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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 7 October 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 7 octobre 2021

Report continued from volume A.

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT

Continuation of debate on the amendment to the motion regarding the reappointment of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a privilege to rise in the House today and speak to government motion number 1, which was moved by the Solicitor General of Ontario.

Madam Speaker, government motion number 1 calls for the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight to be reappointed with the same mandate and membership that existed prior to the prorogation of the first session of the 42nd Parliament, and that it resume its business at the same stage of progress as at prorogation. I will be supporting this motion for a number of reasons I will elaborate on in a few minutes.

First, I'd like to say thank you to all the front-line workers across the province, whether they be in health care, seniors care, education, the service industry, grocery and retail, law enforcement, construction. Everyone has done a tremendous job over the last 18 months adapting to challenges we've all faced during the pandemic.

And I want to thank everyone who is able to that has gone out and received their doses of the Health Canada-approved vaccines. The vaccination efforts of this province and our local public health units have truly been an amazing achievement in this short period of time.

The first COVID-19 vaccine was administered in Sarnia–Lambton on January 26, 2021. Today, less than 10 months later, Lambton Public Health is reporting that they have administered over 185,000 doses to local residents, with over 77.2% of the eligible community members being fully vaccinated. That is truly a remarkable achievement in such a short period of time.

Across this province, nearly 22 million vaccine doses have been administered across Ontario, with over 200,000 doses administered each week.

Every single public health unit has at least three quarters of its population with at least one dose of the vaccine. As a government, we have been taking this vital challenge from all perspectives to make sure that every Ontarian who wants to gets their first or second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine as quickly and as easily as possible.

To reach parts of the province where vaccination rates are lower than the provincial average, we've been working

with our partners to expand access to the vaccine through various methods, such as direct outreach from family physicians to their patient base, as well as pop-up clinics in convenient locations such as workplaces and places of worship. I know in the Toronto area, they've also used the buses, the transit system. I thought, "That's a great idea." We haven't used those in Sarnia–Lambton yet, but maybe that's something that we'll end up doing yet.

I'm optimistic that in the coming weeks, we will continue to see the vaccination rate climb close to the 90% level that Dr. Moore has mentioned in his weekly briefings. It goes without saying that it wasn't always easy to envision a time when the end goal would be so close at hand.

Over the last 18 months, this government has been working day and night to ensure that everything was being considered and every tool being used to fight the virus and support the people of Ontario. One of those tools being utilized to ensure we have the best pandemic response of any jurisdiction in Canada was the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight. As a member of that Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight, I have special interest in making sure this committee was doing the best work it could for the people of Ontario and, if I might say so, I believe it did.

Now, as members may know, with the prorogation of one of the longest legislative sessions in recent memory, the previous select committee was dissolved, so I'm pleased that our Solicitor General has moved government motion 1 early in the new legislative session, so that the select committee can be reconvened and continue that important work as soon as possible.

As a refresher on the history of the committee and its mandate, I will remind everyone that on July 13, 2020, the government House leader introduced a motion to appoint a Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight. Following a long debate, the motion carried on July 15, 2020.

The committee was appointed to receive oral reports from the Premier or his designate on any extension of emergency orders by the Lieutenant Governor in Council related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the rationale for those extensions. Under the reopening Ontario act, 2020, the Premier, or a minister to whom the Premier delegates the responsibility, is required to appear before and report to a standing or select committee designated by the Assembly at least once every 30 days. This report is to address the following: (a) orders that were extended during the reported period and (b) the rationale for those extensions.

Committee hearings consist of the report from the presenter, followed by questions from the various members of the committee. Finally, the committee is authorized to release interim reports summarizing each hearing.

As a committee member, I can personally attest that the appearances of the Solicitor General before the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight have been very insightful, and participation by all members of the committee has been high. We also had our Minister of Health at least one time, and Dr. Williams, the Chief Medical Officer of Health, among others.

It goes without saying that the emergency orders that we are reviewing and discussing at these meetings with presenters like the Solicitor General are extraordinary measures for extraordinary times, but it is these carefully selected and reviewed emergency measures that are helping the people in communities in Ontario navigate our way through this pandemic.

Since August 2020, the select committee has met 15 times to hear from the Premier's designate. Each meeting is composed of a 30-minute oral presentation from the Premier's designate outlining the orders that have been amended or extended since the previous meeting. This is followed by 70 minutes of questions from all parties to help explain the rationale for these extensions and amendments.

The questions that members of the committee have raised are far- and wide-reaching, which includes the need for workplace redeployment measures, the government's plan for easing restrictions when case counts decline and the impact of the orders on the lives of Ontarians, including what supports the government is providing to mitigate those impacts.

Speaker, it's an extremely valuable opportunity for all members to sit on that committee and ask questions, including those that come to our office and from our constituents. I'm always able to ask questions that my constituents bring to my attention, and I know other members of the committee in this room do as well. It's a valuable opportunity to bring forward the concerns, thoughts, fears and hopes of our various constituents. I'm sure that all members have heard, as I have, from so many of their constituents throughout this entire pandemic, and bringing forward their questions and concerns to the Premier's designate is extremely helpful. I know the vast majority of Ontarians just want to understand and have confidence in their government's plan to combat COVID-19, and this committee has provided them an amazing forum to do just that.

As I said previously, the government is using every tool in its tool box to win this fight against COVID-19.

1550

Speaker, I continue to be overwhelmed by the support that this government has made available throughout this pandemic, especially to my community of Sarnia-Lambton. In just the last few months alone, I've been able to announce, in this Legislature, several important investments in critical public services in my community.

For example, just this week, I shared with the House the more-than-\$1.1-million investment in Pathways Health

Centre for Children in Sarnia-Lambton. This 24% increase to their annual budget was part of the larger, historic investment of \$240 million over four years in Ontario's children's treatment centres and preschool speech and language programs. We know that early intervention leads to better long-term outcomes for children. By improving access to assessment and early-intervention services, children will be receiving services and working towards goals a lot sooner.

I might add, on a personal note, that I have a nephew who is a very able and functioning member of society. He's an HVAC mechanic. But I remember that when he was just a child, his mother, my sister, enlisted him at the Rotary centre that I was just speaking about which helped with his speech. He had a speech impediment, and it was to do with his hearing. They've adjusted all that, and he has been very successful—so a shout-out to Pathways.

Just yesterday, I also had the privilege of announcing a new investment of nearly \$3.5 million in long-term-care facilities in Sarnia-Lambton. This investment was part of our government's commitment to ensure long-term-care residents receive an average of four hours of direct care every day by 2024. It is also part of our plan to fix long-term care, which has been neglected for too long. It's no secret that the residents of our provincial long-term-care facilities were in an extremely difficult situation during the early stages of this pandemic. This was true in Sarnia-Lambton, just as it was true across this province.

The Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight reviewed a number of emergency orders that impacted long-term-care facilities with the Solicitor General and others during the very last session of the Legislature. This was important work by the committee and reason enough, in my opinion, to support government motion number 1 that we are discussing this afternoon.

Speaker, I'm also extremely pleased that I have had the opportunity, on several occasions in the last 18 months, to announce investments in our hospital system in Sarnia-Lambton, Bluewater Health. I might say that during the early stages of the pandemic, to support Bluewater Health, when the numbers were very high and we didn't know what we were facing, a full year and a bit ago, Lambton College stepped in—another facility in Lambton county. They worked together—all of Sarnia-Lambton, and I should give a shout-out to all the mayors, Bluewater Health, all the first responders. But at Bluewater Health, with a lot of assistance from the local construction association—and many people chipped in—they built a day hospital at Lambton College, at the basketball court, which was available to be used in the case of our emergency room being overwhelmed, but thank God it wasn't. We didn't need it. But the community stepped up at the time. Those facilities have all been packed away, ready for an emergency in the future that we hope we don't have, but it's there when we need it.

Going back to Bluewater Health: In the past few weeks alone, I've been able to share the good news with Bluewater Health and with this House that they have received over \$4 million—\$4,004,900—in new, annualized funding, representing a 2.7% increase to their base

funding. After years of underfunding and neglect by the previous government, this is welcome news to Bluewater Health. I applaud the government and the Minister of Health and all of her officials for making this happen. I know this wasn't the only announcement; other members in this House also received funding for their various hospitals. But I'm quite happy about Bluewater Health, particularly.

Speaker, I've also shared the good news that Bluewater Health will receive, this year, another \$1,350,000 in health infrastructure renewal funding, otherwise known as HIRF funding, to go towards their ongoing improvement projects at our beloved Charlotte Eleanor Englehart Petrolia hospital, a hospital that is over 100 years old. Long story: When it was going to be closed by former governments, both the Progressive Conservatives and then later by other governments, the local community rose up. I was not a member then, but I've seen the various discussions, and they were very vigorous. That hospital is still there today, and I hope will be there long after I'm not here in the House. Speaker, I might say that I was born at that hospital, as the rest of my family were.

This multi-year project will ensure that residents of rural Lambton county will have access to high-quality care for many generations to come.

These are just some of the important investments that this government, our government, has made in Sarnia-Lambton over the last 18 months that will help to strengthen our community for its recovery from this horrible pandemic, which has affected many parts of this province, tragically.

As I mentioned before, I'm an optimistic person by nature. While this pandemic has been challenging on everyone, I believe that as a province and a government, our response to the pandemic continues to move us in the right direction. To reiterate what the Solicitor General said the other day, sometimes it can feel like the COVID-19 situation has become commonplace or routine over time. However, the emergency orders put in place through the reopening Ontario act are important and deserving of attention. The opportunity to direct legislative questioning on orders does not exist for orders made under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, which is why it is so important to reconvene the select committee to do this critical job of legislative accountability.

During the last 18 months, this government has put the authority of this Legislature first. I might say our government has been going above and beyond the call of duty to make sure that this Legislature has been able to exercise this important role of oversight during this pandemic.

Unlike some other Parliaments, the Ontario Legislature, as you all know, has continued to meet safely to get important work done for the people of this province. I am proud to say that the members here, whether we're on cohorts or all kinds of Zoom—I never even knew what Zoom was 18 months ago, but we've participated in a number of committee Zoom meetings. I do a lot of my meetings now in my office with Zoom. I don't know

whether I'll ever return to the old way of doing business. I think this is more convenient for my constituents. I'm able to meet with a lot more people than I could in the past. There's a lot better scheduling. I think it's been a lot better way—which we never would have gotten into if it hadn't been for COVID-19; not that I think that's a positive reason to get there, but it's something that arose out of it.

That is in no small part thanks to the dedication of our assembly staff who are here today. The Clerks' table, the Speaker's office, the Speaker, the Sergeant-at-Arms, everyone here today helped to make us able to continue to serve. Their dedication has allowed us to be here safely and continually.

This work has included often rigorous debates over the extensions for the declaration of emergency as well as discussions over the reports produced as a result of those declarations, and in many pieces of legislation brought forward to help the people of Ontario get through this pandemic. We've changed the way we vote, the way that we conduct committee business and the way that we take meetings as members and ministers—all to make sure that the important work of governing the province continues safely for our staff and the members as well.

The work that is accomplished by parliamentarians on all sides of this House is vital to this Legislature to fulfill its responsibility to Ontarians. We must ensure that the select committee can continue to provide those opportunities for our members and their constituents to be actively engaged in these critical proceedings.

If adopted, this motion will allow the committee to seamlessly continue its critical role without delay. It will also ensure that the government can continue to be in compliance with the legislative obligations required by the reopening Ontario act. Most importantly, it will ensure that Ontarians can continue to have unobstructed access to the orders that are put in place to keep their loved ones and their communities safe.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will close. Thank you.

1600

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 101(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence in the ballot list for private members' public business such that Ms. Morrison assumes ballot item number 1 and Ms. Horwath assumes ballot item number 23.

Further debate?

Mr. Michael Parsa: It's a pleasure to be back in the Legislature alongside all of my colleagues from both sides. I look forward to working with them to introduce, discuss and pass meaningful legislation that will work to benefit each and every Ontarian across our province. After all, Speaker, democracy relies on communication and interaction between all parliamentarians for it to truly function. Although the pandemic has made this a complicated task because of public health guidelines, I am happy to see the positive results of our work here today and as we continue to protect the health and well-being of our constituents.

Speaker, before I begin, I would like to say that it's an honour to rise in this House for the first time since our

return from the last session. And as always, it is my pleasure and it really is an honour to represent the good people of Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill. I will continue to do everything in my power to serve my constituents and act as their voice in this assembly, and I am honoured to have their support as I continue my mandate as their elected representative. As a parliamentarian, I will continue to do my part so that this government and this assembly continue to create strong legislation that moves our province forward towards our continued recovery and out of this pandemic.

Speaker, I am honoured to rise alongside all of my colleagues here today and join them to discuss one of the important parts of our province's plan to exit this pandemic once and for all. We're here to discuss an important motion before this House, and that is to re-establish the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight. On Tuesday, the Solicitor General and her parliamentary assistant stood before this House and shared their thoughts on this important motion. Now, several of my colleagues are joining them both today to speak on the same topic. It goes to show how important this motion really is, and it also shows how important the select committee's responsibilities are. Speaker, as the Solicitor General said herself that day, I too recall when a similar motion was brought before this House in July of last year, while we debated the Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act.

Just as the Solicitor General said as well, I too am rather pleased to see that this motion is up for debate so early on in this second session of the 42nd Parliament. Now, I don't see a doubt that this Legislative session will be a very busy one, for sure; I have no doubt. After all, Speaker, we have many new and exciting plans to continue moving our province forward and help us recover as we work towards a brighter future for everyone.

Our government remains committed to ensuring that the important work of the select committee is carried out, uninterrupted from its previous efforts. Speaker, the objective of this motion is to keep Ontarians informed about their government, keep them engaged in the consultation process and, most importantly, to keep their loved ones safe. I have no doubt that every single member of this House shares that sense of purpose, Speaker, and to that I say, if they wish to uphold this commitment then they must also know that in order for the important work of the committee to continue, it needs to be re-established. That is exactly why we are here today. We are taking the first opportunity we can to move ahead with that re-establishment. During such a critical time for our province, this motion is essential. Please allow me to elaborate as to how and why that is the case.

Now, I could go on and explain all of the different elements of this committee and how its procedures and responsibilities impact the legislative process. Or I could begin by sharing with you the real reason why this committee is so important to communities just like mine. Speaker, the committee is so important because it supports the work that our government is doing in every part of the

province and in every part of the response to this pandemic. The best part is we are all able to see the impact of good governance, accountability, transparency and communication across our communities.

I have personally been able to witness the many different ways in which my community has seen the positive effects of our government's response to this health crisis. For example, our government allocated funding to provide businesses with innovative tools and resources they can use to be successful. During a time when our businesses have faced significant hardship and so many obstacles, this continues to be crucial to them.

This funding allocation came from the Skills Development Fund introduced by the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development, which was created to award organizations for innovative projects that address challenges to hiring, training or retraining workers during this pandemic. Speaker, the goal of the fund was to make it easier for laid-off workers and unemployed workers to pursue training and start better careers.

Our first round of funding was a huge success as it awarded \$115 million back in February of this year to support employee training and help the province recover from the pandemic. This first round also helped launch 146 projects and prepared thousands of workers and job seekers for a successful career. The additional \$83.3 million was a part of a second round of funding, which ensured Ontario workers could continue to receive the quality training they need and deserve to support our economy. A portion of the \$83.3 million was allocated to purchase state-of-the-art simulation-training systems.

Speaker, this mattered a lot to the people of my local community of Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill. Just last week, for example, I had the pleasure of joining the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development in the 76,000-square-foot Labourers' International Union of North America Local 506 Training Centre to announce the funding and to learn how this simulation technology is helping construction workers today. A hybrid model of in-class and simulation training improves careers and income options, as new and existing workers can fill roles such as construction craft worker, demolition labourer, torch cutter, machine operator, heavy machine operator and hazardous material worker, amongst others. The funding will also help the 190 apprentices laid off during the pandemic return to work, as they will have the opportunity to use their knowledge and skills in the simulator.

Speaker, this is part of the initiative the government promised to Ontarians when it announced the provincial budget: to give hard-working men and women the tools they need to start a job and make a better living for themselves and their families. For the people in my riding and all of Ontario, this means construction work on your roads, community centres and housing will be completed by someone who is well trained and efficient at what they do.

The new virtual training program will remain at the existing LIUNA Local 506 centre in Richmond Hill, making it convenient for people in my riding to receive the

highest-quality training right across the local area and in fact all across York region. New simulation equipment will give workers the hands-on experience to operate a range of heavy machinery, including dump trucks, excavators and wheel loaders to support the construction demand here in Ontario. For Ontarians, this investment will not only increase job site efficiency but will also decrease the chances of an accident, as operators will be equipped on handling and responding to job site demands with precision and accuracy.

Speaker, this is one of the many areas our government has been focusing on to protect the physical, mental, financial well-being of all Ontarians. Our government also understands that our approach to protection and recovery has to be one that hits back at every sector affected by COVID-19, and that especially includes our health care sector.

In my riding, and those of my colleagues who are here representing the constituents in York region, we felt the effects of the government's response to the pandemic in our health care sector. For example, last week I had the privilege to meet some of the health care professionals at Mackenzie Health hospital to honour the contributions that first responders have made throughout the pandemic. Myself and my dear colleague from the great riding of Richmond Hill donated refreshments to all the staff as a gesture of gratitude for their efforts and to show this government's support for their hard work and their sacrifice. The member from King–Vaughan and the member from Vaughan–Woodbridge also donated snacks and refreshments to the health care professionals at Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital, which continues to have a large impact on our COVID-19 response.

1610

Speaker, while this was a small thank you from my colleagues and I to the countless health care workers in our region, it's important to note that if it weren't for our government's support of their work in protecting us, we wouldn't have been able to deploy the countless resources that we've made available thus far, especially to the aforementioned Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital. Some \$125 million in funding was made available to the Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital, which allowed it to partially open its facilities ahead of its originally planned deadline in a unique capacity, designed to support our province's hospital network. This unprecedented measure was taken to relieve pressures on nearby hospitals due to rapid increases in hospitalization and ICU occupancy rates as a result of this virus. The Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital opened for COVID-19 relief at a critical point during the pandemic, when cases rose to dangerous levels and hospital beds were difficult to find.

Now that it is fully operational as intended, the Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital is the first new hospital to open in Ontario in 30 years. Speaker, because of the hard-working health care professionals at hospitals across Ontario such as Mackenzie Health and Cortellucci Vaughan, the province has the lowest reported active cases in the country at just 38 cases per 100,000 Ontarians, as

the Solicitor General previously stated. As for vaccines, Speaker, well, it's no secret that Ontario and Canada continue to lead by example to the rest of the world. With over 86% of those eligible to receive their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine having done so already, we are on our way and are one of the most successful jurisdictions in the world. Over 21 million vaccine doses have been administered across Ontario, with tens of thousands more being administered every day.

We have taken unprecedented measures to support our vaccination campaign and make it the most successful in Canada. We did this by taking actions such as deploying mobile GO-VAXX bus clinics in partnership with MetroLinx, which have administered over 9,000 doses through walk-up appointments. The point is, Speaker, in my community, our response to the pandemic in the health care sector not only brought about change for the surrounding areas, it also changed the way we treated our most vulnerable patients by relieving pressure when it was needed, and freeing up more resources that allowed our heroes on the front lines to do what they do best, and that's to save lives.

Speaker, I think we can all agree that when it comes to the health and well-being of Ontarians, and indeed, all human beings, there are at least two factors that we need to take into account, and those are physical health and mental health. We know for a fact, Speaker, that the pandemic has brought about a concerning increase in the number of individuals who find themselves struggling with mental health, some for the very first time. But perhaps the worst of it is that we are seeing the mental health of our children and our youth suffering as well, perhaps more so after this pandemic.

This isn't an easy subject to talk about, but we need to lead by example and show people across this province, of all ages, that conversations surrounding mental health are incredibly important. And just as it is important to talk about our mental health, it is equally important that we act to protect it. That is why our government not only supports conversations surrounding mental health, but we also put our money where our mouth is, Speaker. After the end of our last legislative session in June, I had the pleasure of joining an announcement at the York Hills Centre for Children, Youth and Families which granted them nearly \$540,000 in new funding. This was part of our government's plan to support, expand and improve access to specialized mental health treatment services for children and youth all over the province.

Now, this new funding doesn't just present exciting opportunities for the future of the York Hills Centre; it also supports them as they continue their incredibly important work for the well-being of children and youth in my local community and the surrounding areas. This funding was designed to help York Hills Centre provide more counselling and therapy, so that they can better respond to the needs of their Indigenous clients. It also supports them by increasing the number of staff available for play therapy, so that younger children are also able to receive the proper care they deserve.

Speaker, helping our local partners, like the York Hills Centre for Children, Youth and Families, has never been more important than it has been in the last 18 or 19 months, and I don't doubt that it will continue to be important for years to come, as we recover from this pandemic.

That's why the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions spearheaded our government's unprecedented multi-billion dollar funding over the next 10 years to support mental health, our Roadmap to Wellness.

The point is that we've seen how the pandemic has impacted the mental health and well-being of our children, youth and families, and has even presented unique challenges for students. That's exactly why our government remains committed to filling urgent gaps in care and reducing wait times for services that can help them, so that Ontarians of all ages can easily access the highest-quality supports where and when they need them. I know that for children and young people who are struggling with their mental health because they haven't been able to go to school and see their friends for so long, this is very important.

These investments are a critical part of our government's commitment to respond to the significant impacts of the pandemic. Supporting the mental health and well-being of our province's most vulnerable by addressing the increased demand for these services during COVID-19 is one of the many ways in which we will continue to protect Ontarians.

Speaker, I'd like to take a moment to highlight one of the many different moving parts that our COVID-19 response has demanded over the course of the pandemic, one that is perhaps the most important of all: consulting with the public.

We held countless consultations with community members on a variety of topics. In my riding, I remember holding a particular consultation to discuss the state of the greenbelt—and other consultations with chambers of commerce not just in my riding but across Ontario, and also ones to discuss the budget. Ultimately, the results that we saw from bringing communities and stakeholders together to be part of the decision-making process were incredibly positive. People everywhere were stepping up to the plate by being proactive and engaging with our government, and we couldn't be more grateful for that.

The public's participation has always been vital for us. For example, a lot of the supports that we provided to businesses in our last budget kept in mind the ideas and suggestions that were raised with us over the course of the pandemic during our past round tables. A lot of those supports were highly effective at relieving the pressures faced at that time.

That's exactly why Ontario's action plan brought back some of those programs with additional funding and investments, like the Ontario Small Business Support Grant, for example, or the Digital Main Street program, both of which were not only vital parts of the budget but were also vital tools for the recovery of our business community.

The public has been so helpful to us, and that's exactly why we want to make sure that we keep listening to them during this important chapter of recovery.

Speaker, before I conclude my remarks, I'd like to circle back to the main topic of this debate, and that's the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight and its importance to this Legislature and our province. I've shown you several examples today of how effective many of our government responses have been in my community, and I know for a fact that this has been the case in my colleagues' ridings as well. I also know, however, that the select committee needs to keep playing its pivotal role in order for it to continue working and supporting us.

We have gone out of our way to adapt as much as possible to the situation we find ourselves in as individuals. As my colleagues have said before, we've had to change how we vote, how committees conduct business and even how members and ministers meet. Every measure we have taken thus far has been to make sure that our important work as parliamentarians can continue to protect our local communities. Our work as members of provincial Parliament, regardless of political affiliation, is of utmost importance to this assembly. That's why we must make sure that the select committee can continue to operate uninterrupted and provide opportunities for us to be more engaged in its proceedings.

My message is simple, and it goes out to all members of this Legislature: This motion, if adopted, would allow this important committee to continue its critical role without any delays and without any more interruptions to Ontario's path towards recovery. But perhaps most importantly, Speaker, it will ensure that Ontarians can continue to rely on a government that is transparent and accountable in its actions in order to keep them safe.

1620

To conclude, Speaker, this government will always continue to provide Ontarians with the care they need to battle this pandemic. And make no mistake, we will continue to do so for every sector that is affected. We will continue to support businesses and provide Ontarians with the skills they need to do their job and provide for their families.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: It's a real pleasure to rise in the House to speak to this government motion, which is—and I'll just read the motion so people at home know what we're talking about: "that the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight be reappointed with the same mandate and membership that existed prior to the prorogation of the first session of the 42nd Parliament, and that it resume its business..." Further to that, there's an amendment. The amendment is "that the Premier commit to attending, at minimum, one select committee meeting and answer questions before the end of the 2021 calendar year." And so, on this amendment, I think it's a good amendment, and what I'd like the government to do—what I'll talk about is what questions I would like to put to the Premier when he attends that meeting of the select committee.

My first question for the Premier will be, why didn't you spend the summer getting our schools ready for this school year? Last year our schools in Ontario faced the

longest lockdown of any schools in the country, 20 weeks longer than any other province. The lockdown of our schools, the closure of our schools has had a huge impact on both the mental health and the academic performance of our students. School closures impacted students' well-being. A preliminary study from SickKids found that over 50% of students aged eight to 12 and 70% of adolescents reported clinically significant symptoms of depression between February and March 2021.

There's also the question about academic supports. The Ontario science table, which is the table that this government continuously says they listen to, cited a study in the report at the end of the last school year. It showed a "survey of 9,500 educators conducted in spring 2021 found that 55% of elementary and secondary teachers reported fewer students were meeting learning objectives compared to other years ... and 70%" of teachers "were worried that some students will not catch up academically."

There is a lot of work that needs to be done to get our schools ready for this school year. It should have been done over the summer, but it wasn't done, and the impacts are already hitting our schools. Just today alone we had 121 new COVID-19 infections in Ontario schools. We have 780 schools—we're only five weeks into the school year—that have reported a case of COVID-19, which is 16% of the schools in the province, and eight schools are closed. Remember, last year, our schools, Ontario schools were closed 20 weeks longer than any other province in this country, and we have eight schools closed already in this province. It's absolutely appalling and it's terrible. It's having a terrible impact on our students.

When we're looking at what the government should be doing for our students and what the government should have been doing over the summer, they should have been preparing temporary classroom spaces: libraries, previously locked classes, community centres. This is what European jurisdictions have done. They've opened up community centres, churches, other places to move classrooms to so that if there is a COVID-19 infection in a school, the whole school doesn't get closed down. You have three classes in a community centre or somewhere else. Those three classes may get shut down, but the rest of the school, operating in different locations, can actually continue to operate.

We need to be hiring thousands more teachers, education workers and custodians to make our schools safe and also to help our students catch up academically on everything that was lost last year. My daughter is a grade 4 teacher in Montreal. She was teaching largely online last year, and she said—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I'm sorry to interrupt the member. Pursuant to standing order 50(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there have been six and a half hours of debate on the motion. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader directs the debate to continue.

Mr. Michael Parsa: Please continue, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I return to the member from Spadina–Fort York to continue the debate.

Mr. Chris Glover: We should be taking every effort we can to make sure our students in Ontario can catch up on the academics that they lost, that they missed last year.

I mentioned my daughter is a grade 4 teacher. She said that online learning works less effectively the younger the kids are. In grade 4, it works sometimes. By the time you get to kindergarten, and I've spoken with other kindergarten teachers, they say that online learning—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I apologize again to the member.

While I appreciate the information I was given, I am requiring that that information be given from the House leader's office, so I recognize the deputy House leader.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you. Continue, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. And I again return to the member from Spadina–Fort York. Please continue.

Mr. Chris Glover: I will continue. Let's see. We need to take basic measures to have touchless faucets in schools and to improve the HVAC systems in our schools so that there are less COVID-19 infections and fewer spreads, and there are fewer lockdowns in our schools. Our students deserve no less.

The terrible thing about this, though, is that at the same time, instead of investing in our schools, this government is actually cutting funding from our schools. The financial advisory office of the province of Ontario says that the increases this government gives the education sector, at 1.2% a year, do not meet inflationary targets. That means that every year our schools have to cut staff, programs and services just to balance the budget. By 2029, the FAO estimates—the financial advisory office, which is an independent office of the province of Ontario—that the underfunding will be \$2.9 billion in our education system.

I was a trustee before becoming an MPP, and before that, I was an angry parent trying to fight education cuts. For 20 years, I've been fighting education cuts. I can tell you that from every year—and I followed the TDSB's budgets—from 1997 until 2014, the TDSB faced a funding shortfall from the government. Every year, trustees were forced to cut staff, programs and services from our schools. It was absolutely atrocious, and some of those were really, really essential services, like the reading readiness program which helps students falling behind in reading in grade 1. It gives them the individual attention they need to catch up. It was other programs. And the biggest thing that's been cut is services to maintain our school buildings.

The former Conservative government of this province left behind them, when they lost office in 2003, a \$5.6-billion maintenance backlog in our schools. The Liberals did not fund our school maintenance properly, and they increased that \$5.6-billion maintenance backlog to a \$16-billion maintenance backlog. Now, it continues to grow. It's over \$17 billion. The students, who are our future, are

the young people of this province—and we are a prosperous province—are not attending schools that are well maintained because none of the last two governments in this province, and the current government, none of them are providing adequate funding to maintain our school buildings. Let alone the pandemic, we need to fund our education system properly so that our students get to attend properly maintained school buildings.

The other issue: We're talking about an amendment to a motion that would allow us to ask questions of the Premier when he attends the special committee on emergency measures. The other question that I would like to ask is—the only bill before the Legislature right now, the only major bill, is on York region waste water. That's actually what I had prepared my notes about today, and that's what I thought we would be debating. But my first question about it is, in the middle of a global pandemic, 18 months into this pandemic, we've been four months out of the Legislature and the most important piece of legislation that this government can bring forward is on York region waste water and whether the waste water from York region is going to go into Lake Simcoe or Lake Ontario—that was the priority of this government. I mean, what about the pandemic? We're in a global pandemic.

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As well as the people who lost their lives and lost loved ones during this pandemic, the most impacted are our students, and I've talked about our students. The others are families with members and people in long-term-care homes and our small business owners. Why isn't the first piece of legislation that this government is introducing now that we're back in the House about protecting those people, about protecting small business owners?

The last tranche of funding for small businesses was closed on April 7. This government hasn't provided any additional funding to small businesses that continue to be impacted by the pandemic since April 7, and there are many businesses that are continuing to struggle. I was speaking with a small business work group I host in my riding and I heard from Kyle Sipkens who runs a small interactive entertainment company that provides jugglers, stilt walkers and other interactive entertainment to festivals and other events. He has never received one penny of support through this entire pandemic, even though he's in what is essentially the tourism sector.

There are so many businesses that have gone under. Statistics Canada reported that in the first year of the pandemic, 25,000 Ontario small businesses closed because they did not receive support, and it wasn't until after that first year that this government finally stepped up and provided some funding. But the funding that I heard about from many small businesses had many holes. There were many businesses that were not eligible for the funding, like the business owner I just mentioned. And there was no appeal process, or a very turgid appeal process, so that when the mistake was made and—you know, there were mistakes made in the assessment of applications. When mistakes were made, it took months and months and months to get them corrected. So these businesses are

leveraging themselves out through this pandemic in order just to stay alive, and they're not getting a response from the government.

A piece of legislation that we should be talking about is the small business supports, another round of funding for those businesses that continue to be impacted by the pandemic.

The other thing I want to talk about is Bill 5, this York waste water bill, which is the bill that's before the House, the only major bill before the House. My big concern with this bill is that it has a section in it—and I'll just find my notes on it—that attempts to prevent companies that are impacted by the cancellation of contracts or other liabilities from suing the government. The government has attempted to do this before. I've seen this at least three times in legislation from this government where the government passes legislation that says, "Do you know what? The government of Ontario signed a contract with you, but we are going to break that contract and instead of compensating the company for breaking the contract, the government is going to pass legislation that will protect them from liability."

When this went to the Ontario Superior Court before—it was on a case with solitary confinement in jails—the Ontario Superior Court ruled that the government cannot use legislation to protect itself from liability. So this Bill 5 that's before the House, the first piece of legislation before this House, actually brings back that legislation, but in contradiction to the court's ruling. So the government is actually going to be opening itself up to another lawsuit, which means thousands or tens of thousands or perhaps hundreds of thousands more of taxpayer dollars are going to go into a lawsuit and into the courts to pay lawyers for a lawsuit that's completely avoidable. Why is this government continuing to pass legislation that I think not only attempts to protect themselves from liability when they shouldn't be protected from liability, but also impacts the business reputation of this province? Because when the Ontario government—it doesn't matter which Ontario government it is. We talk about the Ontario government—the Conservative government, the Liberal government, the NDP government—we should really be talking about the Ontario government, because there is only one Ontario government from 1867 to today.

When a government of Ontario signs a contract, they have to be signing that in good faith. When we're asking investors to invest in Ontario, to build their businesses in Ontario, to sign contracts with the Ontario government, we need to respect those contracts. We should not be passing legislation that attempts to protect the government from liability for breaking those contracts. If the government needs to break a contract, then they need to compensate those businesses that are impacted by the breach of that contract.

There are so many things that we should be talking about in this Legislature right now. We should be talking about schools and the measures that we need to be taking to protect our students and to make sure our students have a full school year and that they get the academic and

mental health supports to make up for everything they lost last year. We should be introducing another round of funding for small businesses. We should be taking action to protect seniors in long-term-care homes.

This government has announced, finally, that they're in favour now of four hours of hands-on care for long-term-care of seniors. But they've done it at the end of their mandate. We're eight months from an election. This will not be implemented before the next election. So this government—it's a nice thing to say. You had three and a half years to fix the nightmare in long-term-care homes, and instead of actually fixing it, now, coming up to the election, you're giving yourself a sound bite, "Oh, yes, we're in favour of four hours of hands-on care." But you had four years to do it, and you haven't done it, and it won't be done before the next election.

Madam Speaker, I would ask this government to please take some action: Pass some legislation that protects our students, that will protect our small business owners and that will protect our seniors.

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I've listened intently to the debates from both sides of the House today and it has been very informative. I've heard a lot of different perspectives, and it has been very nice to hear some of the more personal and touching memories that some of the members shared here today. I think it's wonderful that, despite the difference in politics, we can share our memories and speak about our loved ones and really appreciate what everyone has to do here.

I think, ultimately, Madam Speaker, we all got elected because we wanted to make a difference in our communities, we all got elected because we wanted to serve our communities and give back to this wonderful province. I might be biased, but I do think it's the best province in Canada, which is the best country in the world. It truly is an honour and a privilege for all of us to be here and to represent our constituents. Even though we might disagree on how to get there and what the best policies are, I do believe that this difference of opinion is really what makes us stronger, and the ability to debate and to engage in a thoughtful exchange of ideas. So I really want to thank everyone on both sides of the House for sharing their thoughts and opinions. It's been very helpful.

You know, Madam Speaker, it has been a tough 18 months for everyone in Ontario. The Premier has been working incredibly hard, as well as cabinet and everyone on the government side and, of course, on the opposition side as well. I wanted to thank the people of Ontario for

really getting together and supporting each other and helping everyone to get through this. We've come a long way in 18 months. I can't believe that a year and a half ago our world pretty much fundamentally changed, and no one really saw it coming. But there have been a lot of lessons learned. I'm very, very proud of the people of my riding of Carleton and the way they came together and I'm very proud of all Ontarians and what we've done to support each other through these difficult times.

I think everyone is really looking forward to Thanksgiving and getting to spend time with family and friends and get back to a little semblance of normalcy. I encourage everyone to do so safely and cautiously, following all protocols.

With that, Madam Speaker, I want to thank, again, everyone in the House for everything that they have done and for sharing their thoughts today, and I move that the question be now put.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Ms. Ghamari has moved that the question be now put. The total debate on this being about six hours and 45 minutes, I am satisfied that there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): On division.

Ms. Jones has moved government notice of motion number 1 relating to the reappointment of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I declare the motion carried on division.

Motion agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Orders of the day? I recognize the deputy government House leader.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: No further business, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): There being no further business, I'm going to take the opportunity and echo much of what we've heard today as we're all heading into Thanksgiving weekend. I hope that folks and their loved ones are able to reflect on the things that we are thankful for and connect safely, whether in person or online. I hope that everyone has a safe and healthy Thanksgiving.

This House, therefore, stands adjourned until Monday, October 18, 2021, at 10:15 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1641.

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Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
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Gravelle, Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
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Hassan, Faisal (NDP)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor—Tecumseh	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
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Kusendova, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre	
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Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
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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	
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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	
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Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
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Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Minister of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre du Développement du Nord, des Mines, des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
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Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
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Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	President of the Treasury Board / Président du Conseil du Trésor
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
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Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
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Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances
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Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Deputy Speaker / Vice-président

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	
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Logan Kanapathi, Sol Mamakwa
David Piccini, Jeremy Roberts
Amarjot Sandhu, Dave Smith
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Julia Douglas

Standing Committee on General Government / Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales

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

Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

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

Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

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

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

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

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

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

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

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

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

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

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

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