures act, then it's not a real thing; it's just a pretty picture.

1720

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

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you for that presentation, my friend from Oshawa. You know, earlier in debate, when

the member from Kiiwetinoong spoke, it was pointed out, and it bears repeating, that not many amendments ever get taken up in this place. Part of what I've discovered we need to do as opposition politicians is point out where our friends can do better.

When I heard you talking about those community stories, it really impressed upon me—and the members over here must know it—that the level of suffering in our communities is really hard to describe. It's serious. So if you were the finance minister, my friend from Oshawa, and you could prioritize a measure that would get money into the hands of that essential grocery worker that you talked about, what would you do? And I hope my friends over here listen.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My friend from Ottawa Centre won't like that I can't give him one short, nugget answer because, frankly, there's a whole truckload of things that would add up to make a difference for people, because if someone is a single parent and they're desperately looking for child care, then my answer is child care.

If it is an essential front-line worker who wakes up in the morning with a tickle in their throat and thinks that they are sick, or whose child has to stay home and isolate and they can't go to work but have to make that choice to go to work because they don't have provincially arranged paid sick days, then I'm going to say that.

If it's a matter of a small business that has been promised \$10,000 or \$20,000 to keep its doors open and it keeps telling its creditors, "I can't pay the bills this week. I don't know when I can, because the government said 10 business days, and it's been three months," then I would say that they should make the money flow for small businesses.

So when it comes to education investment, we need to see strong investment in child care, education, health care, but I think that the investment needs to reflect the need, not just what the government wishes the need was.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question, the member for Northumberland–Peterborough South. I thought the member for Guelph was going to ask a question, but it's the member for Northumberland–Peterborough South.

Mr. David Piccini: I'd like to thank the member opposite for her speech and especially drawing local examples. Those are always, I find, the strongest in this place.

She and I share a college in our vicinity, Durham College. In the budget, the government invests an additional \$106 million to support colleges as they pivot to modern, new learning spaces to support the many young men and women who frequent the halls. On the budget, Linda Franklin, president and CEO of Colleges Ontario, said, "We're excited to be collaborating with the government on further measures. We welcome this initiative, and we're excited to collaborate on further measures to modernize post-secondary education, including creating more opportunities for people who need to retrain for new careers during Ontario's economic recovery."

In short, is Linda Franklin of Colleges Ontario correct when she says that this government makes the right investments into our post-secondary institutions?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I appreciate that the member opposite reminded this House that he also is one of the seven members who represent Durham region. It's also good when we can talk about the academic institutions—places like Grandview, as I see the member from Whitby. We have shared spaces, priorities and institutions in our community.

I have worked extensively through the last seven years of being elected with Durham College, and they have been wonderful and excellent advocates for their growth, for the needs of the students. I'm grateful to hear that the government is connecting with them, because what we've heard today, when we're talking about Laurentian, when we're talking about Lakehead, is the lack of consultation happening.

So I put this back to that member: Are they indeed connecting with community institutions across the province and reflecting the needs that are being asked for? Also, I'd love to talk about students, but perhaps in my supplementary.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to say to the member from Oshawa once again how much I appreciate her bringing the voices of her constituents—as she said, the real people of Ontario—into this place every time. We really appreciate that. I know that those people, as she showed here today, are feeling enormously frustrated. They're feeling angry. They're frightened. They're anxious. Just a couple nights ago in Toronto here, we had almost 7,000 people join a live Zoom to share their concerns, so I feel it.

My question to the member is, as a teacher, I was wondering—we know this government has made a real mess of our schools and education throughout this pandemic. What would you have liked to see in this budget to address what our students are going to be going through after nearly two years of disruption of education?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you. The member from Davenport obviously knows as well or better than I do—because while I am hearing from community members and families in my neck of the woods, that member serves as the official opposition critic on behalf of education, so she is hearing it from across the province.

But I will tell you that many of the folks who work in education broadly are very nervous and very concerned about the fact that this government has not put in this budget a replenishment of the school board reserves, that they asked them to dig deep and now they are steeling their pockets and we're pretending that none of that happened. That's going to put our boards in a very—to say a challenging position is such an understatement. So I don't know how they will face that.

We're hearing from families the ups and downs and the ins and outs of the lockdown. What they want to see from this government is leadership, and we haven't seen that yet, frankly.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Speaker, as you know, the member from Oshawa and my riding of Whitby—we've collaborated on several initiatives over the years, one of which is Grandview children's treatment centre. In the recent budget, there's \$31 million in capital and \$240 million in operating costs. Added to that, another project that we've collaborated on over the years is the Abilities Centre: \$4.5 million.

Will the member stand in her place tonight and say that she will support that investment when it comes time to vote?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I love the question because I do like when we take the opportunity to highlight those non-partisan issues.

Grandview Children's Centre is a remarkable space. They're a community. It is not a building; it is a community of people and families. The member and I and many others have done a lot of work through the years. I see the member from Ajax across the way. You're very fortunate to be getting them. I am sad to be losing their main campus. It's just been up the street from me. You will be glad to have them, and that is an important thing. The Abilities Centre is another highlight in this province—a remarkable facility.

My answer is always what it has been since I was elected: I support the needs in my community. I support Grandview Children's Centre and always have, unequivocally. You want me to support a budget that has nothing else for the folks across the province? No. You can play politics—not going to do it.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, I rise today to speak on Bill 269, the government's budget bill. It's not even been a month since this bill was introduced, and it is already out of date and inadequate in dealing with the crisis we face in Ontario today.

The chair of the government's science advisory table predicted that Ontario was headed for a disaster back on February 11 if the Premier eased restrictions. The restrictions were eased and the crisis is here, a third-wave crisis that's barely mentioned in the budget. As a matter of fact, the budget cuts \$4.8 billion in the next fiscal year, primarily due to reductions in COVID funding, literally a few days before we've hit the worst wave of the pandemic.

1730

Speaker, on March 24, when the budget was introduced, 333 people were in ICU; today, over 770. Less than a week after the budget was introduced—actually, a week and a day after; sorry—the Premier pulled an emergency brake. A week later, he issued an emergency order and a stay-at-home order. Less than a week later, and a day after we were told that schools were safe to keep open, the Premier announced that schools would be closed. Then, last Friday, we had the Premier making announcements of further restrictions that the science table didn't even ask for, and we didn't get the restrictions that the table did ask for.

If we're truly going to protect people's health and the economy, which the budget says that's it's designed to do, then I would respectfully request the members opposite to make some significant changes to this budget to address the crisis that Ontario is in today, and to especially address the advice of the province's science advisory table, especially the information they released earlier today.

So where does that begin? It begins with safe workplaces. The scientists, the public health officials, virtually everybody in Ontario has said that we are not going to get COVID under control if we don't have safe workplaces. What does that mean? It means seamless, immediate paid sick leave for vulnerable workers. It means paid time off for vaccines. It means closing workplaces that are not really essential. It means mandating medical-grade PPE in those workplaces that are open and deploying rapid testing. It means strategically targeting on-site mobile vaccine clinics in those essential, most vulnerable workplaces.

It also means reversing the \$790-million cut to education during the third wave of a pandemic. If we want schools to be open, we have to make the investments in those schools.

It also means tripling the Ontario business support grant. The budget doubles it, and that was maybe appropriate for the second wave, but we're now in the third wave, and so many small businesses are barely hanging on. Let's have a budget that actually triples the grant and expands the eligibility to include so many of those small businesses—which I'm sure are reaching out to all of our offices—that are falling through the cracks or experiencing challenges through the application process.

The budget does promise four hours of care in long-term care, something I have been advocating for for a long time; it's unfortunate the previous government was unable to deliver on that. But we can't wait for another four years for the money to deliver on four hours of care. Elders and the people who care for them deserve better.

Speaker, people who are on social assistance need help, especially people on Ontario disability support payments. There is no increase for people on ODSP, even though their cost of living has gone up with having to buy things like PPE, hand sanitizer and other things, in some cases ordering in deliveries, paying more for food. The places in our communities that oftentimes people on ODSP would go to for additional support or help, or maybe to earn a little extra income to supplement their monthly allowance, are closed. They need help.

I assumed that this budget would include a chapter on housing, given all the tent cities we see in communities across the province. Instead, it had a page on housing. We were facing a housing crisis before COVID, and COVID has exposed the significance of that crisis. Yet the budget doesn't deal with it.

The government talks a lot about mental health support. I would urge them to accelerate funding for mental health support, because people need those supports now.

So if the government truly wants to protect people and the economy, reverse the \$4.8-billion cut. People may say, "Well, how do you pay for that?" I would say that every

business person knows that you sometimes have to make strategic investments that are smart investments, that have a return on investment, and that's exactly what investing in dealing with this third wave will do for the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We now have an opportunity for questions.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I just wanted to drill down on one point that the member raised, and it was on the hours of care in long-term-care homes, the 4.5 hours that he mentioned. There has been a significant investment made in the health human resources side. So I'm wondering what specific advice he has with respect to improving the health human resources side.

We know that it takes time to actually get new PSWs through the system. It also takes a significant amount of time on the construction side so that we can reduce the ward rooms from four down to two. The advice that has been given is that the time that it would require to do it properly, which has been put in the budget—it would take a couple of years in order to do that. What would the member specifically suggest in order to speed that up, really, with an eye on the health human resources side of it?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member opposite's question and remind the members that the government's own staffing report in long-term care came out over the summer, recommending hiring additional staff. The estimated cost of that is \$1.9 billion. The budget reflects that, but it doesn't allocate the money until the fiscal year 2024-25.

I would allocate the money in this fiscal year, because the member is absolutely right: It takes time to hire people. If we're going to hire and train people, we need to let them know that there's going to be a permanent increase in their pay, and we need to let them know that the money is going to flow in this fiscal year, so our elders have the four hours of care they deserve.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm glad we're talking about long-term care, because we know since long time past that the NDP is a champion of long-term care. We have been fighting for long-term-care changes—the 4.1 hours of care, taking profits out of long-term care and increasing those wages.

Just today, in PressProgress, the story reads, "Corporate directors at Chartwell, one of Ontario's largest for-profit long-term-care companies, voted to give its executives millions in bonuses while recommending against a 'living wage' for the company's hard-hit frontline workers." Can you speak to how important it is, if we're looking for funds for helping sustainability in the workforce in long-term care and where the funds could come from—could you speak to that article and maybe enlighten the government on how we could do it?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the question from the member. I thought one of the tragedies of the first wave was that while so many elders were tragically dying in

long-term care, bonuses were paid to executives in long-term care. The bottom line is, we have to prioritize care over profits.

At the very least, while we transition to having a non-profit, public long-term-care system, we need to put conditions around the way government money is spent—stronger conditions; I realize there are conditions in place now—because paying out those kinds of bonuses when our long-term-care homes are facing a humanitarian crisis, when the people who care for our loved ones are not even being paid a living wage and in some cases not even being offered full-time work or guaranteed benefits, is unacceptable. We can do better.

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

Mr. Stan Cho: Speaker, I'll be quick. I see there's not much time left.

The member from Guelph knows I have a lot of respect for him. We've had some great conversations. I know he has a small business background and small business is important to him. Obviously, it's a difficult time for small businesses. I appreciate that the member, during committee, called for expanding grants, support programs for other industries, like the tourism sector, and we did that in this budget. The hospitality sector we know has been hit hard. And we doubled the small business grant.

The member says that he's calling for a tripling of the small business grant. I respect where he's coming from, but then my question is—you voted against the doubling of the small business grant. It's never too late to do the right thing. Will the member vote in favour of doubling the small business grant and expanding supports to the tourism industry?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: First of all, Speaker, in a \$186-billion spending plan, there will be some things in there you support—I would argue probably all of us support. But a budget is about who we are as a province, what we prioritize, what kind of Ontario we want to live in, the kinds of ways we want to care for our neighbours and people in our communities. When the budget falls short of that, my job in opposition is to hold the government accountable for that. I can't support a budget that doesn't provide what the people of Ontario need today.

1740

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

Mr. David Piccini: It's always a pleasure to rise in the House specifically to talk about Ontario's 2021 budget and its impact on Ontarians and, of course, the people of Northumberland–Peterborough South, the people I represent here in this place.

Mr. Speaker, this budget really focuses on two key items: protecting the people's health care system and protecting our economy. We know that we cannot have a healthy economy without healthy people.

I'm going to start my remarks today talking a bit about health care. It's really important for me, coming from a background with the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, and priding myself on a wonderful

working relationship and valuing the amazing front-line heroes in Northumberland–Peterborough South—the remarkable staff at our hospitals, paramedics, our front-line heroes and our public health workers.

In the 2021 budget, we talk about outlining our plan for defeating COVID-19, fixing long-term care and caring for the people of this province. We've made more than \$1 billion available for the province-wide vaccine plan and added more than \$650 million into long-term care. But what does all this mean, the billions and millions? What does it mean for Northumberland–Peterborough South? What does it mean for the folks at home?

It was in March of this pandemic that Premier Ford and Minister Elliott joined me at Northumberland Hills Hospital, with CEO Linda Davis and CEO Varouj Eskedjian from Campbellford Memorial Hospital, front-line workers and board members, to highlight the medium-sized hospital funding formula that plagued hospitals—systemic underfunding from the previous government that really led to challenges in our health care system in Northumberland–Peterborough South. I think of nurses who joined me in my office and spoke to walking around that hospital just to decompress because—you know what they did, Mr. Speaker? They merged the in-patient units because of the struggles, because of the fiscal pressures—not having rooms to breathe, incentivizing sick people instead of giving hospitals that breathing room to look at how we can move from chronic disease management to chronic disease prevention.

I'm proud to say that thanks to this government's investment, we're giving hospitals that flexibility. We know that in this budget, it includes another \$1.8 billion for our hospitals. That was welcome news to Northumberland Hills Hospital, welcome news to Campbellford Memorial Hospital, and we'll be working with them this summer to address those supports.

I think of transitional bed funding, getting alternate-level-of-care patients out of the emergency room, out of the hallways and into the most appropriate care in our riding. I think of the increased bed investments at both hospitals, but I'm going back to transitional bed care funding because that ties into investments this government is making into long-term care—a \$1.9-billion investment to improve the structures and an additional \$610 million, of course, in this budget and the staffing, making Ontario a leader in Canada, committing to four hours of direct care. That's not going to happen overnight. That's going to require changes—changes like implementing degree-granting autonomy for our colleges, changes like free tuition for our PSWs.

I think of the mid-career professional who called me the other day, who is seeing the acknowledgement of our health care heroes, who turns on the TV and see volunteers from the Brighton Legion highlighting our health care heroes and wants to answer the call in her fifties. I salute her for doing that, and I'm thankful that she's answering our call—Linda Franklin, whom I alluded to in the Q and A earlier, whom we've been working closely with, linking our arms with the colleges to launch this free tuition

program, to unlock thousands more PSWs into Ontario's system.

This is what excites me. This is what should excite us all. We shouldn't be intellectually dishonest at this place—these tangible measures to lead to the health care professionals. We can stand up here and say “four hours of direct care” and talk about money, but what interests me is the actual heavy lifting that goes into creating these new positions that we're seeing in Northumberland–Peterborough South—new positions that are going to line the hallways of Pleasant Meadow Manor, Golden Plough Lodge, Streamway Villa and Hope Street Terrace, just to name a few. Take a drive through Northumberland–Peterborough South on any of your rides home and you'll see signs up with new builds. From Ottawa Centre, take the long drive—Highway 7. You'll see the signs for the brand new builds that this government is investing in—as I've always said, you've got to have the structure and then the staffing in that structure—modern and safe spaces that this government is investing in.

I think back to the 611 net new beds the previous government invested in over a decade. Well, Mr. Speaker, in Northumberland–Peterborough South today, shovels are in the ground for over a third of that investment over a decade, today, this day, in my community. Say what you like—and we have our differences—but that's important movement that this government is making to invest in long-term care.

When we talk about those investments, I think of the health care heroes, the workers at Pleasant Meadow Manor who are going to benefit from the 35 new beds and 61 upgraded beds. For Golden Plough, redevelopment accelerated under this government—29 new beds, 151 upgraded beds. Streamway Villa—133 new beds, 59 upgraded beds. I really take a point of pride when we make these announcements—not just a stuffy politician at the podium. I always like to hear from front-line workers who stood at the podium to talk about what this meant to them.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to kid myself. Many of these workers come into my office upset, wanting our government to do a better job. But they know that we have a Premier, Premier Ford, who listens, a Premier who will understand and say, “When the people talk to me and want to see something, I'm more than willing to make that investment, or right the ship, if we need to do that”—those workers who stood with me at the podium, who are going to benefit from the modern and safe spaces, those workers who are family members of the residents of those places, our loved ones, who are living in these homes.

I think of Hope Street Terrace, Regency long-term care—I just got an email from staff, from the nursing care coordinator, and she spoke to me about supports to get vaccines in arms. We prioritized her, we prioritized her colleagues in our vaccine distribution. It wasn't without its bumps in the roads. We know we've had significant supply delays—the peaks and valleys that ministers have spoken to with respect to the supply challenges. But when we rolled up our sleeves, when we worked together, we got jabs in arms for those workers, jabs in arms for those residents.

I think of their harrowing stories of redeploying onto the front lines of outbreaks and the pictures and the stories of dilapidated infrastructure. We cannot look ourselves in the mirror honestly and say that it wasn't a result of the ward-style rooms which contributed to COVID-19 spread. Dilapidated infrastructure: That contributed to COVID-19 spread.

This government is getting it right. We're making the investments for the modern and safe spaces that are going to benefit the people of Northumberland–Peterborough South and those workers.

Of course, 35 new beds for Hope Street Terrace and Regency long-term care and 157 upgraded beds—that has been welcome news. I'm going to be speaking to Port Hope council tonight to work with them on that, because it takes collaboration, it takes partnership. That's what we're doing with our municipalities. I'd like to thank the leadership of the councillors, of the staff members at Port Hope, of Mayor Sanderson, who I've worked closely with on this investment.

Mr. Speaker, it stems back to the people we both have the privilege of representing. That's why we do this. That's why we make these investments. We need to improve long-term care. We need to improve our health care system.

I think of community paramedicine that this government has invested in, and in this budget we've expanded it to more rural communities. I look left and I see all GTA colleagues, but I look right and I see a lot of rural Ontario colleagues who are benefiting. I look across the way and see rural Ontario colleagues who are benefiting from community paramedicine, who give our paramedics the opportunity to utilize their scope of practice in a non-emergency setting. That's critical.

1750

Do you know what Northumberland News had to say? When I took the drive home from Queen's Park—I always pick up the paper on Thursday nights. That's when they do distribution. Do you know what the front page of Northumberland News said? “Impact: Community Paramedicine ... Just What the Doctor Ordered.” Everyone, take out your phones, go online and read that great story. They talked about George Ryken. I remember running down George's driveway. I signed him up in the nomination to support me. I said, “George, we've got to fix our health care system.” He's a farmer. I know George's family. They've been remarkable community champions in Northumberland–Peterborough South. Community paramedicine was there for George when he needed it most.

I would submit in this place that all of us, there's no disputing, when we have programs like that that are there for the patient, when we talk about better, patient-centred care—when I worked at the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada and we talked about better, patient-centred care, these are the sorts of programs that lead to that better, patient-centred care.

Mr. Speaker, that's this government making those investments. I'll draw you back to that title: “Impact:

Community Paramedicine ... Just What the Doctor Ordered.” I don’t say that because these weren’t things that we haven’t all contemplated in this place; I say that because we can all link arms and say, “Your government, a government that is here to serve all of us, a government that is held to account and made better by members of the opposition, acknowledges the importance of community paramedicine and made those investments in this budget.”

I’m really proud that we actually were part of the pilot. Northumberland–Peterborough South wasn’t mentioned in the budget, because we’re already part of the community paramedicine program. I’d like to thank county staff. I’d like to thank our new paramedics chief. She took me on a ride-along. Northumberland’s first female paramedics chief took me on a ride-along.

I’ll never forget our paramedics and what they do on the front lines. I’ve had the opportunity to join them for the awards of distinction, acknowledging the work that they do. Giving them the opportunity to practise their scope of practice in a non-emergency setting—that’s a good thing for Ontarians. That’s a good thing for our health care professionals. And for George Ryken, that made a difference.

I could go on, but I would like to close on my health care remarks, just speaking about the Colborne rural family health hub. Northumberland was one of the first 24 health teams in the province of Ontario. We’ve seen remarkable investments in Peterborough. I think of Otonabee–South Monaghan and the important investments we’ve made there for accessibility for their family doctors. I think of Lakeridge in Durham and the important investments we’re making there—a new hospice. We’ve got four hospices now that we’re talking about in our riding, and when I was first elected we had one.

Mr. Speaker, when I was first elected we had no community paramedicine. We had shoestring budgets. I’ve got a tight collar here—that’s what our hospitals were feeling when it came time to do their budgets. We’ve loosened that. We’ve given them the flexibility. We’ve invested in community paramedicine. We’ve invested in transitional bed funding. We’ve invested in new builds. We’ve invested in supportive staffing initiatives, not to mention the Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit in this budget that will provide up to \$2,000 for retraining, that will support our professionals.

I’ve always said that it’s about learning as you earn, and this government acknowledges that. This government acknowledges lifelong learning. This government acknowledges our knowledge-based economy, which is why we have always made historic investments into micro-credentials. That will be a legacy piece of this government, a legacy piece of Minister Romano’s. This is one of the best micro-credential strategies in Canada, one of the first comprehensive micro-credential strategies—making that OSAP-eligible.

For the folks at Hiawatha and Alderville First Nations, we’ve invested in infrastructure in this budget, in important water projects. What we can all agree on in this House is that the year we’ve been waiting for our federal

government to invest in projects that the province has already nominated—I take very seriously my relationship, the teachings I get from Chief Carr, from Chief Mowat. We’re doing them a disservice when we don’t approve those projects right away.

I’d like to leave here a message for MP Lawrence, who I work closely with, and for the federal government: Approve those water and waste water projects for our Indigenous communities today.

Mr. Speaker, I’d also like to talk about the rural health piece, just in closing.

Colborne, an important area of the riding of Northumberland–Peterborough South—and I’d like to thank Mayor Martin. I’d like to thank Cramahe and the council. I had the opportunity to speak to them the other day. We’ve launched a rural health hub.

When we talk about better patient-centred care, when I talked about chronic disease and moving from chronic disease management to chronic disease prevention, that means rural Ontario folks no longer taking the hour-plus drive—that means those folks in rural Ontario getting the health care they need when and where they need it—a chiroprapist at the rural health care hub, mental health supports at that hub, primary-based health care at that hub. That is thanks to historic investments in this budget for health care.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on for hours about health care, because it is important. We cannot have a healthy economy without healthy people. I’m proud of the investments that this government has made. I lament the fact that I have to wrap things up.

With that, I move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Mr. Piccini has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I did hear a no. I guess the bells will ring for 30 minutes—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I’m sorry; keep going down?

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

All those opposed will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Hon. Paul Calandra: We want to confirm that decision. We wouldn’t want that to go to waste.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I wouldn’t want that to go to waste.

It’s going to be a 30-minute bell. The bells will ring for 30 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes. Prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1759 to 1829.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 5; the nays are 5.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Well, I get a vote. I will oppose the motion to adjourn.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Therefore, it is time to move on to private members’ public business.

Report continues in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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

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

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

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

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

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

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

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

Chair / Président: Amarjot Sandhu
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeremy Roberts
Ian Arthur, Stan Cho
Catherine Fife, Mitzie Hunter
Logan Kanapathi, Sol Mamakwa
David Piccini, Jeremy Roberts
Amarjot Sandhu, Dave Smith
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Julia Douglas

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

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

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

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

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

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

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

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

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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