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Jeudi
22 octobre 2020

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 22 October 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 22 octobre 2020

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers/Prières.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPORTING ONTARIO'S RECOVERY
AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 VISANT À SOUTENIR
LA RELANCE EN ONTARIO
ET SUR LES ÉLECTIONS MUNICIPALES

Mr. Downey moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 218, An Act to enact the Supporting Ontario's Recovery Act, 2020 respecting certain proceedings relating to the coronavirus (COVID-19), to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to revoke a regulation / Projet de loi 218, Loi édictant la Loi de 2020 visant à soutenir la relance en Ontario concernant certaines instances liées au coronavirus (COVID-19), modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur les municipalités et abrogeant un règlement.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand in the House today to open debate on a bill that would, if passed, support thousands of Ontario workers, employers, volunteers, non-profits and other organizations who make an honest effort to follow public health guidance and law as Ontario responds to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ontarians are experiencing unprecedented challenges as we respond to the second wave of COVID-19. Each day, thousands of front-line workers and volunteers put their health and safety at risk to contribute to our communities and our province.

The level of risk does not end there, Mr. Speaker. These workers and volunteers also risk significant civil liability in the event of COVID-19 transmission to third parties. This applies even if workers make good-faith efforts to take all the necessary precautions and efforts set out by public health advice.

Front-line workers are under an incredible amount of stress. Each day, they serve our communities while doing their best to minimize the spread of the virus. They do this for the safety of the people they serve, their families, their loved ones and their neighbours.

After listening to the concerns of individuals and organizations from across Ontario who were relied on by their neighbours to lead their communities' recoveries, we are taking informed, responsible and decisive action to help. Our government is supporting the volunteers, front-line workers, charities, community partners and non-profits, all of whom are essential to Ontario's recovery.

We are convinced that this proposed legislation will help support Ontario's recovery as we face these unprecedented times. Our government is sending a clear signal that we will be there for Ontarians when volunteers want to give their time, when businesses want to rehire staff and when they want to open their doors, and when charities want to help those in need despite these unprecedented challenges.

We will not allow COVID-19 and its impacts to discourage entrepreneurs who want to hire our neighbours. We will not allow this virus to prevent volunteers from offering their unique experience and knowledge to help life get back to normal at the local rink, the curling club or the Legion. We need these volunteers to help ensure our 4-H clubs, our cadet squadrons, Boys and Girls Clubs, Big Brothers Big Sisters and countless others can come back strong and continue their essential work.

We cannot afford to allow local charities to fear holding that annual fundraising, the annual programing that will help them reach the lives of people who need the help the most. If we are to recover as a province, we need to support Ontarians who act in good faith and to make an honest effort to follow public health advice.

This is why, after listening to the concerns of Ontarians, our government is introducing legislation to stand up for our province's front-line workers, so they can focus on work without fear of retribution. If passed, the proposed supporting Ontario's recovery, 2020, would provide targeted, enhanced liability protection to front-line workers if sued by third parties, while ensuring people are able to pursue claims-related gross negligence and intentional misconduct regarding the transmission of COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate that the proposed legislation will not impede Ontarians' ability to hold bad actors to account. That includes individuals who do not make an honest effort to follow public health advice, guidance and laws relating to COVID-19.

I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the thousands of workers and volunteers who continue to make essential contributions to our communities. From health care workers to restaurant staff and clerks at grocery stores, coffee shops and pharmacies, to minor hockey and figure skating coaches and volunteers at local Legions and

charities, these are the everyday heroes that keep our communities moving and growing and full of life. They're a driving force behind our province's success, and they are being relied on through Ontario's recovery.

We have always valued and respected the work they do, but many of us feel an even deeper appreciation now. I'm talking about the people who provide essential services to their communities, people who work on the front lines and make an honest effort to follow the public health advice. They're following the laws on COVID-19, they're doing it for us and they're doing it for their families. These workers provide a vital service, not just to our communities and to our neighbours, but to the province. They shouldn't have to worry about being held liable when making an honest effort to follow public health advice.

We're talking about the employees at the local grocery store, the public school teachers across Ontario, the coaches and volunteers who keep our kids engaged through minor sports associations, the restaurant staff prepping take-out orders, local business owners and the people who work for them, and the hard-working prison guards working in correctional facilities. They're the child care providers who care for our children and, of course, they're the thousands of dedicated health care and personal support workers who provide care to our loved ones in their greatest time of need. It is thanks to their work on the front lines that we're able to continue to do normal activities like groceries, sending our kids to school, and participating in community activities.

My cabinet and caucus colleagues and I have spoken with many of these workers and business owners first-hand, before and since the first wave hit back in March. I know how passionate they are about the work they do and the careful measures they take to keep people around them safe. These people should not be discouraged from continuing to make a contribution to their communities.

The proposed legislation would ensure that Ontarians who are contributing to the recovery of our province and making good-faith efforts to follow applicable public health guidance and laws relating to COVID-19 do not face the risk of civil liability. If passed, the proposed changes would ensure that front-line workers and volunteers are able to focus their work on supporting families across Ontario and rebuilding our economy. The proposed legislation protects good-faith efforts to comply with applicable public health guidance and laws concerning COVID-19.

0910

So what does that mean? I've been asked many times: What does that mean? I'll give you an example. Say you run a non-profit facility providing mental health services for your community. Your facility is permitted to stay open during the pandemic; its services are essential and it saves lives. You honestly believe that you're following the rules that apply to your facility: cleaning surfaces regularly, limiting the number of people that can enter, moving furniture to ensure social distancing. Even so, an outbreak occurs at your facility.

With the benefit of hindsight, you see that it wasn't perfect. Maybe you didn't follow the right public health

guidance or you misunderstood it. But in a lawsuit, because your facility was permitted to stay open and you made an honest effort to follow the rules, an informed effort—you tried to follow them and you believed that you were in compliance—you will be immune from civil liability unless a court determines that you were grossly negligent. This should not be taken to mean that Ontarians can stand by and disregard the rules or make them up on their own. They have to make a good-faith effort to follow the rules.

We understand that, especially during the early days of the pandemic, it wasn't always easy to narrow down the rules that applied in one community or another amid the sometimes seemingly conflicting reports. An organization might receive one set of public health guidance from a municipality and a different set from a public health unit or a regulator. They might even conflict on certain points. That's why the legislation provides that the immunity applies even where such a conflict exists. But Mr. Speaker, there isn't a conflict because one set of public health guidance is more specific. That is not a conflict.

When I talk about good-faith efforts, I'm talking about an honest effort, an actual effort made by a person, a business or an organization to follow the public health guidance and laws related to COVID-19. This legislation would protect hard-working people making an honest effort to follow the public health guidance and doing their best to lower the risk of COVID-19 infection or exposure.

The legislation would also ensure that Ontarians are able to take legal action in cases of gross negligence, intentional misconduct and bad actors who fail to make the honest effort to follow the COVID-19 rules. They remain in jeopardy, Mr. Speaker.

Before I continue, let me be clear: This legislation would not hinder a worker's current rights to sue a person other than their own employer for work-related COVID infection under workers' compensation legislation. To ensure workers are protected, the proposed changes will not interfere with employee rights as they relate to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board and supporting legislation. It would not stop workers from accessing their rights under the WSIA or change the existing system in any way. In addition, workers who are not covered by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act would be able to sue their employer and any other person for work-related COVID-19 losses, just as they are able to now.

As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 has disproportionately affected residents and staff at long-term-care homes across Ontario. Our government has launched an independent commission into this matter, led by a very strong team of people. We feel strongly that the people of Ontario deserve a timely, transparent and non-partisan investigation.

I would also like to reiterate that the proposed legislation would not prevent access to justice for individuals in long-term-care homes. Even with the proposed legislation in place, individuals would be able to file claims and seek redress against long-term-care homes for matters including, but not limited to, failure to provide the necessities of

life; gross negligence or wilful misconduct; fraud; fraudulent misrepresentation; unlawful confinement; or assault or battery. We are not changing the standard or legal tests associated with these claims. The safety and well-being of the residents and staff of Ontario's long-term-care homes is and continues to be our government's top priority.

Let me be clear: We are not going easy on those who do not make a good-faith effort to comply with public health advice or who act with gross negligence. Our government is committed to holding bad actors accountable for their actions, and this legislation would not protect those individuals against legal action.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario is not the only province to put forward legislation to protect workers and businesses who make an honest effort to prevent the transmission or spread of COVID-19. The NDP government in British Columbia passed legislation that protects people and businesses that prove they followed, or reasonably believed they were following, all emergency and public health guidance.

In Nova Scotia, on the other end of the country, they issued a ministerial direction to protect long-term-care workers who act or reasonably believe they act in accordance with public health guidance. In addition to that, more than 38 US states have enacted some type of civil immunity protection for the health care sector, front-line service providers, PPE manufacturers or other businesses.

Ontario is proud to join these jurisdictions in standing up for the people who support their communities as we work together to respond to and recover from COVID-19. This is one of the great things about our country, that we can learn from each other and that we see the efforts that are made, whether it be British Columbia or Nova Scotia or the Northwest Territories or anywhere around the country. We're proud to provide leadership in this area, to join BC and to join Nova Scotia in protecting those on the front lines, protecting our small businesses, making sure that people have a comfort to engage in their community if they're following public health advice, have an honest belief and are acting in good faith that that is what they're doing, and Mr. Speaker, that is what they are actually doing.

The COVID-19 outbreak has had an unprecedented impact on Ontario's court system. Now more than ever, we need to be innovative and resourceful to ensure that Ontario's resources continue to deliver access to justice and not get held up on cases where the good-faith actions of workers are being second-guessed. That's why we're taking action now.

The proposed changes will help to ensure that court resources are used in appropriate cases. We will make it easier to direct court resources to address matters where people or businesses or organizations have endangered others because they have failed to make good-faith efforts to follow applicable public health advice and laws respecting COVID-19, or they acted with gross negligence. If passed, the proposed legislation would be retroactive to March 17, 2020, the date when the province declared a state of emergency in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

I want to tell you a little bit about what we heard. Over the summer we listened to health care workers, businesses,

grocery and retail store workers, the charitable sector, not-for-profit organizations and sport organizations. We talked a lot, we listened more, and we heard broadly that the COVID-19 outbreak has caused a great deal of strain for thousands of workers and businesses across this province. We heard that, despite being informed, acting in good faith and taking all prescribed measures, businesses and workers have concerns. They fear the financial implications of litigation related to COVID-19 infection or exposure.

I just want to mention that that fear of the financial implications is not limited to one segment. It's not limited to union/non-union. It's not limited to the kind of job that you do, Madam Speaker. It's very broad and it's very widely felt.

They have concerns that litigation could impact their ability to continue to serve their communities or to bring in employees to help them do so. That's why we're taking action now to support those who make essential contributions to our communities and help Ontarians access the services they need. Their work is critical to helping businesses and organizations focus on Ontario's recovery and growth.

This proposed legislation would support Ontario's continued recovery and make sure public health and workplace safety remains a top priority of people and businesses without adding unnecessary burdens to Ontarians who make an honest effort to follow the rules.

I would like to highlight some of the input that we received. But before I do that, I'd like to take a moment to share our gratitude and admiration for Ontario's front-line health-care workers. Whether they are providing care in hospitals, long-term care, primary care, primary care clinics, home or community care, correctional facilities or public health units, the work they do is vital.

I have a little bit of first-hand knowledge about that. My mother was a nurse. She was a VON nurse at one point, doing home visits. She worked in different environments. I can tell you, it's something that every family member who has a nurse in the family, who has a front-line worker in the family, is proud of. You know that they are doing hard work and they're putting themselves out there, and in the time of COVID-19 it is exacerbated even more. They are putting themselves out there, and that's why we're stepping forward. Their value and contributions and their collective response to tackle COVID-19 is nothing short of impressive, and they have worked tirelessly to care for others while balancing the needs of their own families. We have to remember, they have their own families at home while they're out there protecting our loved ones and

0920

We received supportive letters from the Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario, who represent 47,000 registered nurses in Ontario. They said, "All front-line workers are doing their very best in a rapidly changing environment to adhere to the latest guidance and tools that are available to them. The last thing they should have to worry about is the future threat of being held personally or professionally liable after the pandemic for outcomes beyond their control."

This is the very intent of the proposed legislation. On behalf of our government, I would like to extend our gratitude to Ontario's nurses and again to all of our front-line health care workers.

Keeping Ontarians safe, particularly our most vulnerable, continues to be the top priority of our government. We remain committed to taking every step to protect long-term care residents, staff and visitors.

I'd like to take a moment to talk about our government's support for personal support workers, for PSWs. I know we all have family members or neighbours who are touched in some way, either as PSWs, or they know PSWs, and the work that personal support workers do is truly phenomenal. These workers are the backbone of every long-term care home across our province. They're providing a wide range of services. They can reduce or delay the need for more costly care in hospitals and long-term-care homes. I mentioned there were 47,000 registered practical nurses; there are 120,000 PSWs, including 50,000 in long-term care and 47,000 direct support workers. Just think of the magnitude of that number of people with a family of their own going out to the front lines, putting themselves out there for our communities, acting in good faith, taking public health advice and looking to our government for some level of protection for the concerns they have in being sued.

I'm proud to say that our government has announced \$461 million to temporarily enhance wages for workers in home and community care, long-term care, public hospitals and social services. This investment will help Ontario attract and retain the workforce needed to care for patients, clients and residents in response to COVID-19.

We have also provided a temporary \$3-an-hour targeted wage increase for approximately 50,000 eligible PSWs. This temporary wage increase builds on Ontario's fall preparedness plan, which includes an investment of \$26.3 million to support PSWs and supportive care workers. This investment will help to increase and stabilize the health care workforce so we are prepared to meet the needs of Ontarians now and in the future. We need these PSWs in our long-term-care facilities, retirement homes and hospitals. They should not fear going into work every day to care for our most vulnerable Ontarians, only to get sued by their clients and potentially their employer. That should not happen.

We have also heard strong support from workers and the businesses who employ them. Across the board, stakeholders representing these groups agreed that the proposed changes would decrease the likelihood of lawsuits about good-faith conduct and go a long way toward protecting workers.

For example, we heard from the Canadian Association of Counsel to Employers, a national association of lawyers who represent public and private sector employers in a wide range of employment-related matters. In a letter dated June 25, 2020, they voiced their support for this proposal—back in June; we've been working on this for a while, to get it just right: "Civil liability immunity would remove an impediment to returning to work by clarifying legal liability. It would help manage legal uncertainty and

give employers the confidence they need to reopen and return hundreds of thousands of employees to their workplaces and/or from periods of temporary lay-offs." I completely agree, Madam Speaker.

As I mentioned earlier, front-line workers are keeping vital services going in our province. They work in grocery stores, pharmacies, convenience stores. They're employed by the food delivery services that countless Ontarians are relying on. They're doing all they can to make our lives feel as normal and functional as possible, and it's our turn to support them.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to take a moment to talk about some of the additional supports our government is providing to these front-line workers. In partnership with various health and safety organizations, we produced nearly 150 sector-specific guidelines in response to COVID-19 and 49 additional helpful resources, like tip sheets and posters. The Minister of Labour—I can't believe how much he has cranked out there, put on the website for people to be able to avail themselves of, to understand through these tip sheets and resources and posters. It's just incredible—150 sector-specific guidelines.

These documents help businesses better understand the responsibilities and, in turn, protect workers on the job. I don't know who could possibly argue with that, Madam Speaker. They include advice, resources, best practices.

Since the onset of the pandemic, Ministers Fedeli and Sarkaria have engaged in consultations and round tables with key business stakeholders. This feedback helped launch a website to provide businesses with information on personal protective equipment or, as we frequently call it here, PPE—its suppliers. There's an up-to-date list of Ontario companies and business associations that are ready to supply PPE.

We also launched Ontario Together, a website that allows businesses and individuals to submit ideas to meet the challenges of the COVID-19 outbreak and direct the resources towards the production of essential equipment, including ventilators, masks, swabs, eye protection.

The talent and the skill in Ontario really, really came to the fore when we got into the pandemic, Madam Speaker. It's absolutely incredible the innovation that has happened and the made-in-Ontario that is there. We are proud of it. We're harnessing it. Ontario Together helped make that happen and helped keep Ontario products flowing in Ontario.

And more recently—that's not enough, Madam Speaker—the government introduced the Main Street Recovery Act. I'd like to again acknowledge Minister Sarkaria for his work on this file. The proposed legislation would support workers and small businesses by modernizing rules to allow them to innovate and meet the challenges of today. The plan includes a one-time grant of up to \$1,000 for eligible main street businesses with two to nine employees to help offset the unexpected costs of PPE. We all know it costs money. It's an additional cost to small businesses who drive our economy, and we want to find a way to support them. Minister Sarkaria found a way, and I applaud him for that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I'm sorry to interrupt the minister. I will remind the minister and all members that we must only refer to members of this House by their title and not by their names.

While I'm up, it is easier to refer to the Speaker as Speaker, rather than mister or madam—just a helpful comment.

I return to you, Minister.

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you, Speaker. Front-line workers, small business owners and entrepreneurs have overcome significant challenges and made extraordinary sacrifices to keep customers safe while continuing to contribute to our communities through these unprecedented times. Through the proposed bill and countless other measures, our government is determined to support them through this pandemic and beyond.

We've heard from stakeholders representing Ontario's thriving agricultural sector as well. One of our government's top priorities is to stop the spread of COVID-19 in agri-food workplaces so that worker health and safety is protected and Ontario's food supply chain remains strong.

Stakeholders in this important sector requested that Ontario look to British Columbia's model for civil immunity. We are responding to this called action. Today, Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, British Columbia is one of the jurisdictions where we looked at legislation that was put in place to protect citizens and essential services through these unprecedented times.

The proposed changes are just one of the ways we're standing alongside Ontario farmers. We're implementing supports aimed at enhancing workplace safety, including education and guidelines for farmers and workers, continuing to conduct proactive inspections to farming operations, and improving data-sharing between Ontario and its partners to better understand the spread of COVID-19 in affected communities. We continue to work collaboratively with municipal, provincial and federal partners and the farming community to help farmers protect their workers and stop the spread of COVID-19.

As you know, Speaker, this is not a simple area of our economy. It spans the municipal, federal and provincial and it takes the co-operation and collaboration that you're seeing, and that's what we're doing. We're trying to find even more ways to do that to battle COVID-19. For example, a new agreement between Ontario and the federal government will see Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada invest an additional \$11.6 million to support efforts by Ontario producers to stop the spread of COVID-19 on their farms.

Actions such as building physical barriers for worker separation, upgrading HVAC systems or enhancing hand-washing stations will all be eligible for this funding. This is in addition to the \$15 million under the Enhanced Agri-Food Workplace Protection Program to help increase health and safety measures to better protect their workers. This equals a total of up to \$26.6 million to date.

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I'm also pleased to report that the federal government has committed to developing mandatory requirements to improve employer-provided housing for farm workers.

Ministry staff will be working with the federal government on the details, including delivering the Ontario portion of the \$35 million in on-farm support as part of the revised Enhanced Agri-Food Workplace Protection Program.

The proposal before you today builds on our government's work to provide farm workers with the tools they need to do their jobs safely and ensure they're able to continue providing Ontario families with safe, high-quality food. We've heard from our agricultural producers and processors that the civil liability immunity for the transmission of COVID-19 would help ensure Ontario's food supply chain keeps going.

Earlier, I highlighted the importance of coaches and volunteers in sports and recreation, who are helping to build up our physical and mental health at a time when we need it the most. I think we all have fond memories of coaches or mentors or people who helped us engage in our communities in sport. So many of us have such fond memories of those people, and it wasn't until we were adults that we understood the effort they made, the time they took out of their lives to contribute to our lives.

I can remember every single hockey coach I had. I can remember every single mentor through different sports, whether it be judo or otherwise, and there's a whole variety through the House here, Speaker. We've all done different things. Whether it be dance or whether it be figure skating, which by the way is very good for hockey players—it could be judo; it could be karate; it could be lacrosse; it could be canoeing; it could be kayaking. It can be almost anything, but the people who took the time out of their lives to contribute to our lives remain special for all of us. When you look back on them, you want to make sure that we're protecting those who protected us.

As we engaged on these important issues, we received strong input and insights from individuals and organizations in community sports and entertainment sectors. We know that in Ontario we're passionate about youth and amateur sport. It's passion that draws athletes, coaches and volunteers who add so much to the fabric of our communities.

I'll just mention, Speaker, that before I was elected to the Legislature here, I helped with the Ontario Winter Games. I was a regional volunteer. Thousands of youth—I could rhyme off any major sports figure who came from Ontario and went through that system. Whether it be diving or figure skating, there are so many fantastic athletes who found their way because of volunteers, and the effort through just the Ontario Winter Games alone—just the number of volunteers is phenomenal. It's unbelievable, really. Then, many people here were involved in the Pan Am Games when they came, and the volunteers, the volunteer drivers, the security—just so many pieces.

People are engaged in their community. We want to make sure that they're engaged in their community now in these tough times because what they contributed then, that we were the benefactors of, they're now trying to contribute to their communities, and we want them to feel safe doing so.

The proposed legislation would allow everyone involved in youth and amateur sport to safely return to play

without fearing legal action. In fact, I participated in a great Zoom call earlier this week with the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries. We heard from different members of the sports industries and we heard great feedback and perspective. They can now see a more certain future.

Think of how important sport is in our community life here in Ontario. Our communities would suffer a disservice if the uncertainty that has developed around COVID-19 was allowed to relegate—if the skilled and the experienced volunteers went to the sidelines this winter or in the following seasons, it would have, I think, a devastating effect on those who want to give to their community. It would have a devastating effect on those who are receiving that effort. Sometimes when we do things, it's not what happens, it's what doesn't happen.

I'm hearing from people who are nervous getting on the bench to coach those kids. They're nervous putting themselves out there. They don't want to go into harm's way, but they want to contribute like they did before. We're making that possible. We're making it possible. It's why we've taken action to develop the Supporting Ontario's Recovery Act with the help and advice of so many athletic and sport organizations. If passed, it would provide the clarity and reassurance needed to ensure we're offering our young people the very best knowledge and expertise that communities have to offer.

And I don't want to underplay that—you don't want me as the coach. You want the one who knows how to do it. You want somebody who's done it before. We want the best. We want them back off the home benches, back on the team benches. We heard it could even assist with the economic recovery of the sector, encouraging clubs to offer paid programing.

Our government also heard from organizations in the non-profit arts and heritage sector. We received a letter from the Ontario Nonprofit Network in July, who indicated that civil liability immunity would help to address significant cost increases in the industry and challenges recruiting and retaining volunteers on boards of directors.

This initiative spans across all industries and all sectors of our communities, and I don't think that it would be intuitive for people to think, "Well, how would this affect the non-profit network?" Well, it does. They're telling us it does. We see that it does, and I'm pleased that the legislation we have proposed will benefit from these experienced and thoughtful perspectives.

The support of these organizations has helped to ensure we're proposing legislation that will tangibly support arts and culture sectors as they recover. Our government remains committed to providing stability and support to our sport organizations and culture industries as our province continues to rebuild.

Agencies that provide social services to families have also asked for legislation to protect organizations that follow public health guidelines. It's important that agencies are protected from litigation that could affect their ability to deliver these important services in the future.

I just want to bring us back to first principles. We're talking about turning your mind to getting the health advice, acting in good faith. You're making an honest effort. This is who we're talking about. We can talk about a sector, whether it be agriculture or non-profits or charities, but at the core of it, it's for those who are making an honest effort. It's for those who are turning their minds to the public health advice and applying it.

We want to ensure that Ontario's municipalities are equipped with the tools they need to face their most pressing challenges. Municipalities are on the front lines, delivering critical services that people and businesses depend on. From public health to child care to housing and homelessness supports for vulnerable populations, our municipal partners need flexibility to continue delivering these services, even when they're facing the challenging circumstances of today.

Municipalities across the province have added their voice to help develop legislation that will ensure communities can find creative and safe ways to come together, recover and grow despite these unprecedented challenges. These same municipalities have expressed strong concerns if the proposed legislation is not passed. I'd like to highlight one of the main comments we received: Without immunity provisions for COVID-19, municipalities will face increases or changes to insurance coverage and premiums.

These issues can also impact the non-profit and for-profit providers that are funded by municipalities to deliver services on their behalf. This includes local housing corporations, housing and homelessness non-profits and service providers operating emergency shelters or housing projects.

I think we can all agree these vital services need to be protected. The services that municipalities partner with are truly on the front lines. But again, I don't think that we always think about municipalities as being front-line in that way. But the social services that are being delivered, the social supports that are being delivered, again, whether it be food banks or whether even job retraining, there are just so many ways—in the college and university sectors, in our hospitals, all of the pieces that come together.

Senior Ontarians living in retirement community homes have been hit hard by COVID-19. As we drafted the proposed legislation, we invited input from stakeholder groups, including the Ontario Retirement Communities Association, otherwise known as ORCA. ORCA represents 95% of all licensed retirement community suites in Ontario, with members caring for nearly 60,000 seniors who live in retirement homes. Its membership also includes over 250 commercial partners who provide products and services to retirement homes throughout the province.

ORCA wrote to our government and spoke in favour of the changes we're proposing today. They said, "Civil immunity would help to prevent job losses, reduce risk for potential investors and help to reduce the pressure on long-term-care homes by preventing interruptions that might impact the development of new suites."

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The health and well-being of Ontario's retirement home residents, staff and their visitors has guided every step of our government's response to COVID-19. Throughout the pandemic we have taken action to respond, prevent and contain the spread of infection in retirement homes.

Among the initiatives taken, the government is allocating \$20 million over two years to protect seniors in licensed retirement homes through increased infection control and active screening procedures. Public Health Ontario has identified priority groups for testing, including retirement home residents, health care providers and others seen as critical.

The government has also established orders to provide retirement homes with more flexibility to recruit and reassign staff; restrict retirement home employees from working in more than one retirement home, long-term-care home or health care setting; and provide the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority with expanded powers to address outbreaks in retirement homes quickly to address potential management issues.

Ontario has also supported homes in accessing PPE from government supply when needed. We've also invested over \$118 million in temporary premium pandemic pay for our front-line workers in retirement homes.

I just want to go back a step, to my point: Ontario has also supported homes in accessing PPE from government supply when needed. It's really absolutely incredible that we have PPE being developed and built and manufactured in Ontario. A retirement home can literally phone and say, "We're running low," and the government has their back. The government will get it to them. We're making sure that they have the tools they need when they need them. This is not something that was always in place. It's something that our government saw as a priority early in the pandemic and we pulled out all the stops, dealt with supply chains, dealt with innovators and invested in manufacturing.

I can tell you countless stories of innovation, of home-grown excellence, that we're now exporting around the world. It really is, again, the spirit of Ontario together, making sure that we're putting all the pieces together so that they work properly. PPE for long-term-care homes and retirement homes is available at the end of a phone: Just phone and it's there. It's something I'm very proud of. It sounds simple. With the complexity of supply chains, it's something that we've achieved, and I'm very proud of it.

Speaker, workers in this sector provide essential care to people across the province. Now more than ever we need to ensure they have all the tools they need to feel safe and supported at work. The proposed legislation builds on our commitment to continue supporting these workers as Ontario safely and gradually recovers.

I mentioned briefly the post-secondary level, the colleges and universities. I'm proud to have Georgian College in my riding—just an incredible institution. Our post-secondary stakeholders have actually provided advice to our government as well since the beginning of

the COVID-19 outbreak. Like many other stakeholders, they were supportive of this proposal and hopeful that it would reduce the need for insurance and help to prevent lawsuits.

I'd like to briefly highlight some additional supports our government has brought in to support the post-secondary sector in response to COVID-19. We provided \$25 million, in addition to supporting Ontario's 45 post-secondary institutions and nine Indigenous institutes to help address their most pressing needs.

We're also investing \$19.25 million into mental health supports for post-secondary students in 2021, an increase of \$3.25 million over last year. I can tell you, as somebody who has a child in post-secondary during COVID, these supports are welcomed. They're needed for friends and for family. I know it's a difficult time for many students to connect. It's hard for them to connect with each other and it's hard for them to connect with loved ones, to reach out for help. This funding will go to strengthening community partnerships and increasing the number of mental health workers and programs at colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes.

I'm touching on a number of sectors of our society and how this will help each of those sectors. This is very broad. It is very broad and helps millions of people. We're honouring small businesses in Ontario this week and I want to be absolutely clear in expressing our government support for businesses that drive our economy forward and define the character of our communities. My hat goes off to all those people who turn a key in the door and stand last in line for a paycheque. They're out there in our communities making them work, helping us recover.

We're well aware that COVID-19 has had a significant impact on small businesses and communities right across the province, including many who have put Ontario's vibrant hospitality sector on the global map. Our hospitality sector is second to none. People come from around the world to train here for hospitality, to train in that profession, whether it be chefs, whether it be wait staff. We have something to be so proud of, and I don't think that we all know that, because we're so used to the high level of service, the high level of excellence in everything from chefs to servers.

We stand shoulder to shoulder with small businesses and independent businesses and their workers. Small businesses account for 98% of all businesses across the province. We know that in small towns and big cities alike, local restaurants are not only huge economic engines but also important cultural and community anchors, and places where we gather to connect with our friends and family. It conjures up the image for me, Speaker, of Cheers, "Where everybody knows your name."

You go to your local restaurant, the wait staff know who you are. The bartender may know who you are. The owner—there's a good chance; 98% of all businesses in Ontario are small businesses, so there's a good chance you know the owner. There's a good chance that the owner knows you. There's a good chance that that owner is contributing to your community, to the Kiwanis or the

Rotary or Lions Club, charity auctions and all sorts of things. But they can only do that if they can have the support of government. Because they're struggling. They're struggling through these times.

The recovery of these businesses is critical for Ontario's recovery, and we knew that many of the impacts of COVID-19 could threaten businesses and the livelihoods they support. That is why we acted swiftly to bring forward supportive measures for the restaurant and food services industry. Beginning in March, I worked with the AGCO to begin to identify and implement opportunities to support Ontario's vibrant hospitality sector in unprecedented ways. We took responsible actions to make it easier for these skilled professionals and experienced entrepreneurs to do what they do best: serve their loyal customers and their communities.

The unprecedented challenges our communities and these workers and businesses are facing required a new perspective and an innovative approach. And so, working with the AGCO, we amended a regulation under the Liquor Licence Act to temporarily allow licensed bars and restaurants to sell beer and wine and spirits as part of a food order for takeout or delivery.

There's been a spinoff effect of this, and a very positive one. As I was talking to a friend of mine who owns a local pub, Brad said to me, "You wouldn't believe. Most of the spirits that I'm selling are made locally." It's Beattie's vodka from Alliston; it's craft beer; it's any number of products. But people are looking for local product and they can't always find it on the shelf of their local LCBO. But they know that Brad stocks it. I sat there in one of my few moments of exhaling and watched a guy buy a couple of bottles of Beattie's vodka to go to the cottage. He bought food—he bought a whole ton of food—but he wanted that as well. What a great spinoff.

The unprecedented challenges they face needed an innovative approach. We amended the Liquor Licence Act to temporarily allow this, along with the takeout and delivery. This introduced an additional revenue option for these businesses at a time when it was greatly needed. And not only for spirits that were being sold; we lowered the cap that they had to charge so that we would leave more money in the pocket of the business owner. We wanted to make it work, and it is working. We heard loud and clear that Ontarians appreciate the opportunity to support local businesses and, in this case, local manufacturers.

Takeout and delivery options also helped to support social distancing measures, and to be frank, it's simple and convenient for many of us. While this was originally intended as a temporary measure to help workers and businesses impacted by COVID-19, I'm proud to say that our government is committed to making this change permanent. We are encouraging everyone to support local restaurants and the food services industry now more than ever.

We need these businesses, Speaker, and these businesses need us. To that end, and recognizing the need to continue practising social distancing, our government also amended our liquor laws to provide consumers with even

more delivery options. We made it possible for popular, rapid delivery services such as Uber Eats to deliver alcohol from the LCBO, the Beer Store or any local manufacturer's retail shop. We have introduced a number of amendments crafted specifically to support the small businesses that we know are enduring tremendous hardship. For example, we've temporarily removed a requirement for Ontario cideries to require them to have five acres of planted fruit in order to set up a retail operation on their premises. This amendment makes it easier for cideries to open up new retail and revenue streams and find new customers.

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I just want to talk about cideries for a moment. I believe we have about 45 cideries in Ontario. It is one of the few products that is entirely an Ontario product. You can grow the apples in Ontario, and it's all juice, it's all Ontario product. What a tremendous story, when we talk about providing supply chains and promoting Ontario. And who picks the apples? Well, the farmers pick the apples, but there are too many apples for a farmer to pick—I can get into "Peter Piper picked a peck...." He needs help. Where does he get the help? He needs workers. Where does he get the workers? Quite often, they're foreign workers who come in and pick the apples. I talked about agriculture and the importance of the agriculture sector. We're helping our restaurants by helping our cideries, by helping our farmers who are helping our employees. It's all interconnected, and that's why this legislation has to be broad. We have to have the entire supply chain figured out and protected. We want them all to feel comfortable going to work. If they're taking public health advice, if they're acting in good faith with an honest effort—we want everybody who's doing that to feel protected so that all of these parts work, because if one of these parts doesn't work, none of the parts work. The amendment makes it easier for these cideries to open up new retail and revenue streams and find new customers.

One of the most visible measures of our government's support for workers and businesses are the temporary extended patios you can now find and enjoy across the province. In June, we made amendments to the Liquor Licence Act to allow licensees the flexibility to create these temporary patio extensions, provided there is no objection from the municipality. Many local businesses continue to take advantage of the change, using heaters and blankets to keep customers warm as the weather gets colder. It's a little crisp out there now, but with heaters on the patios, people are still enjoying them.

The patio change was significant—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Come to Timmins.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order.

Hon. Doug Downey:—and with the change we wanted to have it be practical and not have to have the small business owner, the small restaurant, have to put a ton of capital into making this happen. We said, "As long as you can see where the barriers are, as long as it's demarcated, it doesn't have to meet the previous stringent, costly

standards.” I can tell you, it has been a raving success. The feedback that we got has been phenomenal. Quite frankly, it may have saved some of the restaurants. People sat outside and ate and kept up the brand loyalty, and then they would order takeout or delivery, so the restaurants stayed functioning.

It was pretty exciting to see some downtowns. Downtown Orillia, for instance, closed the street and allowed the patios to expand. In the summertime, the spirit of the community was phenomenal. And it was done safely. It was outside. It was with distance. It did everything we hoped that it would do, and it helped some businesses survive.

We have to think differently. We have to think in a way that is going to protect people, but we have to support our businesses at the same time.

These temporary extensions were a lifeline. It also provided Ontarians with an additional opportunity to safely visit a licensed bar or restaurant and support that business.

I like to think that this will be one of the enduring images of our community during this difficult time. With outdoor patios extended onto our community streets and sidewalks, you can bet we'll wrap our scarves around our necks, put our toques on—even in Timmins—and safely join our friends and family on the patio one more time.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Come on over. It snowed on Monday.

Hon. Doug Downey: I'm not afraid of a little bit of snow.

It might be a little chilly, but we know well that these establishments are the very fabric of our cities, towns and neighbourhoods. We'll stand up for them, and we don't mind standing under a patio heater to do so.

Our government has been committed to supporting the hospitality sector since day one. An illustration of that is the steps we took in December 2019 to bring Ontario up to date with other jurisdictions in Canada and around the world with respect to serving hours at licensed bars and restaurants and commercial airports. These establishments, in certain airports after security, are now allowed to serve alcohol 24 hours a day, as they would be in jurisdictions around the world. Supporting these businesses and jobs and, importantly, keeping our hospitality workers safe, remains a top priority of our government.

Much like the hospitality industry, the COVID-19 outbreak is taking a toll on the construction sector. Our government has taken action, and we're continuing to take action to ensure our workers in construction can continue to do the work of building Ontario safely.

When the government responded to COVID-19's unprecedented impact on the justice system, we suspended limitation periods and the time periods when a step must be taken in a legal matter. This was a necessary measure to help minimize uncertainty for people involved in legal proceedings during a time when normal court proceedings were not possible. In essence, we froze time—froze time so it was predictable, so that people could get the service they needed and stay protected. But this order could have

had consequences in the construction sector, because certain payments have to be made, and if they can't be made, then that stops the cash flow and workers don't get paid.

To explain briefly, under the Construction Act, a construction project owner is required to hold back—the lien holdback, as it's known—from the contractor a certain amount of money for a certain amount of time. But when we froze time, that holdback period could be frozen as well. It also applies to payers. As the time periods were suspended by the emergency order, many of the payments to the workers would not have been made.

We heard from key stakeholders in the construction sector and we took immediate action to ensure that those payments in the industry were not impacted as a result of the order. We lifted the suspension of limitation periods under the Construction Act to allow the release of holdback payments to contractors and subcontractors. This helped to resolve what could have been a significant cash flow problem in the construction industry.

The COVID-19 outbreak has altered nearly every part of life in this province. At the Ministry of the Attorney General, we worked around the clock to ensure that justice not only remains accessible, but that our justice system evolves and modernizes and stays that way. We're not going back.

We acted quickly to make investments in technology, from laptops to conference lines, and we quickly provided access to Zoom and other digital platforms to allow the courts to transition to remote hearings. We accelerated a number of the ministry's modernization plans, moving it forward very quickly, such as e-filing.

I'm happy to say that Ontario now offers e-filing for more than 400 different kinds of forms in civil and family matters. That means a non-attendance at a courthouse. That means filing from your desktop. That saves people money. It saves time. It saves cost. It saves across the board, and it's safer. So I'm very proud that this has happened. It's a nearly tenfold increase in the scope of this electronic service.

We rolled out a new online court case search service to open up public access to information that you previously had to line up at a courthouse to see. What happened was, if you wanted to know what was on the docket, you would have to physically go to that courthouse—and this is mostly in the Toronto courthouses. But you would go to the courthouse, you would have to go to the floor, you'd see the little kiosk, you'd have to do your thing, and you could see what was happening in the courthouse that day.

We had a conversation. I said, “I don't know. If you can't get in the courthouse, how are you going to see the list?” That was an access-to-justice issue for me. That was an issue where, quite frankly, the reporters couldn't see it, the public couldn't see it, and it's publicly accessible data. Nothing is being hidden. It's supposed to be out there.

So we had a conversation, we had a Zoom call, and I said, “I've done a lot of work on databases, and so have some of my colleagues. I know behind every database is an Excel sheet, or something like that. It's a table, and so

I don't want everything on the table." They had great plans. They had got a great product, where some of the documents can be loaded. I said, "No, let's get the information out there. Let's just do the API and get the pieces that we can get out there."

And sure enough, very quickly, the excellent team at the Ministry of Attorney General got to work, and in very short order, it's now going up every day. You can check. Go online, pick your courthouse, pick your docket and you can see what's going on—real transparency, real access to justice. There are some things we're being careful about, and we're going to do some more work on. We're being careful about things like some of the family law stuff, where there may be reasons why privacy is needed, but for the civil and for the others, it's out there, as it should be.

We're gradually rolling out access to Thomson Reuters CaseLines. It's a document-sharing e-platform that facilitates remote and in-person hearings. It's phenomenal. You can go in there and the judge can see certain documents. Some can be hidden, and some can be redacted if it's, say, child welfare issues, stuff like that. It's very sophisticated. But it's very user-friendly. It's quite good. It's a major investment in the future in Ontario's courts.

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Ensuring justice services were available when needed has been critical for many Ontarians and businesses. We've now moved away from in-person service, meaning serving documents to require civil cases to be served on the crown and related entities by email. Before COVID, you had to serve in-person at a spot. Now, you can serve it by email. Why not? There's no added value by having somebody have to walk through a door with a piece of paper and hand it to somebody else who inevitably is probably going to scan it anyways, so now it's being served by email.

We also fast-tracked legislation for remote commission services, expanding notary services. This helps rural and remote, and it's more convenient for businesses. The change is paving the way for documents to be signed and verified remotely. The legislation also expanded notary services to better serve Ontarians, including rural and remote, as I mentioned.

The days of watching our justice system fall behind are long gone. In responding to these unprecedented circumstances, our government has made bold and significant steps towards a smarter and stronger justice system, a system that will continue to evolve, improve and better serve our communities as we work together to get our province back on track.

There's more to be done in the justice sector. We have a number of initiatives that we're working on. We're engaging with our justice partners. The Chief Justice of Ontario and the Chief Justice of the Superior Court and the Chief Justice of the Court of Appeal have all been doing yeoman's work in their areas, working with us and working in their areas to keep the system moving, to keep it functioning for Ontarians, and harnessing the technology that we can do.

I'm told that the Superior Court of Justice has heard over 50,000 Zoom hearings since the pandemic started—

50,000. I just want to say that the capacity to expand that—now all remand hearings, all in-custody remand bail hearings are being done by Zoom. And with the leadership of the Chief Justice of the Ontario Court, now all out-of-custody remand hearings are being done. That's saving people time and convenience. Justice is getting done, but it doesn't mean it has to be clunky and expensive.

Speaker, as we continue to respond to the dangers of COVID-19, the health and safety of Ontarians remains our first priority. We cannot let our guard down as our province takes every step to contain the second wave of COVID-19. The severity of this wave depends on all of us following the public health measures to stop the spread. I want to thank and acknowledge the thousands of workers and volunteers across the province who have put their health at risk to keep others and their families safe.

The proposed legislation would provide protection for those workers who make an honest effort to follow public health advice relating to COVID-19. This would allow workers and volunteers to focus on their jobs and supporting their communities and not worrying about the liability for the inadvertent transmission of COVID-19.

I also want to state again that this does not impact anyone's ability to take legal actions against gross negligence, intentional misconduct or bad actors, those who would ignore public health advice or thumb their nose at it or act with gross negligence. Our government does not believe in providing protection for those who engage in that type of behaviour. They're threatening our recovery, and they're threatening the lives of some of our citizens.

As we work to stop the spread of COVID-19 and rebuild our economy, we are taking measures to ensure that front-line health care workers, local businesses and volunteers who act in good faith have the support they need to continue doing their jobs.

As I've stated today, we cannot afford to allow the valuable expertise, experience and knowledge of Ontarians to be left on the sidelines as communities are working to rebuild and as they recover. When volunteers give their time, when businesses want to rehire staff and when charities want to help those in need, we need to be there to encourage them with clarity, with reassurance and with support. Thanks to the input and insights we've heard from across Ontario, that is exactly what we are proposing to do through this legislation: support Ontario's recovery act.

I urge all members of the House to stand up for the front-line workers and businesses across the province by voicing their support for this bill. Thank you. Merci. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions and responses?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Support for business, Bill 218: What is your government going to do to stop the gouging by insurance companies who are raising rates by 100% to 150%, resulting in increases of thousands of dollars to hundreds of thousands of dollars to our hotels in Niagara Falls? Also, families who endured the horror of losing loved ones in long-term care during COVID-19 deserve justice.

Instead of holding for-profit long-term-care corporations accountable, Premier Ford has written a law to protect companies and the government from being held responsible. My question to you, sir, is why?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Response.

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you for the opportunity to respond. I think if the member opposite goes back to those stakeholders and says, “Does this legislation help you? Will this legislation help you, because you’re making an honest effort; you’re looking to the public health advice; you’re implementing the public health advice; you’re acting in good faith? With an honest effort, is this helping you?” I’m very confident the answer will be yes. The answer is, “This is a help. This is what we were looking for.” Not just the charities and the non-profits and the small businesses but the big operators, like those in the member’s riding: They were looking for this kind of help, because we’re in unprecedented times and people are nervous. We want them going to work. We want them doing the things that they can for their community.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I listened intently for the last hour—a fantastic presentation by the Attorney General on Bill 218, the Supporting Ontario’s Recovery and Municipal Elections Act. He spoke about what our government has done to help our front-line health care workers, to help the front-line businesses that are working either as essential services or that are slowly able to reopen, as well as the volunteers. I think many of my colleagues here around the room were volunteers before they got involved in politics and eventually elected.

We heard about SLAPP lawsuits, and we were nervous about what that meant to us. We understood people who didn’t want to get involved and were worried about the consequences. We’re aware of good Samaritan stories that went off the rails.

What I would ask my esteemed colleague is, the fact that we have so much support for all that we have done so far in terms of—you remember, I had my statement in May on patios, and you jumped right on that and loosened the rules for the patios. What are we doing to hold on to that momentum, that we can keep going, that people want to hold on to—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. Response?

Hon. Doug Downey: We’re still moving at 90 miles an hour, and we’re making sure that we’re finding ways to support the small businesses, the restaurants with the patios. The liquor delivery that I mentioned: We’re going to make that permanent. The small business red tape bill that we have in front of us is also a support. So government is doing a number of things. This is one piece of the puzzle. There are many things happening at the same time, and this is a support for those front-line workers and for the people who are working in the hospitality industry and the food chain. We’re doing a number of things for them through this and then, through the other bills in front of the

House, we’re also supporting them—so just a tremendous amount of work.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Ça me fait plaisir de me lever sur le projet de loi 218 et poser une question.

What else can be said about this government attacking the electoral democratic process? Speaker, it may not be a coup d’état, but it’s certainly a “coup d’épée” to whatever hope Ontarians may have about independent municipal elections.

People are dying in this pandemic. So my question: What does meddling in democratic elections have to do with facing a global pandemic?

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you for the question. I actually got an email last night from a city clerk who said, “Thank you, thank you, thank you, because we’re spending resources on navel-gazing about how municipal politicians are going to get re-elected instead of helping the citizens of our community in a time of crisis, of COVID-19.” So that’s what it has to do with it. It’s an early, early answer so that municipalities can focus on the things that matter most and the people in their communities that matter most, and that’s not even talking about the excess cost of doing it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I’m really very glad that the minister brought in this bill, Bill 218, to protect not-for-profit organizations. We have 58,000 not-for-profit organizations, who are helping in all aspects of support to the community, and they barely can survive through this epidemic because of the shortage of people, shortage of volunteers, shortage of money. Nevertheless, on top of that, we are adding more liabilities and fear of getting sued for a good reason or not a good reason. So I think this bill brings a protection which is very, very needed.

Can the minister tell us how this will help not-for-profit organizations to continue serving the community, given the fact that I know that the NDP have been talking about not-for-profit organizations to do all kinds of [*inaudible*]?
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Hon. Doug Downey: The not-for-profit industries and the charities in our communities are struggling as well. They’re struggling. They rely on volunteers. I go to the food bank, because it’s such a visual for me—I’ve been in a number of food banks—the number of people who contribute to making that work, not just contributing food, but their time and resources.

I spent time as chair of a Big Brothers Big Sisters organization. I was president of a Kiwanis Club. I’ve been involved in these charities and non-profits, doing front-line work, and I can tell you: When I talk to my colleagues and my friends who are still, every day, doing that work, it has fundamentally changed how they are functioning. There’s a nervousness about engaging with the community and being held civilly liable for the inadvertent transmission of COVID-19, when they’re doing everything possible. They could not be safer. They’re having meetings outside. They’re just doing so many things. Madam

Speaker, it's such an important sector and we need to step up for them.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm going to ask this question again, because it wasn't answered. This is a crisis in the province of Ontario. I want you to understand that: It's a crisis. What is your government going to do to stop the gouging by insurance companies who are raising rates by 100% to 150%, resulting in increases of several thousands of dollars, including hundreds of thousands of dollars to the hotels in Niagara Falls? What is your government going to do to stop that gouging, so they can carry on with their businesses?

Hon. Doug Downey: As the member opposite knows, insurance is a very complicated area. We're hearing it. I'm hearing it. I've heard from others saying, "Look, my hospital insurance has gone up." That's having an impact. Different areas of insurance—when I was parliamentary assistant to finance, I spent a ton of time understanding and working with the car insurance industry to understand how it works and what the component parts are.

Our government is focused on the needs of Ontarians. Our Minister of Finance is engaged on this file. The parliamentary assistant to finance, Mr. Cho, is engaged on this file. The Premier is engaged on this file, I can tell you; you heard him yesterday. He says, "I'm like an 800-pound gorilla on these guys." This is a focus for us. It's important for us, and we will continue to protect Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): We have time for one more quick question.

Mr. Michael Parsa: Yesterday during question period, I noticed that some of my colleagues perhaps were not as informed about Bill 218 and the fact that such similar bills have been enacted in other jurisdictions, in particular in British Columbia by the NDP government. Madam Speaker, I'm wondering if the minister—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Stop the clock. I recognize the member from Timmins on a point of order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The member is saying that we're misinformed. He should inform himself of that legislation, because it is different.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): That's not a point of order.

I apologize to the member for interrupting. Please continue.

Mr. Michael Parsa: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I was just wondering if the minister can please elaborate and tell us why it's so critical for us to have Bill 218 enacted here in Ontario.

Hon. Doug Downey: I can tell you, my relationship with—I guess they're in an election, so I have to be a little bit careful in BC, but it has been very positive. BC has done some really great things through their Ministry of Attorney General. The liability legislation that they brought forward was something that we looked at very closely. Ours is broader and ours is a more defined standard. It's more, I'm going to say, road-tested through

the courts, but the concept was worth looking at, so I appreciate what they've done there.

They've done some other very innovative things in terms of justice. Their tribunal system is really phenomenal. I struck a deal with Minister Eby at the time, with Attorney General Eby, and so we're moving forward with that as well. We look to our provincial partners for best practices, and this is one example where we're adopting some of the things that they've brought forward.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): It is now time for members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WOMEN IN POLITICS

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: This morning, I decided to write a new statement to reflect on Niagara's women in leadership summit, which I have had a chance to attend this week. They spoke about a need to knock down barriers for women in politics. Speaker, I get it. I am currently the only female representative in higher office in the Niagara area. Before that, I was often one of two women at the table for St. Catharines city council, and before me, I watched great women in politics succeed in Niagara despite barriers, like Cindy Forster, Susan Vendetti and Pat Lindal. I am certain they faced discrimination, and I stand on their shoulders to do what I do today.

To the women who want to step up and lead, here is a message from a veteran female politician who often felt like they were doing it all alone: "We need you. Be strong. Always engage, because we need your experience. Today, it is more important than ever." It is about she-covery, child care and pay equity for work dominated by women like front-line staff in nursing homes.

The pandemic has put pressures on these gaps, but there will be a time when they slip away again. We need more women in leadership roles to make sure that does not happen. We need more women in politics. The issues that women shoulder will only get better with more women having their voices counted in more places.

WASTE REDUCTION

Mr. Norman Miller: As we celebrate Waste Reduction Week, Ontario is finally moving towards holding producers responsible for the waste they create and encouraging innovations in compostable packaging. These are two ideas I brought to the Ontario Legislature as private member's bills. In 2005, and again in 2007, I introduced a private member's bill designed to develop regulations setting hard targets for recycling and requiring producers of products and packaging to be responsible for the recycling of their products and to achieve those targets. That was more than 15 years ago. The previous government talked about creating a circular economy, but didn't do it.

Then, three years ago, I toured Muskoka Roastery in Huntsville and learned about the certified compostable coffee pods they use. It's an Ontario innovation produced by Club Coffee in Etobicoke, using technology created by the University of Guelph. In an effort to prevent millions of plastic coffee pods from filling landfills across Ontario, I introduced the Reducing Waste One Pod at a Time Act in the fall of 2017.

I was pleased to join Environment, Conservation and Parks Minister Jeff Yurek at Club Coffee three weeks ago to announce his proposed regulations designed to increase organics collection and encourage compostable packaging. Keeping organic waste out of landfills will help Ontario reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

Both of these ideas came from constituents. Dr. Jim McTaggart-Cowan told me about product stewardship and, as I say, Muskoka Roastery introduced me to compostable coffee pods.

I'm proud to be part of a government that is acting on these ideas to reduce waste, in particular plastic waste, and finding ways to create jobs while protecting the environment—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you.

INSURANCE RATES

Ms. Sara Singh: It's an honour to rise here on behalf of the good people of Brampton Centre and raise some alarming concerns. We've been hearing from drivers who have been faced with increased premiums throughout this pandemic. Rather than actually regulating the rates and ensuring that drivers would receive a discount rather than an increase, this government has chosen to do nothing. These rates are not just rising in Brampton Centre, Speaker. They are rising across the province, all the way down to Collingwood and beyond, and yet this government hears these concerns in all of these ridings and does nothing.

And it's not just drivers who are facing increased insurance premiums. We also heard from the taxi and limo industry, some of whom aren't able to even drive and earn a living right now and yet are forced to pay increased premiums.

It's not just people on the road; we've heard from small business owners who are forced to close their doors given these increased costs, and yet when this government had the opportunity to do something, regulate those rates and help those small businesses out with two different pieces of legislation that you brought forward, you did nothing. You're allowing these companies to continue to profit and benefit through this pandemic while hard-working everyday Ontarians are suffering.

Small businesses are in dire need of assistance, and rather than create legislation or packages that will actually help those companies out, your government sits here, in silence, and allows these companies to continue to profit.

I urge you, Speaker, to implore this government to do the right thing and regulate these rates before it's too late.

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INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATORS AWARDS

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'm pleased to rise today and recognize the outstanding work of two leaders in Sarnia-Lambton. On September 17, Mike Lapaine, president and CEO of Bluewater Health, was awarded the International Association of Business Communicators Communications Champion Award for recognizing the value of communications to his organization and for his exceptional leadership and communication, both in ordinary times and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Julia Oosterman, chief of communications and public affairs at Bluewater Health, was also recognized by the IABC with the Outstanding Communicator Award. Ms. Oosterman received the top honour for consistently achieving business results through excellent communication strategies, employing communications as a force for good in her community, implementing an ethical framework at Bluewater Health and inspiring a high level of transparency during the pandemic.

I want to personally congratulate Mr. Lapaine and Ms. Oosterman on being selected for these awards. Their professionalism and leadership at Bluewater Health has become a tremendous asset for the Sarnia-Lambton community. I can personally vouch for their unwavering commitment to excellence in communication. Mr. Lapaine and Ms. Oosterman have always made themselves available to answer questions or to assist my staff in finding supports and solutions for local issues.

As the MPP for Sarnia-Lambton, congratulations to both Mike and Julia on your well-deserved awards.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Ms. Marit Stiles: It's really an honour to be here today to rise to give voice to the frustrations that my constituents are sharing with me over this government's misplaced priorities.

People in Davenport are struggling, like folks across this province, with the reality of a resurgent COVID-19. Adding to the concern about their own family's health and safety, they're worried about what will happen to their jobs and if support will be there if they lose their jobs. People hit hard by the first wave and government inaction are still living in tents in local parks in my community as the weather grows colder, and small businesses don't know how they're going to make it through to the next month.

But instead of supporting our communities during the biggest challenge they've ever faced, the Premier and this government are once again targeting local democracy, banning the use of ranked ballots in municipal elections and overriding the rights of the people to determine how they choose their own representatives.

Torontonians and people across this province want this government to get out of the business of meddling in our

local democracy. They want them to scrap their attack on ranked ballots and fund the transit, the housing and support for small businesses that we so desperately need at this time.

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to say a few words to the family of Abdirahman Abdi, who tragically died on July 24, 2016, as the result of a violent arrest, something that should never have happened.

It's been a long four years, and I know that this week in particular is very difficult for you, your friends and the community. You are left still seeking justice. I want you to know that the fight against systemic racism and bias will and must continue, both in our institutions and ourselves.

Bias is the enemy of justice, and bias is something that's part of the human condition. It's in every one of us. It's the way that we're made. And only by the process of self-examination and examining our institutions can we take the necessary action to promote justice and safety for all. That's the obligation of every one of us in this Legislature and everyone in a position of power.

I want you to know that we stand with you and the friends of Abdirahman in continuing to seek justice in his name.

LAWREN HARRIS

Mr. Michael Parsa: Tomorrow, Friday, October 23, we celebrate Lawren Harris Day. Lawren Harris was a well-respected Canadian painter who was born in Brantford, Ontario. He was best known as an original member of the legendary Group of Seven and is credited with being a driving force behind its formation.

Lawren Harris was a pioneer when it came to truly appreciating the uniqueness of our Canadian landscapes and recording them in a distinct style that is appreciated worldwide. Among his work are many paintings of beautiful Ontario landscapes.

I'm proud to say that York region is home to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, which showcases many beautiful art pieces created by the Group of Seven, including works from Lawren Harris himself.

The McMichael gallery is a proud contributor to the cultural identity of not only Ontario but all of Canada. It acquires, preserves and exhibits artwork from artists and contributes to the development of Canadian art, with a focus on the Group of Seven and Canada's Indigenous peoples. One of the McMichael's current exhibitions is "A Like Vision": The Group of Seven at 100.

Speaker, Canadians such as Lawren Harris will forever be embedded in the cultural fabric of Ontario for his irreplaceable contributions to the development of the distinctly Canadian painting style that is appreciated across the world today.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, it didn't have to be this way. We weren't prepared for COVID-19, and now we are paying the price. People are dying, lives are upended, social relations are strained and our economy is suffering.

We went through SARS. We saw the impact of a brand new breath-borne disease on our society. We studied the effects. Reports were written, and some steps were taken, but big steps were ignored or dismantled. Stocks of PPE were acquired and allowed to be frittered away, to disappear, so that when COVID-19 hit in the spring, we didn't have the essential equipment that our front-line workers needed.

Vietnam, South Korea, Taiwan all learned the same lessons from SARS, and they successfully applied those lessons to reduce the impact on human life and on their economies.

In the spring, we knew there would be a second wave, and this government didn't prepare for it. Hiring more PSWs started after the second wave hit. The ramp-up of testing and contact tracing started after the second wave hit. The virus is rampaging again through our long-term-care facilities, and they aren't prepared.

Speaker, the negligence is shocking, unpardonable and a damning indictment of this government.

FOOD BANKS

Mr. David Piccini: I rise today to thank the many people who participated in our recent fall food drive to support our local food banks. With the onset of COVID-19, the need has never been more real in the community of Northumberland-Peterborough South. And after Thanksgiving, the opportunity to restock the shelves has been challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic.

I'd like to thank our amazing community that came together; specifically, all the farmers who donated pumpkins that were given out free in return for a food donation: Kent Farms, Garden Hill Farmers Market, Gord and Sherry Robinson, Burnham Family Farm Market, Cricklewood Farm, Cheer Farms and Vanderview Farms. And this wouldn't have been possible without the many amazing locations throughout my riding where we ran our food bank: No Frills in Brighton, Cobourg Foodland, Norwood Foodland.

A special thank you for some amazing donations from Guardian pharmacy in Port Hope, Jim Corcoran from Ste. Anne's Spa, Pet Valu Port Hope, Maple View retirement home, and of course Cobourg Foodland.

Mr. Speaker, the food banks of Clarington East, Asphodel Norwood ministerial food bank and Food 4 All in Northumberland do a remarkable job serving constituents in need in my community, and I'd like to thank them and their volunteers for all the work that they do.

ED HUM

Mr. Dave Smith: It's an honour today to rise to talk about a friend of mine. Way back in 1990, during my first

year at university, I worked part-time at a local pizzeria named Dexter's Pizza. We were within walking distance from Trent's main campus. That's where I first met Ed Hum. Ed owned a company named Far East Entertainment. He placed video games at different locations. Ed put Street Fighter in our restaurant. Ed's family also owned a local restaurant for more than 80 years. Some of you may have heard of it because it's fairly popular in our community: Hi Tops. His grandfather started it. It was passed on to his father, Paul, and eventually on to Ed.

1030

Ed also owned a number of coin laundries, and he was very unique in the naming of them. There was Wash-O-Mat, Wash-O-Mat on Water and Wash-O-Mat on Park.

Despite all of his business success though, what he was most proud of was his family. He doted over his daughters, Ashley, Elissa and Victoria. When Ashley became the first Hum family member to be accepted at university, he went on and on about how proud he was of her.

Ed was diagnosed with testicular cancer just over three years ago and unfortunately succumbed to the disease last Thursday. Ed is only seven years older than me, and that is far too young for someone who has done so much for our community to leave us.

BRAIN CANCER AWARENESS DAY

Hon. Christine Elliott: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to call the attention of all members to the fact that Saturday, October 24, is Brain Cancer Awareness Day. I ask this House to join me in recognizing all those who have been impacted by brain cancer. We send our heartfelt support to those affected and to the wonderful health teams that are supporting them during this time.

QUESTION PERIOD

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question this morning is for the Premier. Families who lost loved ones in long-term care during the COVID-19 pandemic have lived with pain and heartbreak that is unimaginable. This week, the Premier added to their pain by exempting himself and long-term-care homes from legal liability for their failure to protect seniors in long-term care.

Yesterday, the Premier dismissed families' concerns, claiming that they had only "read the headlines." Why would the Premier insult families expressing outrage and frustration by claiming that they're just not smart enough to understand the government's bill?

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

Hon. Doug Downey: I'm pleased to rise again today and answer the same question in the same way. What this

does not do—what the bill does not do—it does not protect bad actors against claims related to gross negligence or intentional misconduct related to the inadvertent transmission of COVID. It does not interfere with employee rights as they relate to WSIB or supporting legislation.

What it does do is targeted, enhanced civil liability protection for volunteers, for workers, for non-profits, for businesses, for charities, for the people who are on the front lines in our communities, who want to engage in our communities, who have been engaging in our communities.

This bill supports our communities in so many sectors. I look forward to expanding in the second question.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, families have actually read the bill, and they know exactly what this Ford government is up to.

Darlene Thomas wrote us to say, "I am disgusted and appalled reading" this bill. "My grandmother died alone under deplorable conditions at Orchard Villa.... Now the government wants to protect these companies? ... Where is the justice?"

Why is the Premier more interested in protecting himself and the for-profit long-term-care chains than allowing Darlene and thousands like her to have some justice and accountability for what happened to their loved ones?

Hon. Doug Downey: As I was reading some of the coverage, Steve Berman, who is a lawyer running some of the cases that have already been launched—if you read his comments in the paper, I don't think he has any concern at all that his cases are in jeopardy of meeting the standard that we're putting out to protect the people on the front lines, the people contributing to our communities, to the non-profits, the businesses, to the many others.

What this legislation does not do is protect bad actors. Bad actors need to be aware: If they are failing to provide the necessities of life, if they're deliberately ignoring public health advice or they're just not taking public health advice, if they're fraudulent or there's unlawful confinement or assault or battery, all of those things can still be pursued, Mr. Speaker. What we're doing is providing a standard of protection for those who are contributing to our communities, doing so with good faith, with an honest belief.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Matt Smith Johnson of Scarborough lost his grandfather in March and writes this: "This clearly leaves an open door for long-term-care corporations to simply claim 'We thought we were doing the best we could' when we can all see they were not...."

"This shifts the burden of proof onto the victims...."

That's what Matt Smith Johnson had to say.

My question is, when will this Premier finally admit that these families are not ignorant, as he suggests, that they have actually read the bill and they simply refuse to sit by while the Premier rewrites the law to protect himself

and to protect the long-term-care chains that failed to protect our loved ones?

Hon. Doug Downey: I've heard the Leader of the Opposition say it three times now, but I think what was said yesterday was that I didn't think that she had read the bill. And I'm fairly certain that she hadn't, because the things she followed up with through successive questions clearly do not get captured in the bill. She's alleging things that are gross negligence. She's alleging things that are over the top.

What we're talking about, what the bill talks about is protecting those people, like the PSWs, the front-line workers, the grocery clerks, the charities, the non-profits, the people who are contributing to our communities, the people who are nervous about volunteering at their local sports organizations. What we're talking about is that with an honest belief and a good faith effort they're engaging in their communities, as we want them to do, to help us rebuild Ontario and help us recover together.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier, but I have to say it's doubly disgusting that the government is trying to use these folks as a shield against the criticism they're getting for this nasty bill.

For days the Premier has denied the fact that his legislation has one goal, and that goal is to protect the Ford government and for-profit long-term-care homes from liability in terms of their failure to protect the seniors who were in their care. The 20 lawsuits that have been filed during this pandemic aren't targeting paramedics and they're not targeting hockey coaches; they're demanding justice from this Ford government and long-term-care chains that made millions while seniors suffered in their care. That's what this is all about.

If the Premier is sincere when he claims that he wants to provide accountability, if the minister is sincere, then will they exempt the Ford government and private long-term-care homes from the legislation?

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

Hon. Doug Downey: Is the Leader of the Opposition sincere in demonizing the good actors, in demonizing the people who are, in good faith, taking public health advice and implementing it? Is she demonizing the PSWs who are doing work every day, the cooks in the kitchens, the people who are helping them, the people who are putting themselves out there, let alone the people who are nervous about coming forward to help in our communities? Is that the effect that she wants? I cannot believe that I'm hearing her say, "Throw our workers in harm's way," when they're making a good effort, an honest effort, in good faith.

We are protecting the people of Ontario so they can contribute to our communities, like we're asking them to do, to help us recover in Ontario as we go through COVID-19.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I would say, not at all. In fact, I'm not even demonizing this Ford government; they're doing it all themselves quite well.

By the way, the minister needs to know that the person he was quoting in terms of the lawsuit says this, "We are puzzled why the government that has promised to protect nursing home residents at all costs is now focused on passing legislation that will only protect nursing home operators, their shareholders and their insurance companies."

The fact is, since this pandemic began the Premier has bent over backward to protect the vested interests in long-term care, whether it's Mike Harris sitting on the board of Chartwell or the small army of Ford government staff now lobbying for for-profit long-term-care chains to be protected. Connected Conservatives know that the Ford government will rewrite the law to ensure that they avoid any accountability.

If the Premier wants to prove otherwise, there's a simple solution: He can exempt the Ford government and these for-profit chains from this legislation. Will he do the right thing?

Interjections.

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

The Attorney General to reply.

1040

Hon. Doug Downey: I'd be curious to know if the Leader of the Opposition took my suggestion yesterday and got a second legal opinion from the Attorney General of BC, the NDP Attorney General, who brought in very similar legislation, or—and I should have thought of this yesterday, but I didn't—she could phone the Attorney General of Nova Scotia, a Liberal government. So if she doesn't trust the NDP government in BC, she could phone the Liberal government in Nova Scotia and talk about the minister's directive there. It's very similar.

We are protecting the front lines. We are protecting the people who are nervous about the inadvertent transmission of COVID. This does not provide any level of protection for criminal behaviour, for gross negligence, for not providing the necessities of life or for the deliberate failure of standard of care. This doesn't help those bad actors one little bit. In fact, it helps us get to them and make sure that they pay the price for their bad actions.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, who I don't trust is this Ford government, and neither do the families in Ontario who were devastated when they lost their loved ones in long-term care.

Residents in long-term care and their families deserve so much better than what this government is offering up. After promising an iron ring, after promising accountability, the Premier refused to make the investments needed to protect seniors in the midst of the pandemic. He has refused to call a public inquiry as well.

But he is now literally rewriting the law to protect himself and for-profit corporations and long-term-care chains from liability. Why is he rewriting the law, Speaker? Why is he rewriting the law to protect himself and those chains? From the profits that they make, they should be held accountable. These chains make a lot of money off of our long-term-care system. Why is he protecting them and not the seniors that they are supposed to be caring for?

Hon. Doug Downey: Now we're getting to the nub of it, Mr. Speaker. If you make money, you're a bad guy. That's where it comes from.

I am focused on the people who are volunteering their time. I'm focused on the people who are going to work every single day putting themselves at some risk. I am focused on the people who are in our communities fighting for our communities, helping Ontario to recover.

We are in unprecedented times. We are looking at those sectors and saying, whether it be agriculture, colleges and universities, whether it be the volunteer sector or the charity sector—there are so many people. We need people in the food banks helping those who need it the most. The NDP would have us throw them under the bus. It is shameful, Mr. Speaker.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier.

Aaron Porter is a York South–Weston resident and TTC employee. On October 4, Aaron felt unwell. He was told to stay at home and get a COVID test. He got the test two days later, but Aaron only received his results two weeks after by phone. It was negative, thankfully. Like many workplaces, Aaron was asked to bring a physical copy of the test results. He could not get it online and the telephone number he was provided was automated. Aaron could have returned to work sooner if he had received his test results.

This antiquated system makes it difficult for containing the spread of COVID and for an economic recovery. Premier, where is the plan to address the test delays that specifically hurt my community?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member very much for the question. I am assuming that you are speaking about the situation at the Humber River assessment centre where there were some people who were experiencing delays in receiving their results. However, that situation has been resolved. Ontario Health has been working with the centre, and they have put in mitigation measures to make sure that this situation doesn't happen again. But people are now able to receive the results online. There was a glitch in the system, but it has now been resolved.

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

Mr. Faisal Hassan: My question, again, is to the Premier. Mr. Speaker, my riding is a hot spot. That means residents like Aaron, many of whom are essential workers

and provide a vital service, are at a high risk of getting COVID. We need reliable, local community-based testing with quick turnaround for test results.

I would like to remind the Premier what the health minister said yesterday in the Toronto Star. She said, "If there is a need—and it sounds as if there is in your community.... We'll do whatever we can to get the resources there." Well, Mr. Speaker, there is a clear need, and my community has been begging for the province's help for months.

The health leaders in my community, from Humber River Hospital to the community health centres, are doing their best. But we need more resources. Can the minister tell Aaron and other residents of York South–Weston that we will get local community-based testing and timely results?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Yes, I can tell the gentleman that. I can tell all of the members of your community that we are responding to that need.

We have recognized that there are certain communities in the Toronto area and the GTA that have greater needs and that they can't all be resolved through the assessment centres. In fact, we have 15 completed or planned community testing events that are taking place in the north Etobicoke–Malton–Woodbridge area. Many of them have already taken place, but I can tell you that on October 14, 15 and 17, there were assessment centres that were opened in Rexdale. On October 24 and 31 and November 7, there will also be additional testing centres that are opened in Rexdale as well.

So we are responding to the need. We recognize that there needs to be some mobile, some pop-up testing in certain areas. As I said yesterday, if there is a need, we will respond to it, and we are responding to it.

WASTE DIVERSION

Mrs. Nina Tangri: My question is for the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. As we all know, the previous Liberal government failed to act when the people of Ontario asked for a more effective and user-friendly recycling program. For the last 15 years, while the previous Liberals and their new leader, Del Duca, were in power, Ontario's diversion rates stalled at just 30%. We saw them make no effort to modernize a program that was no longer working for the people of our province.

Mr. Speaker, Ontarians have suffered under the Liberal piecemeal blue box framework long enough. It is about time that a government showed true leadership on this issue. It is easy for the opposition to say that we are not doing enough to help the environment, but the progress we have already made to improve a system that was so irresponsibly neglected under the previous government suggests otherwise.

Mr. Speaker, this past government showed time and time again that they were not able to make the far-reaching changes necessary to finally give Ontarians the Blue Box Program they need and deserve. So can the Minister of—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. The Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks to the member from Mississauga–Streetsville for that excellent question. I'm pleased to give this response, Mr. Speaker. Our government is committed to implementing a Blue Box Program that is easy and accessible for all Ontarians, and one that will work to achieve the highest target waste diversions in North America.

It is my commitment as minister that, once transitioned, the Blue Box Program will continue to be convenient and accessible to all people of Ontario. This includes municipalities with populations under 5,000. If you had a blue box curbside collection system prior to the transition to producer responsibility, you will continue to have it after the transition to producer responsibility. In fact, producers will have to ensure that more communities, including in northern Ontario and Indigenous communities, have some form of service.

Mr. Speaker, I announced the proposal. We'll expand the program to apartment buildings, long-term-care homes, retirement homes, schools, municipal parks—

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

Mrs. Nina Tangri: Back to the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks: The people of this province were continually ignored by the previous government. It's frustrating to see that nothing significant was ever done to provide Ontarians with more convenient and consistent recycling options.

By not working to modernize the blue box, what the Liberals did was effectively ignore the amount of waste that was going into our landfills. The opposition loved to endorse headlines alluding that the government is ditching recycling, yet in their own environmental plan, they actually say, "The most efficient way to reduce emissions from waste is to divert it from landfills."

Ontarians deserve more than this rhetorical whiplash. What they need is a government that will put the work and the consultation in to create a system that actually works for the people of this province, and one that diverts more waste from landfills.

Can the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks provide members of this House an effective—minimizing the amount of material that ends up in our landfills?

1050

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Ontarians divert almost 50% of their residential waste through the Blue Box Program, green bins or composters in their backyards. Unfortunately, when you factor in the waste from other sources such as commercial and industrial, the diversion rate drops to about 30%. That means that about 70% of all total waste generated in our province ends up in landfills, and it has stayed that way for the past 15 years. This represents a significant loss in economic opportunities, when potentially valuable resources are thrown in the trash.

We need to do better. That's why our Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan established our waste diversion

programs on the producer responsibility model. Making producers responsible for the waste associated with their products and packaging will spur innovation from producers. In the case of the Blue Box Program, we'll provide up to \$135 million per year in relief for municipalities, and ultimately the taxpayer.

Mr. Speaker, we're expanding the list going into the blue box. We're standardizing the list so people will know throughout Ontario what will go in the blue box, and we're expanding—

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

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier. A growing chorus of anti-hate experts and concerned citizens are raising serious concerns about the Premier's decision to quietly sneak provisions giving Ford ally Charles McVety the power to grant university degrees at Canada Christian College.

Yesterday, the Premier said, "He went through the process like every other college, and the process is independent." However, CBC News today reports that Canada Christian College has not actually completed this process at all. Why would the Premier of Ontario make such a completely untrue claim?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I would ask the member to withdraw her unparliamentary remark.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The question has been placed. The parliamentary assistant will reply.

Mr. David Piccini: All private post-secondary institutions in Ontario require a thorough and rigorous organizational review in order to change names and expand degree-granting authority. This review is undertaken by the independent Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board, and we'll look forward for the review.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: McVety has a well-documented record of crossing the line into hate speech. In 2006, he was kicked off of a Christian broadcast channel for suggesting that LGBTQ people prey on children and that Haitians practise Satanism. On Twitter, McVety has called the Islamic faith "a war machine," and even invited Geert Wilders, a notorious anti-Islamic political leader, to speak at Canada Christian College, saying that Canadians should come to the campus to learn about "the threat of demographic jihad." This is the school that the Ford government wants to make into a university.

Will the Premier admit today, will anybody on that side of this House admit today that this was not the result of an independent process, but an attempt to do a favour for a political ally? Will you stop this reckless plan today?

Interjections.

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

The parliamentary assistant.

Mr. David Piccini: Again, it's the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board that reviews programming. One of the reasons we have a high-quality education system across the province of Ontario is because we lean on the expert advice of the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board. PEQAB is made up of independent experts and individuals with significant expertise and experience in the education sector.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: My question today is for the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Mr. Speaker, let me say that I appreciated, the other day, the comments of the Premier about my trail-blazing role as the first woman and openly lesbian and openly gay Premier of Ontario.

I wonder, then, if the minister could confirm for us that he supports the inclusion of all Ontarians regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, socio-economic status, ability or ethnicity in his vision of a strong, thriving post-secondary system?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant to reply.

Mr. David Piccini: I thank the member opposite for her question.

In my previous career, I worked internationally—and one of the reasons youth from across the globe choose Ontario is because of the high quality of our post-secondary education system. Regardless of background, they choose Ontario because programming is of a high quality because we rely on the expert advice of the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board.

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

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: I appreciate at least part of that answer. But now, I ask that the minister explain to the Legislature and to the people of Ontario, particularly to people in the LGBTQ+ community, young people who are questioning their sexuality, children who are raised in loving gay and lesbian families, why this government would extend the mandate of the most publicly and vocally homophobic man in Ontario. Why, in the name of all that is decent, would this minister validate the hateful, vicious, racist and homophobic rhetoric of Charles McVety by extending the reach of his Canada Christian College?

As Reverend Michael Coren wrote yesterday in iPolitics, "For many people, Charles McVety is Canada Christian College." Why, then, would this government grant that such an organization, run by a man who rejects science and evidence and is on the record espousing hate, grant university degrees in science and in arts?

Is this actually happening because of McVety's support during the 2018 election campaign? If so, how will the Conservative members explain their actions to the young people living in fear of homophobia in their constituencies?

Interjections.

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

The parliamentary assistant to reply.

Mr. David Piccini: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the inclusive world-class education system we have in the province of Ontario.

When we develop programming to respond to the labour market needs of this province, it is done with the independent assessment—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Parliamentary assistant, please conclude.

Mr. David Piccini: —with the independent assessment of the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board. It has been going on for the past 20 years in the province of Ontario, and we will continue to have a world-class education system that welcomes the world to Ontario.

ECONOMIC REOPENING AND RECOVERY

Mr. Dave Smith: Over the last few weeks, I've been meeting with small businesses across my riding. In fact, last night, I had a round table with a number of businesses. Consistently, they support the actions of this government and at the same time they keep asking us if we can give them more help offsetting the high cost associated with PPE.

Can the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction provide greater clarity on how the Main Street Recovery Act will help small businesses address this concern, and does the minister have any indication if the other parties in this House will support small business by helping to pass this legislation?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I'd like to thank the member from Peterborough-Kawartha for the question.

Small and main street businesses are the backbone of Ontario's economy. Our main street recovery plan was designed based on over 100 virtual meetings, round tables and discussions and, more importantly, the largest-ever stakeholder consultation in the history of this province.

Now, the plan draws from across government and builds on more than \$10 billion in urgent economic relief provided through the COVID-19 action plan. It also includes the Main Street Recovery Act, proposed legislation that would modernize rules to help small business, and programs like the \$1,000 main street recovery grant to fund PPE. Ontario's small business strategy completes the plan. It's a long-term framework that will help small business rebuild, reinvest and grow.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: I'm not surprised, but I am disappointed, to hear that the other parties don't want to help small business with the high cost of PPE.

Ironically, the leader of the Liberal Party, on a campaign swing through Guelph, heard the top issue facing small businesses there was—wait for it—assistance with PPE. Now, the Liberal leader has criticized the Premier for spending time this summer meeting with Ontarians. He referred to it as “campaigning.” Yet when Mr. Del Duca had his tour, it was, “Leadership, in this day and age, is actually talking to [people] in their communities”—a little bit of a discrepancy there.

Liberals in the House demand further closures and restriction measures, but at a recent nomination meeting in Halton, they stacked the room—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant can respond.

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Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, our government and our leader recognize the devastating impact that COVID-19 is having on businesses and people right across Ontario. But our government has a plan to modernize regulations and to reduce unnecessary burdens, to help more people and businesses recover from the economic effects of COVID-19 and to prepare them for the opportunities of the future.

The Better for People, Smarter for Business Act will help build a government that works for the people of Ontario through the pandemic and beyond. Our government is creating the right economic environment that will allow people and businesses to focus on recovering, rebuilding and re-emerging from this crisis stronger than before.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. Once again, the Premier is shamelessly using the pandemic to push through legislation that is driven by his own agenda and that will do absolutely nothing to help Ontario recover from COVID-19. The government’s meddling in local decision-making by scrapping ranked ballots came as a complete surprise to Ontario municipalities, especially London, the only city to have used this voting system.

London’s leadership in running a successful ranked-ballot election in 2018 has been recognized across Canada, but the Premier’s interference means that not only are the one-time expenses in tabulator algorithms, additional auditors and voter education now lost, but the city will face new costs to revert back to first past the post. How exactly does overriding local democracy and forcing London to abandon ranked ballots save municipalities money?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Milton, the parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Parm Gill: I want to thank the member opposite for that important question. It is important that the way people vote in the federal election and the way people vote in the provincial election is the same way that people vote in the municipal election. Our government is committed to enhancing consistency in all elections. That’s why, earlier

this year, we responded to a request by the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario and made changes to create a single voter list that would be used both in the municipal and in the provincial elections.

As noted by the Chief Electoral Officer, this change was intended to reduce the need to make corrections on election day, shorten wait times and save municipalities money, especially during some of the most difficult times that we’re going through right now with COVID-19, where resources could be put to use in other areas to help local constituents.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Upon hearing of the government’s surprise move to end ranked ballots, the mayor of Kingston said this, “I’m disappointed for the residents of Kingston (who) spent time and effort in 2018, learning about ranked ballots, understanding the differences in that system, weighing out the advantages and disadvantages, and, ultimately, casting a vote (for) what they thought was best.”

Yesterday, the Premier said these ballots were confusing. I question how, when the Premier won his leadership on a ranked-ballot system. Without it I may very well be asking Premier Elliott a question right now, but I guess the Premier is just a little confused about how he actually ended up in the position that he is in. Just because they’re confusing for him doesn’t mean he should scrap them for all the people in Ontario who actually understand them and support them.

Why is the government using the pandemic to get rid of ranked ballots when voters in Kingston voted massively in favour of them?

Mr. Parm Gill: I want to thank the member opposite for the question. Let me get this on the record: 443 out of the 444 municipalities in Ontario, during the last 2018 municipal election, used the first-past-the-post system. The city of London was the only municipality to have used ranked ballots in Ontario, and their municipal election—get this—cost \$515,000 more than the previous election. That’s 40% higher, Mr. Speaker. And listen to this: They got the exact same election results that they would have under the previous system.

I also would like to remind the member, since he mentioned the city of Kingston: As outlined in the city’s staffing report in 2018, the city of Kingston projected a 2022 municipal election would cost \$1 million more under the ranked ballots. Mr. Speaker, we—

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. The House will come to order.

The next question.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Mr. Mike Schreiner: My question is for the Premier. I’ve been told that the Premier gave PC MPPs a “For the

People” sign for their desks. After the Premier’s latest attack on local democracy, I’m wondering if they’ve changed the signs to “Doug knows best.”

The people of this province do not need the Premier to dictate to them how they should conduct local democratic elections. I’m confident that people can decide that themselves. And if they choose ranked ballots, they will choose a system that leads to more civility, something I believe we all need in politics.

Speaker, my question is for the Premier: If ranked ballots are good enough to elect the Premier as leader of his party, why are they not good enough to elect mayors and municipal councillors?

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

Mr. Parm Gill: As I pointed out earlier, our proposed changes would bring predictability to municipal elections. It would bring consistency to municipal elections. We would vote the same way federally, the same way we would vote provincially and the same way we would vote municipally, Mr. Speaker.

I am proud of the fact that our government has a collaborative relationship with municipal partners that is unprecedented in Ontario. Just this year, under the leadership of our Premier, we signed a safe restart agreement which will provide \$4 billion in emergency funding to our municipal partners. Our government also passed legislation that gives municipalities more say on the location of green energy projects and landfills. This collaborative spirit is not shared, obviously, by the opposition who voted against all of these measures, unfortunately.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, I find the parliamentary assistant’s answer shocking. That the government actually thinks that they’re going to impose on municipalities and take away their democratic right to determine how they’re going to elect their local councils is just wrong. I’m also quite offended, Speaker, that the government keeps putting a price tag on democracy. It cheapens democracy to do that.

The fixed cost for the ranked-ballot elections in London was 10 cents an elector. Through you, Speaker, can the parliamentary assistant explain to the people of Ontario how 10 cents is too much to spend on improving democracy?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. The parliamentary assistant to reply.

Mr. Parm Gill: I want to thank the member opposite for that question. For the member’s benefit, let me translate what 10 cents per elector looks like in real dollars. That works out to \$515,000 in additional costs. That is 40% higher, literally to receive the exact same results that they would have received under the previous process.

What we’re trying to do on this side of the House is make the process consistent. This is exactly how we vote in our federal elections. This is the same way we vote in our provincial elections. And it will be the same way that

voters in Ontario can vote in a municipal election, while respecting the taxpayers’ dollars.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: When the previous Liberal government was in power, they spent a lot of time touting their carbon tax, but had very little to show for it in terms of real environmental outcomes. Ontarians weren’t fooled. They knew that this previous Liberal government’s carbon tax was nothing more than government cash grabs that did little to protect our environment or prepare us for the future impact of climate change.

In fact, even the Liberal’s own environment minister said that their 2017 pricing scheme was not a real solution to address Canada’s greenhouse gas emissions or meaningfully address the issue of Ontario’s changing climate.

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Mr. Speaker, Ontario has lacked a clear direction when it comes to fighting climate change, and this is all thanks to the previous Liberal government, backed by the NDP, who cared more about frivolously spending taxpayers’ dollars than coming up with a serious strategy. If there is a general consensus, it seems, about finding effective and affordable ways to tackle climate change—

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

The response? Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: I thank the member for Mississauga—Erin Mills for the question. My ministry is committed to achieving Ontario’s emissions reduction target and preparing for the impacts of climate change. We will continue to work hard towards this in a way that is transparent and respectful of hard-earned taxpayer dollars. We announced that we would be introducing an important initiative, the first-ever broad multi-sector climate impact assessment, to better understand where and how climate change is likely to affect communities, economies and the natural environment.

We recognize the importance of gathering expertise to make more informed decisions. We have selected a consulting team, led by the Climate Risk Institute, to conduct the province’s first-ever multi-sector climate change impact assessment. As part of this work, the institute will be reviewing a variety of information, such as climate data, land use patterns and socioeconomic projections. This will serve as our foundation to develop appropriate climate change resilience measures—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. And the supplementary question?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thanks, Minister. Ontario’s climate is changing, with more frequent and extreme events, such as severe rain, ice and windstorms, prolonged heat waves and milder winters. Climate change should not be made a partisan issue. Instead of crusading against the government, both the Liberals and the NDP should step up to the plate so that we can work together to ensure that Ontario maintains both a healthy environment and a healthy economy.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Ontario want a government that prioritizes real action, that will lead Ontario’s fight

against climate change and make up for years of neglect by the previous government. They want a plan that will protect and prepare communities against the impacts of extreme weather events. Can the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks tell us how exactly the impact assessment will take into account the different environmental considerations of all provinces, regions and communities?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks again for that question from the member. In 2018, insured damage for severe weather events across Canada reached \$1.9 billion. The Insurance Bureau of Canada estimates that for every dollar paid out in insurance claims for homes and businesses, Canadian governments pay out \$3 to recover public infrastructure damaged by severe weather.

We know that we need to strengthen the province's resilience to the impacts of climate change. We recognize that in order to do that, we need to find the environmental approach that fits all provinces, regions and communities. The climate change impact assessment will examine the unique geographies, economies, municipalities and communities of the province. It will also examine the impact on a number of key themes, including infrastructure, food and agriculture, people and communities, natural resources, ecosystems, the environment, businesses and the economy.

Mr. Speaker, we are committed to promoting integrated, tangible environmental solutions that tackle climate change, address local priorities and support communities as they work to do their part—

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

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Nelson is a grade 8 student in my riding who is in virtual school. Nelson has ADHD and has been doing brilliantly in a program that ensures he has lots of one-on-one time with a teacher or an EA, and that allows him to follow his IEP. As of today, however, Nelson still doesn't have a teacher in his online class. That means that either his parents have to stop their work to act as his teacher or he joins a regular class of 35 kids without the attention or the IEP that he needs.

It is almost November. This is brutally unfair to Nelson and his family. What is this government going to do to ensure that Nelson gets the education he needs and deserves?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you for the question. The basis of the question underscores the importance of quality in teaching. It's why, just days ago, the Premier—supported by the trustees, public school board associations and parent councils—has rescinded regulation 274 to allow the principals of those schools to hire expeditiously, because, as the member noted, that child should have a teacher. I think we all endeavour to ensure a child at this juncture has an educator to lead them in instruction.

I understand the frustration of that parent and of the member opposite. It's why we gave our school boards an additional influx of money, an additional \$100 million to hire more educators. It's why school boards have hired north of 2,000 educators.

If we seek to assist school boards in hiring people for promotion or hiring them for supply, we should ask our federation partners—and I ask the member in her supplementary to agree, that we should rescind the 50-day rule to allow retirees back into the classroom, after firm opposition by the Ontario Teachers' Federation.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: My question is back to the Premier—but this minister thinks they've done enough? He is completely ignoring the stress that students and parents and teachers have been put under when it comes to online learning.

In the community of Goulais River, north of Sault Ste. Marie, parents are still driving their students to the schoolyard to access Internet so kids can download their lesson. As we heard, students in Toronto are still waiting for teachers to be assigned to them for virtual learning as of last week and despite registering in August.

I want to share one other one: Bella in grade 4 has to stay home because of an autoimmune issue. I just heard from her parents today. Her teacher is spending 90% of her time helping little kids deal with their tech issues rather than teaching the curriculum. Teachers are trying their best to make this work for students, but they're being forced into some impossible positions thanks to this government's lack of support.

Speaker, while the government sits on over \$9 billion in COVID relief money, families are struggling with online learning. When are they going to act to support them?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The member opposite's solution is not to enhance online learning; it's actually to scrap it altogether. For Bella's parents, I wonder if they knew that her member would rather her not even have the choice of online learning, how she would feel knowing that that child clearly ought to be home given her own personal circumstance.

It is this government who stood alone in the defence of online learning in the negotiations. We created an online learning system that has not and never been created in the province or in this country. We lead. The Premier has demonstrated a commitment to innovation and pedagogy by providing parents a credible online learning program. We mandated funding and training of every educator. We provided \$69 million to hire virtual principals. We provided \$30 million to procure over 30,000 new pieces of technology, and we've ensured Internet is extended to every school by next September.

We are firmly committed to this digital pivot. We will do everything we can to support our school boards—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The House will come to order. The next question.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Minister of Long-Term Care. There are still seven long-term-care homes in Ontario with double-digit COVID-19 cases today.

Yesterday, the minister said that long-term-care residents were not being moved out of crowded homes and four-bed ward rooms because “they have a moral right to their home.” Then she also said, “We considered decanting residents”—decanting. I didn’t think the minister could exceed comparing COVID-19 to a bad flu season, but she succeeded.

Fairview Nursing Home right now is putting up wall dividers between COVID-positive residents and COVID-negative residents. The minister couldn’t answer yesterday whether she thought that was a safe practice. Given her training, I would expect that she’d be able to answer that question easily. Does the minister think that putting up wall dividers is the safest way to protect residents from the spread of COVID-19?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Clearly, Mr. Speaker, the member can appreciate that the government inherited a system after 15 years that was in peril. I know, to the residents of that nursing home, it doesn’t matter to them that the government inherited a broken system. It doesn’t matter to them that the previous government hadn’t made investments in long-term care for many years. What they want is their government to move quickly to take action. That is exactly what we did when it came to long-term care before the pandemic hit, and it is what we’re doing after the pandemic hit.

To the member’s question: Is it the best choice? Obviously not, Mr. Speaker. But that’s not what we want. We want a system that treats all our seniors properly. That is why we are building so many long-term-care homes in this province. That is why we moved to Ontario health teams, a blanket of care for our seniors. Whether it’s in the hospital or long-term care or whether it’s home care, we want the best system possible. We will continue to work on that, despite having inherited a system that was so broken.

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

Mr. John Fraser: If it’s not the best choice, then maybe you could have planned for another.

In Ottawa’s West End Villa, where 20 residents have died since September—I mentioned it yesterday; a home that’s less than 15 minutes’ drive from the minister’s constituency office. Donna Mavis was told by West End Villa that she couldn’t take her sister, June, out of the home earlier in the summer. In August, June got COVID-19. She survived. But here’s what June said: “People were dying all around me. It was frightening.” After this months-long struggle, June went home yesterday.

Since the minister wants to talk about the moral rights of residents, through you, Speaker: What is the minister’s moral obligation to the residents of West End Villa?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I would suggest to the member that it is the obligation of all members of this Legislature, all of us who have been elected to this place, to do our best to make sure that the people of the province of Ontario, whether they’re seniors in long-term-care homes or patients in hospitals, receive the top and the best care that they possibly can.

It is without a doubt we inherited a system that was broken, but that is what we started off—almost immediately after the 2018 election—to fix, with significant new funding for our long-term-care homes.

When the pandemic hit—in fact, before the pandemic hit, the Minister of Health brought in place a new system of Ontario health teams to provide a blanket of care because we knew that there were shortcomings in the system that were left to us by the previous Liberal government.

To his constituent June, I say to you: I am very sorry. I am very sorry on behalf of all parliamentarians. You expected better and we are doing all that we can to ensure that you get better. It is not just about money. It’s not just about new builds. It’s not just about PSWs. It is about a commitment to making sure that long-term care is the best that it can be from now and into the future. We won’t let them—

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

The next question.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Premier. The TTC must purchase more buses, streetcars and subways to provide service and address overcrowding, and the decision on how much they’re going to purchase is today. Here’s the problem: The TTC doesn’t have enough money to buy the vehicles it needs. Toronto needs 1,400 buses, but it can only afford 300. Toronto needs 80 subway cars, but it’s ordering none—none—because this government is refusing to pay its fair share and help out. Toronto has come to the table and the federal government has come to the table, but this government is nowhere.

Premier, can you commit today to helping the TTC buy the vehicles our city needs so transit riders can get from A to B at an affordable price?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Transportation (GTA).

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you to the member for the question. I think it’s unequivocal, the fact that the Premier has been the strongest advocate for public transportation in the province of Ontario. We are investing \$28.5 billion to expand our subway system, not to mention the fact that the Premier himself stood with conviction to negotiate a good deal for Ontario.

The members opposite accused him of giving in. He did not. He negotiated further, which led to \$4 billion being provided to municipalities, with up to \$2 billion provided to transportation agencies to support them during this difficult time.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan. Supplementary.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: My question is for the Premier. The workers at the Bombardier plant in Thunder Bay need our help. Hundreds have been laid off and more job losses are coming. Toronto needs more transit vehicles, and we can build them in my riding. That's a made-in-Ontario solution right in front of us. With provincial funding, Toronto's order would be much bigger, and that means more jobs. Yet this government has dropped the ball on funding. They have been silent.

I've asked this question before, but it needs to be asked again: When will this government finally step up and fund Toronto's much-needed transit vehicle order so Bombardier workers can keep their jobs?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much to the member for the question. Something that is very important to all of our colleagues, particularly our colleagues in northern Ontario, is the preservation of good, well-paying jobs. Mr. Speaker, Metrolinx put in an order earlier this year to the tune of \$100 million for additional GO Transit cars. We have invested a historic amount in public transportation across the province of Ontario, which will certainly require additional vehicles, an additional fleet to service. We will continue to collaborate with the city of Toronto and York region to start construction as quickly as possible so that we can continue to order additional vehicles and fleets.

CAPITAL MARKETS MODERNIZATION TASKFORCE

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: My question is for the Minister of Finance. In February, this government created a task force to provide specific recommendations to change Ontario's publicly traded stock market and capital markets. The task force was called the Capital Markets Modernization Taskforce and was chaired by downtown Toronto lawyer Walied Soliman, who practises in special situations.

In July 2020, the task force released 47 proposals that it provided to this government. On September 3, 2020, the Canadian Securities Administrators, whose mandate is to harmonize capital markets across Canada, responded with their concerns that the task force ignored having Ontario adopt the passport system that harmonizes our capital markets with the rest of the country's and also identified 10 proposals it had concerns with.

Can the minister tell us if he plans on adopting all 47 proposals put forward by his task force that was chaired by Mr. Soliman?

Hon. Rod Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. This work is important work, and I appreciate her giving me an opportunity to highlight it.

Ontario's capital markets are an important part of the infrastructure of our success, not just now but into the future. Our government recognized that the evolution of

those capital markets, as with the evolution of capital markets globally, was an important area of focus. That's why we did appoint the task force.

That task force has provided preliminary recommendations, but as is our approach in government, we wanted to make sure we consulted. I asked that the broader community, including the national regulator, have the opportunity to comment on that. We're awaiting the final comments and we'll look to those recommendations.

But, Mr. Speaker, the work of the capital markets task force is aligned to the idea of this government. We want to create an environment where capital can be raised, but also where investors can be protected. When those recommendations are final, I am sure that I'll bring them back to the House, and I'll look forward to—

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

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: As a woman of mixed ethnicity, I found one proposal of the task force curious. The minister previously stated that the goal of the task force was to reduce regulatory burdens. Proposal 19 of the task force calls for the Ontario government to adopt a policy introduced earlier this year by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's federal government. This proposal calls for government-mandated gender and race quotas that all companies listed on the stock market would have to comply with.

The task force also calls for 10-year term limits for corporate directors, the suggestion being that people like me can't make it onto a corporate board without your help. This specific proposal would actually increase regulatory burdens on companies listed on the stock market rather than reduce them.

Can the minister tell us whether he will be moving forward with this new regulatory burden on business and apply government-mandated gender and race quotas that all companies listed on the stock market would have to abide by?

Hon. Rod Phillips: No, Mr. Speaker, and again, I appreciate the chance—the member highlighted the members of the task force. I would like to do so as well: Cindy Tripp, who is the founding partner and managing director of GMP Securities; Melissa Kennedy, who was the chief legal officer at Sun Life; Wes Hall, a founder and executive chair of Kingsdale Advisors and the founder of the BlackNorth Initiative as well; Rupert Duchesne, a former CEO at Aimia; and also, of course, Walied Soliman, as she mentioned.

Mr. Speaker, all of these recommendations will come before the minister. We will see what the recommendations back from the broader community are. But, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that we look at all of these options. They are contained in a very consultative report, and we'll present them when they're ready. I look forward to reforming the capital markets.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: The former GM plant site in my riding of St. Catharines is being tested for toxic

materials for the second time. The residents of St. Catharines had to wait almost six months—six months—for the results of this testing: a study that found high levels of carcinogenic PCBs leaking into the Twelve Mile Creek. These new tests need to be expedited. Concerned residents of St. Catharines deserve up-to-date information.

Will this ministry commit to expediting tests for the former GM lands in St. Catharines to provide the answers to the neighbourhoods in the area?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thank you very much to the member opposite for that question. We had a quick conversation yesterday regarding that, and I know you had a meeting with ministry staff the other day regarding the GM property.

The health and safety of Ontarians is front and foremost in the Ministry of the Environment. We're going to continue to support the city of St. Catharines in addressing the residents' concerns. We are conducting water sampling, we're taking air sampling as well, and we're looking for impacts downstream, on which we'll act if there are some that are beyond legal limits.

We are planning additional water sampling in the areas following a rainfall, Mr. Speaker, and we will continue to do so to ensure that, in collaboration with the city of St. Catharines. We will continue our monitoring of the situation to ensure that the residents around the area, including all the residents of St. Catharines, are maintained and kept safe, ensuring that the environmental standards set forth by the government of Ontario are held to the highest—

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

The supplementary question.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Concerned residents are asking for asbestos testing to be done on the grounds and the water surrounding the former GM site. Everyone sitting on that side of the House knows how deadly asbestos is and how just one interaction with it can lead to lifelong problems and can be fatal. The Minister of the Environment has said that it is the responsibility of the Minister of Labour. The Minister of Labour has said that they cannot investigate unless the site is active. Which ministry will it be?

The residents of St. Catharines deserve a better answer. The residing residents want the former GM property cleaned up and rid of contamination. The mayor and the city councillors want the former GM lands cleaned up once and for all. Above all, the community, the residents have raised concerns about asbestos poisoning.

Will this government commit here today to make an exception to include asbestos in their water testing so that the residents and the city of St. Catharines can move forward and development can please take place?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks again for that question. We're more than willing to continue to work with the city of St. Catharines on issues surrounding the GM site. We do have air monitoring to assess for asbestos coming from

the dust piles and the rubble. The member opposite is correct: It's not a labour issue if there's no work being done on the site.

We will work with the city of St. Catharines and GM to ensure that if the land comes up for sale, the record of site condition is at above-board standards. I'm more than happy to sit down and meet with the mayor of St. Catharines to have a further discussion on this issue, as to how we could support the city of St. Catharines in ensuring that the GM site is safe for the residents of St. Catharines.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our question period for this morning. This House stands in recess until 1 p. m.

The House recessed from 1133 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ONTARIO REBUILDING AND RECOVERY ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 SUR LA RECONSTRUCTION ET LA RELANCE EN ONTARIO

Ms. Mulroney moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 222, An Act to amend various Acts in respect of transportation-related matters / Projet de loi 222, Loi modifiant diverses lois à l'égard de questions relatives au transport.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll invite the Minister of Transportation to briefly explain her bill, if she wishes to do so.

L'hon. Caroline Mulroney: Je suis heureuse de prendre la parole pour dire quelques mots sur la Loi de 2020 sur la reconstruction et la relance en Ontario, une loi modifiant diverses lois en matière de transport, que j'ai présentée il y a quelques instants.

I am pleased to rise and say a few words about the Ontario Rebuilding and Recovery Act—An Act to amend various Acts in respect of transportation-related matters—that I introduced a few moments ago.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges. It has had a devastating effect on our economy. Canada's GDP is forecasted to shrink by 6.6% this year. Job losses have accrued across many sectors. This year over the February-to-May period, Ontario employment declined by almost 1.2 million, the largest three-month employment decline on record.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. I understand there's a ministerial statement coming as well. Is that the case? Okay. You have another opportunity. Thank you.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE INFRASTRUCTURES DE TRANSPORT

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Once again, I'll recognize the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Mr. Speaker, I'll pick up where I left off.

The good news is that we are recovering, with employment up 168,000 in September, building on 670,000 over the previous three months. But the road to full recovery will be a long one. Jan De Silva of the Toronto Region Board of Trade said it well: "No community, workplace or industry has been left untouched by the impact of this pandemic, or the measures taken to prevent its spread."

The pandemic has also reshaped our society, and the changes will be felt for years to come. Speaker, it's not enough to contain the spread of the virus; we must also lay the foundation for our economic recovery. The Premier often says that this pandemic has revealed the "Ontario spirit," and I couldn't agree more. People and businesses across this province have gone above and beyond to help and support each other. And our government is determined to do our part by creating jobs and getting Ontario back on the path to prosperity.

History has shown us the importance of governments responding to hardship by creating jobs—the New Deal; after World War II; and, most recently, Canada's Economic Action Plan, after the recession of 2008-09.

En 2020, alors que nous sommes confrontés à un nouveau défi, provoqué par la pandémie de la COVID-19, la solution continue à être l'infrastructure. Notre gouvernement a un plan d'infrastructure de 144 milliards de dollars sur 10 ans. Mais nous devons réduire la bureaucratie afin de pouvoir réaliser les bénéfices économiques plus rapidement et stimuler efficacement notre économie maintenant. Il est temps de faire construire l'Ontario, et c'est l'objet de ce projet de loi.

Mr. Speaker, in 2020, as we face a new challenge brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the solution continues to be infrastructure. Our government has a 10-year \$144-billion infrastructure plan. But we need to cut red tape so that we can realize the economic benefits faster and effectively stimulate our economy now. It's time to get Ontario building, and that's what this proposed legislation is all about.

Infrastructure creates jobs. It has been estimated that every \$100 million that we invest in public infrastructure supports \$114 million in real GDP. Our four priority transit projects in the GTA are expected to support up to 20,000 jobs during their construction. It's time to expand that sort of job creation to other parts of Ontario.

We need to build—but not just anything. We need infrastructure that connects our cities, improves our

quality of life and brightens our economic future. Highways, transit, long-term-care facilities, broadband—these are the investments that will make a difference in the lives of millions.

Nous devons construire, mais pas n'importe quoi. Nous avons besoin d'infrastructures qui relieront nos villes, amélioreront notre qualité de vie et éclaireront notre avenir économique. Les autoroutes, les transports en commun, les établissements de soins de longue durée, l'Internet à haute vitesse : ce sont les investissements qui feront une différence dans la vie de millions de personnes.

But all too often, burdensome red tape delays these kinds of projects. That frustrates people, and it hurts our economy.

We took the first step with the Building Transit Faster Act and the Transit-Oriented Communities Act, which came into force earlier this year. Those acts will help us eliminate roadblocks that have delayed major transit projects in the past, and create integrated, mixed-use communities around our new stations. But they only apply to our four priority transit projects in the GTA.

The rest of Ontario needs infrastructure built faster too, and now more than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic has made addressing those delays even more urgent. We've heard from municipalities that want to make transit-oriented communities a priority. They want us to help them get infrastructure built in their cities faster. So our government is acting on these calls.

Le reste de l'Ontario a également besoin d'infrastructures construites plus rapidement, aujourd'hui plus que jamais. La pandémie de la COVID-19 a rendu encore plus urgent le traitement de ces retards. Nous avons entendu des municipalités qui veulent faire des communautés axées sur le transport en commun une priorité. Elles veulent que nous les aidions à faire construire plus rapidement des infrastructures dans leurs villes. Notre gouvernement répond à ces appels.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to give a brief overview of our proposed measures, but before I do, I want to state very clearly that our intention is always to work collaboratively towards consensus. Like the Building Transit Faster Act, these proposed measures would give us a backstop to prevent significant delays if we are unable to reach an agreement with our partners to deliver major projects. But we remain committed to collaboration with municipalities, Indigenous communities and organizations, the private sector and others.

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The proposed Ontario Rebuilding and Recovery Act contains three pillars, and I will touch on them briefly now. First, we propose to amend the Building Transit Faster Act. These amendments would enable the extension of measures in that act, as appropriate, to other provincial transit projects by providing regulation-making authority to name such projects. Second, to support the accelerated and streamlined delivery of provincial highway projects we are proposing to strengthen enforcement through amendments to the Public Service Works on Highways Act for provisions related to the relocation of utilities on

highway projects. These changes would add a provision for a court order if a utility company fails to comply with a direction to relocate, just like the measures that exist in the Building Transit Faster Act. Third, we are proposing to extend through regulation the measures contained in the Transit-Oriented Communities Act to other provincial transit initiatives, including GO rail expansion and light rail projects.

Finally, I will say a few words about some of the non-legislative aspects of this proposal. As part of our Broadband and Cellular Action Plan, led by the Minister of Infrastructure, our government is supporting efforts to identify and remove policy and regulatory barriers to broadband infrastructure deployment. To that end, the Ministry of Infrastructure is funding the expansion of broadband in communities of need across the province and will be exploring policy levers that support more private sector investment to accelerate broadband expansion.

Dans le cadre de notre Plan d'action de l'Ontario pour l'accès aux services à large bande et au réseau cellulaire, dirigé par la ministre de l'Infrastructure, notre gouvernement soutient les efforts visant à identifier et à supprimer les obstacles politiques et réglementaires au déploiement des infrastructures de services à large bande. À cette fin, le ministère de l'Infrastructure finance l'expansion des services à haute vitesse dans les communautés qui en ont besoin dans toute la province et explorera les leviers politiques qui soutiennent davantage d'investissements du secteur privé pour accélérer l'expansion des services à haute vitesse.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing will be taking steps to help expedite municipal infrastructure projects. He will be consulting with municipalities to better understand the challenges that they face and to identify potential new powers to grant and/or delegate to municipalities to accelerate the delivery of local infrastructure projects.

The Minister of Long-Term Care will be looking at ways to get more beds built faster by speeding up municipal approvals for development and redevelopment of long-term-care homes. To that end, we are proposing to help address zoning and site plan approval concerns for priority long-term-care-home development. And to help us do this, we recognize that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has existing authority to make zoning orders under the Planning Act.

But, Mr. Speaker, none of this can be achieved without a strong skilled trades and professional workforce. That's why the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development is working to help workers and employers seize opportunities by increasing apprentice registration and training opportunities through major infrastructure projects. This will help us increase the skilled trades and professional workforce pipeline.

Les mesures proposées contribueraient à rendre l'Ontario plus concurrentiel et plus branché, tout en augmentant le nombre de métiers spécialisés et de professionnels et en créant des collectivités plus saines, plus sûres et plus prospères. Ils nous aideront à construire

pas seulement des infrastructures, mais une province plus forte et plus résiliente.

These proposed measures would help make Ontario more competitive and connected while growing the skilled trades and professional workforce and creating healthier, safer and more prosperous communities. They will help us build; not just infrastructure, but a stronger and more resilient province.

Across the province, Ontarians are doing their part, from the front-line health care workers who each and every day work to protect the health and safety of Ontarians, to those in our own lives who are taking steps necessary to reduce the spread of COVID-19, and to those of us here in this Legislature who have the responsibility to navigate this difficult moment.

With this bill that I have introduced today, we can take the steps that are necessary to help build a brighter economic future for Ontario. I look forward to the debate on this bill in the coming days and weeks.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the Minister of Transportation for a summary of the new bill, the Ontario Rebuilding and Recovery Act. I have a copy here. I've glanced at it, and over the coming hours and days, I will look at it a lot more closely.

I will provide some initial remarks. There is no question that transit is critical to our work to improve the livability of our region, tackle congestion and help us move out of the economic challenges we are facing so that we can recover well. There is no question about that. It is a wonderful concept, the green new deal, where we are looking at how we create new jobs, green our economy and build livable cities at the same time. There is lot of potential for transit investment and transit infrastructure to achieve those very important goals.

I do want to address some of the matters that came up around the job component. There are things that can be done now to increase the number of jobs, especially the number of good jobs, that can be created through transit construction.

Number one: This government should integrate community benefits agreements into new transit projects, the four priority transit projects, as well as additional ones so that good jobs can be created locally, and marginalized people who live in nearby communities can have access to those good jobs. It requires leadership from the trades and from the provincial government to move forward on that ambitious plan, and I hope that this government incorporates that very important concept into your work with transit.

We have the experience with the Eglinton Crosstown where community benefits agreements were incorporated into that infrastructure project. While the talk is lofty, the results are not where they need to be. The target to hire people locally and get them into the trades—they're not being met by Metrolinx. My hope is that this government can learn from that experience and really factor in that job piece when it looks at these additional projects.

The second piece when we're talking about jobs and economic recovery and transit is that we don't need to wait

for these new transit projects to be built. This government can, right now, move towards creating good jobs in the transit sector. The key way of doing that can be to help influence a decision that is being made right now at the TTC.

The TTC right now is deciding how many subways, streetcars, Wheel-Trans buses, and buses they need in order to keep our current system functioning. There is a request from the TTC that much of the fleet is made in the Thunder Bay plant so we can have made-in-Ontario subways and streetcars help the city of Thunder Bay and then also help the city of Toronto get around.

When we're talking about jobs and using transit to rebuild our economy, my request is that the provincial government also look into how we can create jobs in the sector now, and one way to do that is to help the TTC. This afternoon is a great time to move forward on that.

I do have some additional comments on the Building Transit Faster Act piece, as well as the transit-oriented communities piece. When we're talking about transit-oriented communities, there is definitely a benefit. It is wise to increase density around transit stations. We support it.

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My request is that there is proper consultation with nearby residents, including a meaningful environmental assessment, so that residents know what is at stake and businesses know what is at stake when there's new construction and new residential development happening in their neighbourhood.

There should be additional funding to provide for the services, from schools to child care to parks, to accommodate the influx of people that will come with transit-oriented communities, as well as a real move towards integrating affordable housing and inclusionary zoning into these developments, so that people who are lower-income or middle-income can also afford to have the benefit of living near a transit station as well.

There's a lot to say: When it comes to the piece around building transit faster, I ask you to provide evidence that indicates that speeding up the expropriations process and running over municipal rights-of-way actually speeds up transit. I think there are other ways of doing it. Don't flip-flop on your transit project, and provide the funding. At this point, you haven't provided the funding yet for the four priority projects. They're the real reasons how we can speed up transit in this region.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's an honour to rise and respond to the minister's statement. I've just received a copy of the bill. I'll be reading it over the next few days and providing more detailed responses.

I'd like to take a moment to respond to the minister's statement. The minister and the government seem to be focused on building back faster. I would encourage them to build back smarter and better.

What do I mean by that, Speaker? First of all, if we're going to successfully build smart transit in this province, we have to adequately consult and connect with communities. I brought this up in response to the associate

minister's comments earlier in the week when I talked about how in my riding—and I know it's not just my riding—Metrolinx had proposed to build a transfer power substation in a highly used public park as part of this "build back faster" agenda. Luckily, the community spoke out against it, and they moved it down the tracks to a more appropriate location. But now our community is worried that they're going to cut off vehicle transportation and all the railroad crossings in the whole western part of Guelph. Can you imagine that, your whole community being cut off? These are the kinds of reasons it's so important to consult with communities first. Everybody in my community wants all-day, two-way, electrified GO. They just want it built right.

Another example of this is the Jane-Finch community. The Jane-Finch community was promised a community centre, then it looked like it was taken away, and now it looks like it might be promised back after the community spoke out against it. I would encourage the government to properly plan and properly consult with communities.

The second point I want to make is that the minister talked about building highways faster. I'm assuming that probably means the GTA West highway—the highway they're fast-tracking; the highway for which they completely gutted the Environmental Assessment Act in order to build faster; a highway that's going to cost \$6 billion, pave over parts of the greenbelt and pave over 2,000 acres of prime farmland—the kind of farmland we need for our farmers to grow food to feed us.

We've talked about this so much in the pandemic, the importance of supporting local Ontario farmers. One of the ways you support local Ontario farmers is, you don't pave over their farmland for a highway that's going to save people 30 seconds. The reason the previous government shelved this highway was because it didn't make sense to spend \$6 billion to save commuters 30 seconds. Why not build transit? Why not prioritize transit over a new 400-series highway?

The third point I want to make is that if we're going to partner with municipalities, we need to provide municipalities with funding support to operate transit. That's actually one of the biggest financial challenges municipalities have faced throughout this pandemic. But it was a challenge prior to the pandemic as well, Speaker.

If we're going to build more transit, we have to make sure that transit is affordable and that it can be operated in a sustainable and affordable way. That is why we've been calling for the province to put in 50% of the operating costs of municipal transit, to make transit affordable and accessible to more people, to make sure our existing transit works better, and is smarter and faster and more reliable.

The government can do that right now. As a matter of fact, I've been told that there's a budget coming up in a couple of weeks. If the government is truly committed to improving transit and building transit-oriented communities, then the budget should contain operating funds for municipalities to help cover transit costs to make it more affordable.

I'll be providing the minister with detailed comments because I do believe in building transit. If the government

is serious about building transit the right way, the proper way, and funding it properly and prioritizing transit over highways, I'm happy to work with them on that, because we know public transit is good for our economy. We know it is good for improving the quality of people's lives. We know it reduces gridlock and climate pollution, and it makes sense.

PETITIONS

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I do have a petition signed by people from across Windsor and Essex county. It's entitled "Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I think this is a fair petition. I agree with it, and I'm going to sign it and send it down to the table officers.

FAMILY LAW

Ms. Donna Skelly: My petition is entitled "Bill 207, Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act, 2020."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas family law disputes in Ontario are often time-consuming and onerous matters for families involved; and

"Whereas the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act includes common-sense changes to simplify Ontario's family law system, allowing parents and guardians to spend less time on paperwork and court appearances and more of their time making plans to support and care for their children; and

"Whereas, if passed, the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act would simplify and modernize the system making it easier for families and loved ones to resolve disputes; and

"Whereas, if passed, Bill 207 would:

—make the family law appeals process clearer and easier to navigate;

—harmonize Ontario's family laws with federal legislation, to make it easier for Ontarians to navigate the system and understand their rights;

—allow parents and caregivers to request certified copies of child support notices made by the online Child Support Service, so child support amounts can be more easily managed or enforced outside the province; and

—remove the requirement for family arbitrators to file arbitration award reports with the ministry, saving both time and money;

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

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario" vote on and "pass the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act."

I will affix my signature to this document and give it to the usher.

1330

PHARMACARE

Ms. Jessica Bell: This petition is entitled "Universal Pharmacare for All Ontarians."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas prescription medications are a part of health care, and people shouldn't have to empty their wallets or rack up credit card bills to get the medicines they need;

"Whereas over 2.2 million Ontarians don't have any prescription drug coverage and one in four ... don't take their medications as prescribed because" ... "the cost...;

"Whereas one in five parents reported their own child being"—I'm going to skip that one.

"Whereas Canada urgently needs universal and comprehensive national pharmacare;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support a universal provincial pharmacare plan for all Ontarians."

I support this petition and I'll be giving it to the usher.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I have a petition from some constituents.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government's plan to ramp up gas-fired power plants will result in a more than 300% increase in electricity industry greenhouse gas pollution by 2025; and

"Whereas this planned increase in greenhouse gas pollution will make it impossible for the province to meet its already weak pollution reduction targets; and

"Whereas this will nullify a third of the greenhouse gas reductions achieved by phasing out coal; and

"Whereas we can meet our electricity needs and our climate targets by relying on energy efficiency, solar and wind, and water power from Quebec;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to phase out ... gas-fired power plants by 2030 and embrace lower-cost, cleaner energy options."

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

ROAD SAFETY

Mrs. Gila Martow: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas tow truck operators provide an important service across Ontario’s road network; and

“Whereas motorists deserve reliable, timely service from their provider of choice across Ontario; and

“Whereas towing operators deserve a safe place to work in urban and rural communities across Ontario without being subjected to repetitive and punitive costs; and

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

“To protect motorists and towing companies providing important services by addressing issues around highway incident management;

“To include incident scene management in regulations to address the potential for improper actions on scene;

“To support the towing industry and reduce costs to motorists and third parties by mandating a single provincial towing licence;

“To introduce regulations that ensure long-term vitality of the towing industry;”

And my favourite: “To implement a towing mobile rideshare application.”

Of course, I affix my signature, and I’ll give it to an usher.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: “Temperatures in LTC Homes.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the province of Ontario requires a minimum but no maximum temperature in long-term-care homes;

“Whereas temperatures that are too hot can cause emotional and physical distress that may contribute to a decline in a frail senior’s health;

“Whereas front-line staff in long-term-care homes also suffer when trying to provide care under these conditions with headaches, tiredness, signs of hyperthermia, which directly impacts resident/patient care;

“Whereas Ontario’s bill of rights for residents of Ontario nursing homes states ‘every resident has the right to be properly sheltered ... in a manner consistent with his or her needs’;

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

“Direct the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations amending O. Reg. 79/10 in the Long-Term Care Homes Act to establish a maximum temperature in Ontario’s long-term-care homes.”

I agree with this petition. I will be affixing my signature and handing it over to the Clerk.

MAGNA CARTA DAY

Mr. Robert Bailey: This petition is regarding Magna Carta Day in Ontario.

“Whereas the Magna Carta is a revolutionary document that influenced the English system of common law and was a precursor in the development of England’s—and later, Canada’s—constitutional monarchy; and

“Whereas the Magna Carta was instrumental in placing limits on the monarch’s power to overrule the law and protected the rights of ordinary people; and

“Whereas the document introduced key principles that hold true in democratic societies today, including equal justice for everyone, freedom from unlawful detention, the right to a trial by jury, and rights for women; and

“Whereas it is important for the Magna Carta to be honoured and remembered as a document that changed the course of history. The fundamental traditions of equality and freedom that characterize our democratic society—particularly that nobody, not even the crown, is above the law—originated in this important document;

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

“Acknowledge the importance of this revolutionary document by proclaiming June 15 each year as Magna Carta Day in the province of Ontario.”

I agree with this petition. I will affix my signature to it and send it down to the table.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I would like to thank CSDP Ryerson for this petition. It’s titled, “Give Prisoners Access to Free Phones Now!” It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Bell acts like a champion of mental health, they jeopardize the well-being of prisoners and their families by putting up barriers to communication;

“Whereas Bell has a monopoly over the federal and provincial prison phone systems in Canada and Ontario;

“Whereas phone calls cost hundreds or even thousands of dollars per month for prisoners and their families, and collect calls can only be made to land lines;

“Whereas disconnection and isolation can result in poverty, mental health challenges, and suicide—and creates barriers for community reintegration upon release;

“Whereas phone companies like Bell and the province of Ontario profit off of the most marginalized among us; and

“Whereas Bell’s contract with the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services is up for renewal in 2020”—this year;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to act to ensure free calling for prisoners; direct calls to cell phones and lines with switchboards; and no 20-minute cut-off calls.”

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

DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME

Mrs. Robin Martin: I have a petition for daylight savings.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the biyearly tradition to switch our clocks impacts people with insomnia and sleeping problems;

“Whereas many other places in Canada including Yukon and Saskatchewan, have abandoned this practice;

“Whereas the US National Bureau of Economic Research concluded that the switch in time actually wasted energy as many products including heaters remained on for an additional hour;

“Whereas research shows transition between standard time and daylight savings is linked towards higher car accidents, and other health issues including heart problems;

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

“To pass the Time Amendment Act and to convey neighbouring regions like New York and Quebec to advance similar changes so that:

(1) This bill will support people who have existing sleep problems; and that

(2) This bill will help save energy; and that

(3) This bill will support the overall health and well-being of all Ontarians going forward.”

I fully support the petition, will sign my name and give it to the page.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I hope the next time the petition is read, it will include the state of Michigan as well, which, as we know, borders Ontario.

“Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I think it's a fair petition. I'm going to sign it and see that it gets down to the table.

FAMILY LAW

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further petitions? I recognize the member for Peterborough–Kawartha Lakes.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you, Speaker. You could refer it to as God's country. I have reminded you of that a couple of times already.

1340

My petition is entitled:

“Bill 207, Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act, 2020.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas family law disputes in Ontario are often time-consuming and onerous matters for families involved; and

“Whereas the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act includes common-sense changes to simplify Ontario's family law system, allowing parents and guardians to spend less time on paperwork and court appearances and more of their time making plans to support and care for their children; and

“Whereas, if passed, the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act would simplify and modernize the system, making it easier for families and loved ones to resolve disputes; and

“Whereas, if passed, Bill 207 would:

“—make the family law appeals process clearer and easier to navigate;

“—harmonize Ontario's family laws with federal legislation, to make it easier for Ontarians to navigate the system and understand their rights;

“—allow parents and caregivers to request certified copies of child support notices made by the online Child Support Service, so child support amounts can be more easily managed or enforced outside the province; and

“—remove the requirement for family arbitrators to file arbitration award reports with the ministry, saving both time and money;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario vote on and pass the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act.”

I agree with this petition. I will sign my name to it and give it to a page to take to the table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPORTING ONTARIO'S RECOVERY
AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 VISANT À SOUTENIR

LA RELANCE EN ONTARIO

ET SUR LES ÉLECTIONS MUNICIPALES

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 22, 2020, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 218, An Act to enact the Supporting Ontario's Recovery Act, 2020 respecting certain proceedings relating to the coronavirus (COVID-19), to amend the

Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to revoke a regulation / *Projet de loi 218, Loi édictant la Loi de 2020 visant à soutenir la relance en Ontario concernant certaines instances liées au coronavirus (COVID-19), modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur les municipalités et abrogeant un règlement.*

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate? I recognize the member for Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, before I begin, I'd like to seek unanimous consent to stand down our party's lead.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member from Toronto–Danforth is seeking unanimous consent to stand down the official opposition lead. Is it agreed? Agreed.

The member for Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you. I appreciate the courtesy.

Speaker, this is quite an extraordinary act. I found it interesting that it has been moving as quickly as it is. I don't know if that's particularly critical, but what's amazing to me—and people should understand this act. People who have lost relatives, friends, mothers, grandmothers, aunts and grandfathers in long-term-care homes, and who have sued those homes for atrocious and negligent behaviour, are now in a situation where the government is bringing forward a bill that, when it comes into force, will dismiss all those legal actions against negligent players—dismissed without costs.

People who have for months been planning to take to court those operators who left grandmothers lying in their own feces in their beds, those operators where people suffered severe bedsores, the operators where cockroaches had the run of the place: Any lawsuit against them is thrown out. The families—and I can assure you, without having asked every one of them, mostly working- and middle-class people in this province who don't have a lot of money to throw around—are going to have to sit down with their lawyers and figure out if, under the very constrained terms of this new bill, they will actually be able to seek justice for their grandmothers, their grandfathers, their aunts and uncles who died and suffered under appalling conditions.

I find it extraordinary that the government has brought this forward, that you can stand up in public and say that you've brought this forward, that you can go out and talk to people and say, "Yes, we think someone who died in their own filth should be forgotten and those who were responsible should be given full legal protection and immunity"—pretty extraordinary.

I think, Speaker, that the government could, if it wanted, exclude private long-term-care chains from this legislation that shields them from accountability. Frankly, if they want to be able to go about in public without this cloud of shame over them, they should be doing that.

This bill blocks the families who are looking for justice from for-profit long-term-care corporations, and it protects the Ford government following the deaths of more than 1,900 seniors during the pandemic.

My guess is that the members on the other side of the House had the same experience as those of us on this side of the House when the pandemic was at its height, and that's that we were getting phone calls, we were getting people coming to see us, we were getting emails from families completely desperate for intervention and protection, families who knew outright what was happening, suspected what was happening, read what was happening and could not believe that they weren't getting intervention.

I had one family in my riding with an aunt at a home just outside of Ottawa—and this was after the army had offered to go in and help deal with problems. They knew that the place was dramatically understaffed, and what they couldn't believe and could not understand was why those operators weren't calling in the army to help. Well, I think we know. I think everyone in this House knows. Because we saw the report from Canada's Armed Forces on the conditions that were found, conditions that those operators never wanted to have come to light, conditions they wanted to bury with those who were subjected to them. And today we are debating a bill to protect those who behaved in a way that was denounced by I think everyone in this Legislature—certainly denounced by the Premier when he read the report, certainly denounced by the Prime Minister when he read the report.

Any minister in this government who would be asked about that report would have denounced the conditions that those seniors were forced to live in. Yet today, we are debating whether or not those people should be protected, whether those operators with cockroach-infested long-term-care facilities should be protected. You've got to be kidding me.

We're in situation where we had former Premier Mike Harris, who is chair of the board of Chartwell, and an army of former Ford government staff lobbying for private long-term-care-home chains, and apparently very effectively. In a dark, dark way, I am impressed by what they were able to get the government to do. They have gotten a bill brought forward—a retroactive bill—dismissing the legal actions brought by family members who have been pushed to the limit and said, "It's being thrown out. Forget about it. Forget about the people who died. Yes, you were close to them. Too bad, it was so sad, but we're going to protect the operators. That's who we're standing up for."

The Premier can amend the bill and end that shame. I call on the government to do that. It's not too late. We're at second reading. This is going to have to go committee. There will be third reading. The bill can be amended so that the memories of those who died in such terrible circumstances are not dishonoured, so that their family members are not dishonoured. That has to happen.

I think that it's incumbent on this government to be acting to make our seniors in long-term care safer. When you give an operator a get-out-of-jail card, saying, "You're not going to be held accountable for what you did," then that means that the profound and fundamental problems that we've seen in long-term care will once again be allowed to run on without check.

1350

I've been in this place long enough, and a number of you have been in this place long enough who remember going after the Liberals, two different Ministers of Health, in situations where people were left in their own filth. We heard vow after vow that it would all be cleared up, and it wasn't. And it was so uncleared up that we had almost 2,000 people die in this pandemic in the spring. And yet, operators are going to be protected—not the seniors, not our family members, not our moms or dads, but the operators—extraordinary. This is a massive gift to those who have invested in these shoddy operations. Their investments will be protected—there's no getting around it—and the Premier, I think, needs to be here and speak to why on earth, after all the words that came out in the spring, he's doing this now.

Over the years, common law has evolved. The understanding of negligence has changed and it has evolved with the hope that people will be protected, that there's a proper balance between those who have been harmed and those who may have, or actually did, harm them. Setting up protection for liability for those who acted reasonably is one matter; that's not what we have here.

This is an act that ignores decades of judicial decisions, that will insulate bad actors, including the government and long-term-care operators, from facing justice. I just want to emphasize that point: This bill doesn't just protect those operators who let cockroaches overrun long-term-care rooms; this bill says that those who are protected include an "individual, corporation or other entity, and includes the crown in right of Ontario." So if Ontario acted in a way that was totally negligent—I'll give you an example—failed to regularly inspect homes so that the quality of care was high enough that we could feel comfort that our loved ones were being looked after, if the quality of care was terrible and not found because inspections were quashed, the government has protected itself. Isn't that extraordinary?

I am sure there are lawyers right now, somewhere, who are thinking through the language that they just want to have on the back shelf in case someone finds a novel way of getting at the operators and the government of Ontario for negligence, because right here, they know they've got incredible armour, incredible protection. That's staggering to me.

This standard of protection for the government of Ontario and its acts of negligence and for long-term-care operators is bad, but it's also retroactive. If in April or May the Premier had stood up and said, "It's terrible, all these people dying. But you know, in a few months, I'm going to make sure that everyone who is involved in running long-term-care facilities is totally protected in law, and all you people out there who are weeping"—because I had to deal with people who were weeping. We had a demonstration out front, on the lawn, early in the summer—distanced, masked—and there were people there who were weeping about the relatives they had lost. If he had said, "Those of you who are weeping, rest assured, I won't stop until every operator is protected and shielded from your

anger and shielded from the legal remedies that you want to use," what would we have been saying then?

Speaker, it's a reprehensible bill. I find it extraordinary that it's brought here—extraordinary. I gather that there's at least one lawyer who's already talking about a constitutional challenge. I look forward to the Premier standing up and saying that he will use the "notwithstanding" clause to protect the crown and the long-term-care operators from people who have found that the bill fundamentally violates our understanding of what protection of life means. I look forward to him again saying, "'Notwithstanding' clause? Yes, that'll save some big operators a lot of money. I think I'll invoke it."

I'm going to take you back to May. That's when the Canadian military put out their report on severe neglect in Ontario long-term-care homes. They observed staffing shortages, patients being underfed and left in soiled diapers. They talked about staff with insufficient training, inadequate protocols to stop the spread of the virus, employees reusing personal protective equipment when they were going between residents, and in one home, residents with COVID-19 being allowed to wander through the facility.

At the time, the Premier vowed to fix the province's broken long-term-care system. Nothing fixes a broken system like making sure that the operators have legal immunity. Oh, yes, nothing like saying to an operator, "You can operate with impunity because no one can sue you for a nickel. Don't you worry. We're looking after you."

What else did the Premier have to say? "The reports they provided us were heartbreaking." These are the reports from the Canadian military. "'They were horrific,' a visibly emotional Ford told reporters on Tuesday. 'It's shocking that this can happen here in Canada. It's gut-wrenching. And reading those reports was the hardest thing I've done as Premier.'" And today, that same Premier puts forward a bill to protect the people who were responsible for these conditions and, on passage of the bill, throws out the lawsuits from those families who sought justice. Crocodile tears do not really capture what we got in May from the Premier. It grossly understates what we got.

Speaker, the military report included observations of understaffing, poor sanitation, neglect of residents, employee burnout at five care homes, cockroach infestation, multiple reports of residents with untreated bed sores due to prolonged bed rest. In one facility, patients were observed crying for help with staff not responding. And yet, Speaker, the armour of immunity is going to come down and protect the operators responsible for that. So I look forward to hearing how the government says it will speak to those families in the weeks and months to come, especially those who spent a lot of what I assume is not a great deal of money available to them to launch these cases.

"The report also notes serious hygiene problems, including patients being left in soiled diapers or on bare mattresses due to a lack of clean linen. At the Altamont

Care Community, many residents had been bed-bound for several weeks when military personnel arrived, and there was ‘no evidence of residents being moved to wheelchair for parts of day, repositioned in bed, or washed properly.’ Personnel at that facility also reported that residents were underfed—due to staff shortages—and you’re going to give them immunity? Really? Seriously? You’re going to vote for that? You understand what you’re voting for, you understand what happened, and you’re still going to vote for it?

“The report also documents abusive behaviour toward residents, including ‘degrading or inappropriate comments directed at residents.’ There are reports of ‘forceful feeding’ and hydration of residents causing ‘audible choking.’ In one instance at the Orchard Villa, residents were sometimes being fed while lying down, which seems to have contributed to one patient’s death by choking.” The Premier “said the investigation of the care homes will include a coroner’s investigation and that results will be provided to police.”

1400

Speaker, you can say the most moving words possible, but when you act to beat up on the families of those who have died, your words are proven to be worse than nothing, much worse than nothing. That is an extraordinary thing to me.

Some of those families who are involved in this matter have spoken out. I’ll just give you a few quotes. Families from Orchard Villa:

“My family and others like us have been through a living hell in the past six months. We watched our loved ones suffer and die while our hands were tied and the only people who could help didn’t move fast enough. This tragedy will be etched in history as a time when those in power failed to protect our vulnerable citizens and this new step shows the corruption of power at its absolute worst”—Cathy Parkes.

“This legislation will have the most obvious impact on lawsuits against long-term-care and retirement homes who acted negligently and failed to take reasonable steps to protect their vulnerable residents. As a result of this legislation, it will no longer be enough for victims, and the families of those who died, to prove that the homes were negligent. They will now have to prove that the home was ‘grossly negligent’ in order to hold them responsible for the damage they caused.” That was not a family member but a lawyer, Melissa Miller at Howie Sacks and Henry, lawyer for the Parkes family.

Marie Tripp: “What Ford has put in this bill, that has nothing to do with LTC, is stripping the rights of families being a voice for our loved ones who have passed in LTC. This is not how I was raised by the generation before me. I was taught to stand up for what’s right and to fix the wrongs. Mr. Ford should not be allowed to get this pushed through to protect the pockets of investors in LTC. His job is to protect the residents of LTC with clarity and accountability.”

Darlene Thomas: “I am disgusted and appalled reading it,” the act. “My grandmother died alone and under deplorable conditions at Orchard Villa. We were not allowed to

touch or even go close to her casket at her funeral. What sort of goodbye or closure is that? Now the government wants to protect these companies? How is it fair for families of loved ones that died or continue to live in these facilities? Where is the justice?”

And lastly: “Lost my mother to COVID at one of the many for-profit LTC facilities where military leadership felt compelled to expand their mandate to highlight the glaring errors being made. She passed mid-April. I was lied to many times during the crisis. I don’t blame the people that lied. It’s rather apparent they were following orders from corporate. The so-called inquiry is a sham and so is this legislation. To Minister of LTC—mom was in same home during the bad flu seasons. Any attempt to compare the two sickens my heart.”

Speaker, I’ve made my argument.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions and responses? Questions?

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is obviously to the member from Toronto–Danforth. I’d like you to comment on, if you would, please, similar legislation that was introduced in British Columbia by the governing NDP party. That government introduced liability immunity protection for people, businesses and organizations, first through emergency orders in April and June, and then through revised legislation in July.

If it’s good for the NDP in BC, why is that protection for PSWs, for supporting associations, for people who are simply trying to do what they can in this horrible situation—why do you believe that, if it’s good in BC, it isn’t good in Ontario?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the question from the member. There already is, in law, protection for those who act on a good-faith basis. What we have here is a step that makes it far more difficult for those who have lost family members to proceed with an action.

You’ll remember I had said that now there has to be “gross negligence” instead of negligence. All of the lawsuits that have previously been filed are being thrown out without costs being awarded to those who filed those lawsuits. You’re putting a huge financial burden on families. You’re setting the standard of evidence much higher. It’s no surprise that families and their legal counsel are crying foul. That’s the difference, member.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I am not a lawyer, but I’m aware of the legal principle that not only must justice be done, but justice must be seen to be done.

I don’t know if in British Columbia the military went in and reported out such a damaging, horrific report on the conditions they found in the long-term-care homes there. But I know what they found in Ontario.

I’ve heard government members stand up, including the ministers, and say, “Gross negligence will be covered. Don’t worry about it. We’re not stripping away those rights.” I heard my friend from Toronto–Danforth just say that that’s not necessarily the case.

My question to the member from Toronto–Danforth: What must this government do to protect the rights of those who were injured, who were neglected, or the family members of those who have passed away or suffered great consequences? What must the government do to protect their rights and see that justice is not only done, but seen to be done in Ontario?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My thanks to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

I think it's fairly straightforward: These long-term-care corporations shouldn't be covered by this act. The province of Ontario should not be given a free pass by this act. This should not apply retroactively. Lawsuits that were already filed should not be thrown out without costs. I appreciate the question, because I think the answer is relatively straightforward. Those things need to be put in place. With those in place, I think you get closer to a semblance of justice and treating those who died and their relatives with respect. I find it extraordinary that even that small thing is not being made available.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Mr. Parm Gill: I want to thank the member opposite for his speech.

This piece of legislation protects tens of thousands of charitable organizations—groups that do tremendous work in our communities right across this province. Without the protections that are proposed in this legislation, they would not be able to pursue—in most cases, they would be forced to shut down.

Obviously, there are a number of members, even from the opposition, who have written to the Attorney General actually encouraging him to bring measures such as the ones that are proposed in this legislation.

I just want the member to explain how he would defend the position of the NDP in his community and have those organizations that do amazing work be forced to shut down.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the question from the member. I think he may have missed the beginning of my speech calling on the Premier to exclude this government and the private, long-term-care chains from the immunity that's being granted them. I'm not speaking about a hockey coach or a daycare centre; I'm talking about the long-term-care facilities, where we've had almost 2,000 deaths, where we had the most horrendous reports by the Canadian military about the conditions that people were trying to exist in. I don't think that the bill should be retroactive for those players, because it's a betrayal of the people of Ontario to grant corporations that kind of immunity and to throw out the actions of those families who have tried to seek justice.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: The member from Toronto–Danforth explained very well all the reasons why this legislation that shields private long-term-care chains from accountability must be excluded. The Ford government is

blocking families who are looking for justice from these for-profit long-term-care corporations.

I've been receiving emails from my constituents, from people across Ontario, who are devastated that their rights are being taken away by Premier Ford, just so he can protect his political allies and protect, at the end of the day, their profits.

1410

I'm curious to hear from the member what else he is hearing from people across the province—we heard some of the reaction from families of Orchard Villa—and if you could kindly share some of the reaction from the people in this province to this legislation.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I want to thank the member for the question.

I think part of it is just shock that this would happen. People think of themselves living in a society based on law, where one can peacefully, through the courts, seek redress for grievous harm. When, in fact, you have a situation of a retroactive piece of legislation that dramatically changes the balance of power between those who have been harmed and those who have caused the harm, people can't believe that's happening to them.

I think the other part of it is just simply the pain: "We went through this. We can't believe that you would do it to us now. We can't believe that we're living outside a system of laws and that we're living outside a system of empathy and sympathy for those who have suffered."

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Mrs. Robin Martin: I find it curious that the NDP is now criticizing this legislation, considering—and we heard it this morning, I think, from the Attorney General—that members from his own party, the members from Parkdale–High Park, Windsor West, Nickel Belt, Humber River–Black Creek, have written letters to the Attorney General calling for the kinds of protections this legislation will bring for Ontarians. These members heard the same concerns from their constituents as the government heard.

In an August 20 letter, the member from Humber River–Black Creek wrote to the Attorney General and said, "I share MPP Miller's call for the government to encourage the insurance industry to act in good faith in this regard, set up proper guidelines and liability protections. It's my understanding that the government of British Columbia has successfully done so through a ministerial order, and many of the leagues in our ridings are comprised of youth with disabilities who are eager to return to the ice after months of isolation, which has inevitably taken its toll on them."

I'm sure you would agree that our sports leagues don't need this kind of liability. Will the member opposite not join these colleagues and support this legislation?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the question from the member.

I don't support this legislation. I don't support retroactive absolution for negligence. It's as simple as that. Throwing out people's legal actions without recourse to compensation is pretty extraordinary, and yet you're doing

it. Protecting the government against claims for negligence when in fact it was negligent is pretty extraordinary.

I don't think there's anyone in this House who can support the structure of this bill and the way it protects those who so obviously caused harm.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Parm Gill: I appreciate the opportunity to rise today in support of our Attorney General's bill, the Supporting Ontario's Recovery and Municipal Elections Act. This bill, should it pass, builds upon our government's strong record to modernize Ontario's justice system while also supporting our province's recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As everyone in this House already knows, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on Ontarians and our communities. That is why I want to thank both our Premier and our Attorney General for their shared leadership with the creation of this bill and for listening to the concerns of everyone who is experiencing challenges related to this global pandemic.

When the COVID-19 virus first hit our province, our government did not hesitate. We acted quickly to close schools and protect our children. We set forward policies that kept families in their homes, helped pay for their child care and provided relief for their hydro rates. We suspended OSAP loan payments for our post-secondary students. And we immediately introduced legislation that protects workers' jobs and helped our small businesses with \$10 billion in assistance through provincial tax and other deferrals.

This is important work, because COVID-19 presents us all with new and difficult challenges. For some, these challenges include limiting our interaction to those within our prescribed social bubble, or exercising caution and prudence when celebrating Thanksgiving and Halloween. For others, it means being more dependent on the kindness of neighbours in our community for essential needs like food and prescription medication. We are all finding new ways to adapt to this new normal.

Thankfully, no matter what challenges we may face, our front-line workers are there to answer our call. They are our heroes. They are there for us, and I am proud to say that our government is there for them.

With our fall preparedness plan, we have invested \$2.8 million to extend the high wage transition fund. We spent over \$52 million to recruit, retrain and support over 3,700 more front-line health care workers and caregivers. We provided temporary pandemic pay, totalling over \$1.5 billion—the largest in the country—to over 375,000 front-line and support workers fighting COVID-19. We have significantly increased the supply and availability of PPE and medical equipment, and we expanded online and virtual mental health support to help Ontario Provincial Police personnel, front-line workers and first responders.

Now, with the Supporting Ontario's Recovery and Municipal Elections Act, we are going further. This proposed legislation would provide more protection to the hard-working men and women on the front line of this pandemic so they are not discouraged from serving their

communities, like mine in Milton and others, because they are afraid of civil liability. In other words, this bill will provide higher, but not absolute, liability protection for people, businesses and organizations who are alleged to have exposed someone to COVID-19 but who made honest efforts to follow public health laws and guidance to prevent and minimize the spread of COVID-19. This does not protect gross negligence. This does not protect bad actors. This does not protect any other forms of breaches or negligence.

Speaker, this bill is not limited to protecting our front-line workers. It will extend to people coaching minor sports teams, to those keeping our supply chain moving and strong, to those volunteering at local food banks, and to those simply showing up for work each and every day, despite the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19. Taking proactive steps like this will protect people and our communities who need this protection. Our government is delivering it to them.

Our government has listened, and we heard loud and clear that stakeholders from all sectors have raised concerns about fears of being sued or exposing someone to COVID-19. The legal costs associated with defending lawsuits are insurmountable, forcing our small businesses and non-profits to shut down. From what I understand, Speaker, if a person or business or organization is sued for allegedly exposing someone to COVID-19, they can use this new protection to either get the claim dismissed early or defend their position at trial.

Undue fears of civil liability for exposure or transmission should not discourage people from reopening their small business and other services that are important for restarting Ontario's economy. Similarly, it should not discourage boards of directors and volunteers from joining charities and non-profits to deliver critical services to their communities. This protection would be retroactive to March 17, 2020, the provincial declaration of emergency, and apply indefinitely. The legislation would also provide that any lawsuit that already exists when the immunity provision comes into force would be subject to the new standard.

1420

Due to the contagious nature of COVID-19, it touches all sectors of our economy. Indeed, we are seeing many industry sectors affected simultaneously. For example, there is the potential for lawsuits involving airlines, universities and charitable organizations, to name just a few, that are affected by COVID-19, which could tie up our court system for years to come. Companies and organizations acting in good faith, with reasonable public health procedures in place, should not be penalized by being tied up in years of litigation over claims. It is therefore important to emphasize that this bill is only there for people, businesses and organizations that have been working in accordance, or had honest belief that they were acting in accordance, with all applicable standards.

As I said before, this bill does not grant liability protection for gross negligence. People, businesses and organizations that ignore public health guidance and act with

gross negligence will not receive protection under our legislation.

Importantly, this legislation would not apply to a corporation or other organizations ordered to close to control the spread of COVID-19, in whole or in part, during or after the declaration of emergency, where a claim is in respect to the closure period and related to an aspect of the organization that was ordered closed.

This immunity has absolutely nothing to do with, and would not provide protection for, other types of cases that are unrelated to the transmission of COVID-19: for example, product liability cases, breach of contract or other types of claims such as assault, medical negligence, failure to provide the necessities of life or fraud. Speaker, that is because our government respects our workers and their rights.

As I mentioned earlier, our government acted quickly with the onset of COVID-19 to protect workers' jobs by quickly passing legislation to provide job-protected leave to employees in isolation or quarantine or those who need to be away from work to care for children because of school or day care closures due to COVID-19 outbreak.

Early in our mandate, we also enacted, for the first time in Ontario's history, the right of every worker to take up to three days for personal illness, two for bereavement and three for family responsibility. We have taken dramatic steps to protect workers, and with this bill, we are continuing to stand with them, shoulder to shoulder. To make sure workers are protected, this proposed legislation will not interfere with existing workers' compensation systems or rights.

In Ontario, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act provides for a no-fault system of compensation for workers and their dependents for any accident, injury or illness arising out of, or in a course of, employment. This proposed legislation does not change or disturb that in any way. In addition, this bill does not prevent a person or organization from suing another. Workers who are not covered by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act would continue to be able to sue their employers for workplace COVID-19-related losses.

I also note, Madam Speaker, that the NDP government in British Columbia has passed similar legislation, protecting front-line workers and essential business and organizations. Therefore, Speaker, the Supporting Ontario's Recovery and Municipal Elections Act is a necessary piece of legislation to help people and businesses as they continue to recover from the economic impact of COVID-19.

However, Ontario's municipalities help to provide an environment for people and businesses to thrive. They too must be included with our recovery plan. I was proud to support our Safe Restart Agreement with municipalities like the town of Milton, which will provide up to \$4 billion in urgently needed, one-time assistance, allowing them to deliver critical public services related to the COVID-19 pandemic, like transit, and help those most vulnerable find shelter. Through this historic agreement, we are making sure people can get to and from work and helping business

remain open, while providing additional resources to limit the spread of COVID-19 and chart a path to a strong recovery for our communities.

With agreements like this in place, we are creating confidence and consistency that is desperately needed for our municipalities. This bill being proposed here today plays an important role in creating this consistency, because people need confidence in the programs and processes provided by their municipal governments.

Earlier this year, we acted on recommendations from municipalities from across the province and the Chief Electoral Officer, and created a single voters list for both municipal and provincial elections. This is a common-sense change that allows better, more fulsome participation in municipal elections. We are focused on bringing predictability and consistency to the electoral process so people can have confidence about where their vote is going and how it will be counted.

Out of Ontario's 444 municipalities, only one currently uses a ranked ballot system—only one, Madam Speaker. The municipal election that used a ranked ballot system ended up costing taxpayers an additional \$515,000, an increase of 40% from the previous election and, with all this extra spending, the results of this election would have been the exact same if they had used the previous first-past-the-post system.

As I mentioned before, Speaker, this matter is made even worse with concerns about how votes will be counted. For example, if there were five names on a ballot, and you only selected three who were all eliminated, you now have a blank ballot that would not be counted in the final vote at all. You will not have expressed any choice about the final two leading candidates. With these concerns, it is clear that a ranked ballot system has the inherent issue of potentially depriving voters from genuinely engaging in the electoral system.

It is interesting to note that the city of Toronto's operating budget includes \$1.1 million to adequately consult and fully investigate their ability to change election vote-counting. This does not include the cost to the municipality for retaining external consultants to undertake a cost-benefit analysis or for acquiring the technology to support a ranked ballot system, nor the impact on election administration.

Ontario and its municipalities are facing a global pandemic. Now is not the time to be experimenting with costly changes to municipal elections. At a time when municipalities should be focused on protecting the health and safety of their residents and are facing decreased revenues as a result of COVID-19, spending upwards of \$1.1 million in just one municipality simply does not make sense for taxpayers.

1430

What we are doing is maintaining predictability and consistency to our municipalities while better respecting taxpayers' dollars. Doing so reduces the need to make corrections on election day, shortens wait times and saves municipalities money.

Therefore, Speaker, I hope all members of this House will join me in supporting this important piece of

legislation. Should it pass, it will be yet another strong step forward taken by our government to help communities, people, businesses, municipalities and non-profit organizations recover. The families in Milton and across Ontario are counting on us to do what is right, and what is right is making sure the Supporting Ontario's Recovery and Municipal Elections Act passes into law.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions and responses?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I think Prime Minister Trudeau showed his character when he broke his promise to do away with the first-past-the-post election system. Political experts say ranked balloting is a legitimate form of our system. In fact, our Premier was elected on a ranked ballot, as you know, and became Premier because of a ranked ballot. I think municipal politicians, with a ranked ballot experiment, could show our provincial and federal cousins that indeed this is worthy.

Martin Luther King said that the character of a man is taken not at times of comfort and convenience, but at times of conflict and controversy. Speaker, my question to the member is, what does taking away the rights of municipalities on ranked balloting say of the character of this government for trampling over the rights of duly elected—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. Response?

Mr. Parm Gill: I'm going to thank the member opposite for his comments. As I pointed out during question period and in my remarks, it is important to be consistent for all Ontarians to know how they're going to be voting. It is the same way that we vote in federal elections, it is the same way that we vote in provincial elections, and Ontarians in every single municipality should expect to vote the same way municipally.

As I also pointed out, there's only one municipality—being London—that used the ranked ballot system, and it ended up costing the London taxpayers \$515 million, or 40% more than what it cost them in the previous election.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Mr. Stan Cho: My question has to do with my constituents in Willowdale. I've been dealing with a lot of them during this pandemic, understandably, in some difficult times. What I've realized is, I get questions in every language you can imagine: Farsi, Mandarin, Tagalog; a very long list. Having such a diverse riding, I have to think about the voter's rights over the politician's rights. I was wondering if the member can speak to how this might simplify the process to increase voter turnout. The last thing voters need is further confusion on their ballots with a ranked system. We need a consistent—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Confusion? Try the Conservative leadership race.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order.

Mr. Stan Cho: —between all levels of government, Madam Speaker. So through you to the member, will this help with consistency? Will this help with voter turnout potentially?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Stop the clock. I didn't want to interrupt the member who had the floor. The member from Timmins will come to order—and that won't happen again.

Response? I return to the member from Milton.

Mr. Parm Gill: I really want to thank the member from Willowdale for the question and for his leadership and hard work on behalf of his constituents each and every single day. He raised an interesting point about consistency. As I pointed out earlier, it's the way that Ontarians or Canadians are able to vote federally. They know the system. They know what to do when they go out on election day to cast their ballot. It is the same way that we vote provincially.

The municipal election is already a lot more complicated than the federal and provincial are, because you are there to elect a mayor, you are there to elect, in some cases, a regional councillor, then a councillor and then a school trustee. It can be very overwhelming for a lot of individuals. The simple method that is used currently federally and provincially to be used municipally would definitely simplify things and make it very, very consistent—actually, easier—and I think it will promote voter turnout.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: It feels like a low point even for this government when, in one week, it is using COVID-19 as a cover for undermining democracy by banning ranked ballots in municipalities, giving degree-granting status to an institution run by a homophobic racist, and forcing families who lost loved ones under circumstances that appalled and disgusted Ontarians to prove gross negligence instead of negligence.

How can the government look Ontario in the face and tell them this is justice?

Mr. Parm Gill: I'm proud of our government. I'm proud of our Attorney General. I'm proud of our Premier and all of my caucus colleagues, who work hard each and every day on behalf of Ontarians.

This piece of legislation is not the only one—this is a piece of legislation amongst many that we've introduced to make life more affordable in Ontario. As I pointed out in my remarks earlier, this will help organizations, individuals, volunteers, who are afraid to go out, who are afraid to help and be involved in their community because of liability.

Let me also make it clear that this will not protect negligence or bad behaviour on behalf of the bad actors. They'll still be held accountable. I think it's important to highlight and clarify that for the opposition, and I hope they'll support this piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Donna Skelly: I can't imagine the stress that our front-line workers—our nurses, our PSWs, people who work with children every day—have been going through since March, since COVID-19 struck not only here in Ontario but around the world. And I can't imagine the level of stress that these same people who put their lives

on the line to protect others, to ensure that the food supply chain continues throughout the crisis, would be under if they were named in a lawsuit simply because they were doing their job or they were doing what they could possibly do under these circumstances.

My question to the member from Milton, then, is: Why is this legislation necessary now here in Ontario?

Mr. Parm Gill: I want to thank my honourable colleague for the question and for understanding and recognizing the importance of this piece of legislation. As she highlighted, there are a lot of organizations, there are a lot of groups, there are lots of hockey coaches and other volunteers who go out each and every single day—even PSWs and other front-line health care workers—who put themselves in harm's way to help their fellow community members. They need some sort of assurance.

The unfortunate part is, the opposition understands the importance of this piece of legislation, because some of them have been writing to the Attorney General, asking for measures that are introduced in this legislation. I understand that they have a job to do; the opposition's role is to oppose. But this is a very, very common-sense piece of legislation. I would strongly encourage them to give it a second look, to support this piece of legislation, because that's what their constituents would expect.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: The member opposite talked about several things in this bill, but I would like to focus my question to the government member on ranked ballots.

My question, which not only I but the people of Parkdale–High Park would like to know, is: What kind of consultation did the government do? Who did you talk to? When did you do it? What did they say?

Speaker, as far as we know, this government did not do any consultation on this.

With all of the challenges that the people of this province are facing—the COVID-19 crisis, the overdose crisis, the homelessness crisis—this is the priority? This is what you want to work on at this moment?

I'd like to hear from the government side on this.

Mr. Parm Gill: I want to thank the member opposite for her question.

I'd like to remind her that in the last 2018 municipal election, out of the 444 municipalities, 443 voted using this system. It is the way that we vote federally, it is the way we vote provincially. There was literally only one municipality that used the ranked ballot system, and it cost them \$515,000 more than it would have cost them the election before. That's 40% more.

Imagine if every single municipality used a ranked ballot system what the cost to Ontario's taxpayers and residents would have been. As I pointed out in my remarks, the city of Toronto is just looking at it and they budgeted \$1.1 million just to explore the idea. That doesn't even include all of the cost factors.

We have to be respectful to the taxpayers and the taxpayers' hard-earned dollars that they have paid into the system to make their life easier, not more difficult.

Report continues in volume B.

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Gill, Parm (PC)	Milton	
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Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hassan, Faisal (NDP)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
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Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Solicitor General / Solliciteure générale
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Karahalios, Belinda C. (IND)	Cambridge	
Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Ke, Vincent (PC)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
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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
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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
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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

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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
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Piccini, David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	
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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
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Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
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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	
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	
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