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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 26 October 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 26 octobre 2021

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 101(c), changes have been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Ms. Sattler assumes ballot number 11, Ms. Andrew assumes ballot item number 12, Ms. Armstrong assumes ballot item number 13 and Mr. Tabuns assumes ballot item number 33.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPORTING PEOPLE
AND BUSINESSES ACT, 2021
LOI DE 2021 VISANT
À SOUTENIR LA POPULATION
ET LES ENTREPRISES

Mrs. Tangri moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 13, An Act to amend various Acts / Projet de loi 13, Loi modifiant diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the minister care to lead off the debate? I recognize the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction.

Hon. Nina Tangri: I'm honoured to rise today to speak to second reading of the proposed Supporting People and Businesses Act. This is exciting for me, putting forward my first piece of legislation in this House both as a minister and as a member of provincial Parliament. I also want to say that I'm looking forward to debating the merits of this important legislation as we find new ways to make life easier for the people of Ontario and businesses right across Ontario.

First, I'd like to place this proposed legislation in context: As we confront COVID-19 for the second year in a row, people and businesses continue to contend with untold challenges. That's why, as we move forward, our government is committed to doing whatever it takes to protect the health and safety of Ontarians while supporting the economy on which they depend.

The bill we're discussing today is designed to reduce burden for people and businesses in forward-thinking and

responsible ways, ones that would maintain or enhance health, safety and environmental protections. We know that you can't have a strong economy without strong people. Through sensible red tape reduction, this bill would lighten the load for people and businesses weighed down by the pandemic's demands.

The fact is, Speaker, that the prolonged and unpredictable nature of this pandemic has resulted in a loss of business and consumer confidence right around the world and across our province. Outdated regulations and duplicative requirements are additional burdens no business or individual needs, especially during this ongoing period of uncertainty. They don't reflect our current reality, and they waste time and money that could be better spent on rebuilding our communities and our economy.

Despite the demands of this global pandemic, we continue to work diligently to help small businesses succeed by taking strategic action and making smart investments that are helping people and the economy. Our historic Ontario Small Business Support Grant delivered payments of \$20,000 to \$40,000 to cover 110,000 eligible businesses right across our province, totalling nearly \$3 billion in funding. That money went straight to small businesses, to be used in whatever way made most sense for them. I've spoken to many recipients of these grants from right across the province, and they've told me how crucial these funds were in helping them cope with a loss of revenue.

Business owners used this money to pay their employee wages, others used it to pay rent and many of the costs associated with keeping their businesses afloat during an extremely difficult time. We paired this funding with additional supports to help employers manage the demands of the pandemic by developing a web page with information on free financial planning resources, mental health supports, where to find PPE supplies and how to obtain local advice through Ontario's Small Business COVID-19 Recovery Network.

While the past 19 months have been very challenging, the pandemic has presented some new ways for businesses to serve their customers, like the rapid rise in online sales, which has given hope to many main street businesses. That's why we've invested an additional \$10 million in the Digital Main Street program for 2021-22. This game-changing program provides: digital transformation grants of \$2,500; a learning platform; support to create or enhance e-commerce stores through ShopHERE; and digital service squads offering one-on-one support. To date, the program has provided over 21,000 businesses with support for their digital expansions while generating

jobs for more than 1,600 students and recent graduates. The additional support will help more than 13,000 businesses take advantage of valuable e-commerce opportunities to effectively expand their reach to new customers in and beyond Ontario.

The program is working, Speaker, and is supporting main street communities right across our province. As minister, I've had the opportunity to see first-hand how businesses and business owners—people—are really benefiting from this program. People like Richard, who owns a men's clothing store in London: As with most businesses, Richard's sales declined dramatically at the beginning of the pandemic. People were no longer going into the office or attending social events and buying new clothes. But, as restrictions eased, Richard reopened his store and benefited from the Digital Main Street program.

With the help of a digital service squad, he received a free website to showcase the brands of men's fashions available at his store. Soon after, customers started calling in, placing orders and having custom suits made once again. It doesn't end there. With the increase in demand for his suits, Richard needed to find a bigger space and bought out the retail space next door. He plans to expand his business and hire a lot more staff.

It's stories like this that demonstrate how the people of Ontario are benefiting from the work our government is committed to doing. We continue to take steps forward on the path to recovery by providing support to small businesses that are the backbone of Ontario's economy and, of course, our communities.

Speaker, the pandemic has in many ways shone a spotlight on the needless regulatory requirements impeding our social and economic progress. It's hard to make changes, start a business or simply get through the day when you must first complete outdated paper forms or prove that the same requirements have been fulfilled multiple times. That's how red tape ties up our time and money in the present, while making it less attractive to invest here in the long term.

Currently, far too many regulatory requirements in Ontario are inefficient, inflexible, out of date or duplicated at the federal or municipal levels. Those are precisely the ones this bill is seeking to eliminate, while protecting health, safety and, of course, our environment. These are the costly and burdensome regulations that are squeezing people and businesses throughout the province and across sectors. Cutting red tape, however, frees people and businesses from wasting time and resources filling out forms and going beyond what's necessary to achieve regulatory goals. It minimizes frustration, saves money and gives us more time—things we could all use a lot more of right now.

0910

Cutting red tape and modernizing regulations is also an important piece to bring government into the 21st century. The more government can step aside and allow technological improvements—whether it's life-saving technology in the health sector, building infrastructure in a more efficient manner or making people's interaction with

government, such as ServiceOntario, easier—the more Ontarians can focus on what matters to them most.

Of course, this bill does more than eliminate needless regulatory compliance requirements. It also goes a long way to modernizing Ontario's regulatory system. Through this bill, we would introduce changes that digitize, streamline and expedite how people and businesses interact with government. Smarter, modern regulations that use digital pathways where possible are easier and faster to comply with so that people and businesses can focus on what matters during this pandemic: our health, safety and economic well-being.

Modernizing Ontario's regulatory system to keep pace with current challenges is, in fact, a strategic way we can help more people and businesses get back on track, and the proof is in what we've already achieved. Since 2020, we have passed four high-impact regulatory modernization bills and their corresponding packages.

While our government has been working to reduce red tape since 2018, the pandemic has made this work even more essential. Through the following acts, we have intensified our work to modernize regulations in response to current demands. They include: the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act; the Main Street Recovery Act; the Better for People, Smarter for Business Act; and the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act.

I want to commend and thank the member from Brampton South, the President of the Treasury Board and former Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction for bringing these bills forward. Minister Sarkaria did an incredible job in this role, supporting small business and cutting red tape in our province. The bill we're discussing today, as well as the entire fall red tape reduction and regulatory modernization package, stands on the shoulders of those achievements.

I'd now like to review some of the tangible changes introduced by those acts, ones that have made it easy for people and businesses to adapt to the challenges of today while preparing them for the opportunities that await tomorrow.

Speaker, as you may recall, the Legislature passed the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act in July 2020. This was to get infrastructure projects built faster while positioning Ontario as a modern regulator in response to an evolving pandemic. To help address infrastructure backlogs for businesses and communities, the act has modernized and streamlined environmental assessments. It has accomplished this by updating the almost 50-year-old environmental assessment program to focus resources on projects with the highest impact on the environment. Through this change, timelines for the largest projects have been reduced from six years to just three.

By matching the level of assessment requirements with the environmental impact of a proposed project, more important infrastructure projects can move forward without undue delay. Our government is ready to build.

To reduce delays for sewage and stormwater projects, the act provided a single consolidated environmental compliance approval process for low-impact municipal

sewage collection and stormwater management projects. This is allowing simple, routine changes by municipalities—including alterations, extensions, enlargements or replacement projects—to be pre-authorized so construction can start without needing separate approvals for each project. It's a way we're making things simpler while maintaining the strong standards that currently exist to protect our environment.

Finally, to help people and businesses in the construction sector, this act makes it easier and faster to update the building code. Streamlining the building code development process, supporting harmonization with national construction codes and allowing Ontario to respond faster to the needs of the construction sector is helping keep more people working and communities running across our province. I think one thing that we can all agree on in this House is the need to speed up construction safely in the province. We have an infrastructure deficit and need to use the tools available to us to build as quickly as we can.

We followed up this bill with the Main Street Recovery Act in November 2020. The purpose of this bill was to support the small and main street businesses that fuel our economy and bring life to our communities. Small and main street businesses all over Ontario have dealt with urgent and unexpected closures, cash flow problems, safety and physical distancing pressures since the onset of the pandemic. The last thing that they needed as they navigated a profoundly disruptive period were outdated, overly obstructive and duplicative rules that slow them down and cost them money. This legislation, together with its comprehensive package of financial and wraparound supports, contained amendments from three ministries that are modernizing regulations and making smart changes that will help us continue to enjoy thriving main streets.

Consider, Speaker, the impact of flexible delivery options on stressed retailers, suppliers and consumers. The act made 24/7 truck deliveries to retailers, restaurants and distribution centres permanent, building on temporary changes made to keep shelves stocked through the first wave of the pandemic when empty shelves in supermarkets and other retailers were a common sight province-wide—actually, globally.

Making this change permanent supports main street rebuilding efforts by helping much-needed goods reach businesses as efficiently as possible. It helps address small business concerns over low consumer confidence and new safety measures. It helps keep supply chains moving, boosting businesses across sectors and it assures consumers that their local retailer or restaurant will have what they need when they need it. Essential retailers—like mother and daughter Sandeep and Karen, who operate a store in my riding—never stopped serving the people of Ontario, and these changes helped to ensure the steady supply of goods for them to continue doing so.

Two pilot projects have shown that this change could also reduce rush-hour traffic, lower fuel costs for businesses and reduce greenhouse gas and other emissions. This means it could also improve our environment and

increase safety for people as they go about their daily lives. It's a good-news, simple solution that could boost productivity, cut costs and give businesses the flexibility they need to grow. It does this with the high potential upside for Ontarians frequenting main streets right across our province.

Another way the Main Street Recovery Act continues to support main streets in communities across the province, such as retailers, restaurants and shoppers, is by increasing the diversity of products that are now sold at the Ontario Food Terminal. Thousands of small businesses, including independent shops and restaurants, rely on the Ontario Food Terminal for their success. That's why the Main Street Recovery Act introduced important amendments affecting it.

First, it expanded the Ontario Food Terminal's mandate to allow it to promote local food. This helps support the growth of Ontario's crucial agri-food economy, enabling more businesses to compete and succeed in a crowded marketplace. A second change is increasing the range of products sold at the terminal to support the distribution of Ontario food products. This would help enable sellers to offer more products for sale to increase their revenues and it would provide a wider range of products for buyers which they could use in their own small businesses to keep existing customers coming back while attracting new ones.

The centerpiece of our fifth red tape reduction package since 2018—the Better for People, Smarter for Business Act, 2020—passed in December 2020. This package comprised over 80 actions in total that helped reduce burden and expand opportunities for people and businesses of all sizes across Ontario.

Consider, Speaker, how deregulating intercommunity bus service is helping people in rural and northern Ontario right now. Intercommunity bus carriers play an important role in connecting people across these communities. This act makes it easier for intercommunity buses to participate in the transportation market and find innovative solutions to fill service gaps, providing people with more efficient transportation options. Just a couple of weeks ago, I was up in Collingwood and Blue Mountain. The housing is so expensive there, but some of the areas further out have more affordable housing, so the intercommunity buses actually really help those communities bring in the staff they desperately need.

0920

For businesses, the act is digitizing outdated paper processes to make it easier and faster for them to fulfill important regulatory requirements. For example, a new digital reporting service for ensuring hazardous waste is properly stored, transported, processed and managed means businesses will no longer submit over 450,000 manifests on paper per year. Let me repeat that number: 450,000 manifests will no longer need to be submitted on paper. This means reports will be quicker and less burdensome for businesses while protecting the environment and improving public services.

Our sixth red tape reduction package, the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act, passed in June of this

year. This comprehensive package of 90 legislative, regulatory and future actions helps to position businesses for new opportunities as vaccinations rise and the competition ramps up.

As the manufacturing engine of Canada, Ontario supplies an incredible number of components to businesses across the country and throughout North America, but we're up against stiff competition from other suppliers. That means we need to continue doing what we can to keep operating costs low, people healthy and our environment safe. The Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act helps do just that, solidifying our status as a key link in the North American supply chain and a top-tier destination for people and workers all around the world.

Speaker, consider how this act is helping to strengthen Ontario's mining industry while supporting electric vehicle and battery manufacturing to promote sustainable growth. Northern Ontario's rich mineral resources position our province to become an international supplier, producer and manufacturer of critical minerals that facilitate electric vehicle and battery manufacturing. That's why our Critical Minerals Strategy lays out a bold vision—one where we can generate increased investment while supporting the transition to a low-carbon global economy.

By amending the Mining Act, we are supporting Ontario's growing critical minerals sector. The amendment also allows claim holders to sell the end product of a bulk sample and keep the proceeds without the province's permission. This helps create business certainty and improves timelines for mining projects, making Ontario's companies more competitive on the world stage.

We're very proud to support these Ontario job creators and their work to strengthen our next-generation industries, and we want to assure the House that through all proposals, the government is committed to balancing a competitive mining sector with environmental protection and sustainability.

This previous legislation also improves the regulatory framework for auto tech pilot project programs. By consulting about potential changes to the Automated Vehicle Pilot Program, we're helping ensure Ontario remains a leader in developing connected and automated vehicles. Consideration will be given to changes to rules about testing micro-utility vehicles like personal delivery vehicles, adding new vehicle types like automated farm vehicles and removing certain restrictions around modified automated vehicles.

In addition to the red tape reduction packages introduced throughout the pandemic, we also introduced the Supporting Local Restaurants Act. This act, passed last December, supported small and independent restaurants in areas where indoor dining was prohibited during the second wave of the pandemic by capping the fees placed on restaurants by third-party companies and apps. The act also ensured that delivery drivers' pay would be protected and that services would not reduce their service areas or restaurant selection. It's just one more way we supported people and businesses during this pandemic.

Speaker, we're very proud to report that, thanks to the work done over the past three years through legislation on our red tape packages, Ontario has reduced needless regulatory compliance requirements by 6.5% since June 2018. This rate of burden reduction is a significant achievement, and it's getting quantifiable results.

Since June 2018, businesses, not-for-profits, municipalities, universities and colleges, school boards and hospitals have benefited from \$373 million in net annual compliance cost savings. This is money that Ontario businesses and public serving organizations can put to better use, year after year.

Doing this amid a pandemic was no easy feat. We proceeded diligently and carefully, prioritizing health and safety at every turn. It demonstrates our resolve to minimize burdens and our health commitment to doing what it takes to protect people's health and safety during a once-in-a-century global pandemic.

Although the 2021 burden reduction report quantified compliance cost savings for businesses and organizations, it's important to note that these changes have also had an impact on our number one priority: our people. Smart, modern regulations can improve how people go about their lives, making it easier for them to interact with important public services. That's why we continue to update regulations and reduce burdens in ways that save people time, money and very much frustration.

A great example is the Green Button initiative. It will require electricity and national gas utilities to provide residential and business consumers with their energy consumption data in a standard digital format. This will provide opportunities for software and app developers to create user-friendly tools for consumers to discover ways they can use less energy. That will help them find sustainable ways to save money on their energy bills.

We're also removing the requirement for high school students to submit paper-based forms on community involvement activities. By allowing students to submit this important diploma requirement online, we're saving time and frustration for students and, more so, for administrators alike. It's a simple fix that reflects today's world, and it shows how regulatory modernization and burden reduction can benefit Ontarians from all walks of life.

Speaker, we've taken a team Ontario approach to these larger pieces of legislation, working right across all ministries to identify opportunities to ease burdens while prioritizing fundamental protections. Part of that team approach, as reflected in the legislation being debated today, involves protecting what Ontarians collectively value. It involves making sure we protect our public health, our safety and, of course, our environment.

The proposed regulatory upgrades contained within the Supporting People and Businesses Act have been designed to uphold these protections and, in many cases, actually improve them. In fact, five guiding principles consistently direct our efforts to reduce red tape.

The first principle is to protect public health, safety and the environment. We've worked to ease regulatory burdens in a smart and careful way to ensure that our

health, safety and environmental protections are maintained or enhanced. This means doing the appropriate studies and assessments on the impacts our changes may have. It also includes putting regulatory changes on the Environmental Registry of Ontario to allow for public engagement and consultation. This keeps us accountable in our work and ensures that we are meeting or exceeding those protections.

The second principle is to prioritize the important issues. Here, we have assessed which regulations cost people and businesses the most time and money, while looking for innovative ways to ensure rules stay effective and efficient. The digitization of government is a great example of saving time and money in government but also for the people and businesses across Ontario. Some of the proposals I mentioned earlier fit into this principle and make life simpler for Ontarians right across our province.

0930

The third principle is to harmonize rules with the federal government and other jurisdictions where we can. We're targeting duplicative red tape and aligning, where possible, with other jurisdictions to eliminate steps that cost job creators time and money. This is particularly important for our businesses that work in different provinces and jurisdictions across Canada. It saves them both time and money if they do not have to follow different rules for the same action. It's levelling the playing field and encouraging more businesses to come to our province while maintaining protections for people's health, safety and the environment.

The fourth principle is to listen to the people and businesses of Ontario. We've committed to hearing from people and businesses throughout this pandemic, to learn directly from them what we can do to remove obstacles standing in their way. Government doesn't always have the answers, Speaker. We need to hear from those on the ground to make the right changes at the right time. It shapes the temporary changes we made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and it has informed the new ones we would make permanent through our proposed legislation. It also ensures the changes we propose are effective and keeps us accountable to the people of the province.

Our fifth principle is to take a whole-of-government approach. We've taken a coordinated approach to make sure everyone is on the same red tape reduction page: a broad, informed perspective that would deliver smarter government for people and higher economic growth to match. It also helps us coordinate changes that impact multiple ministries and sectors, harmonizing legislation and regulation when necessary.

One of the most common frustrations I hear from business owners and residents in my community and across the province is that government operates in silos. We've made significant progress in breaking these silos down, Speaker, and I'd like to thank partner ministries for their ongoing collaboration and work so far. The 21st century world does not live in silos and government shouldn't either.

As you can see, it's our position that regulations and rules are not negative in and of themselves. It's the

unnecessary, the duplicative and the outdated regulations that are the problem. And it's these we would update through the Supporting People and Businesses Act.

Speaker, now that we have appropriately contextualized the bill, I'd like to outline some of its key proposals for the House. The first item we're highlighting today would provide regulatory authority for the government to permanently allow licensed restaurants, bars and other hospitality businesses to create or extend licensed outdoor patio spaces, subject to municipal approval. These businesses, which brighten our main streets and bring people together, have suffered immensely throughout this pandemic. So, to help them to sustain their operations, keep people employed and continue to give back to their communities, our government introduced temporary regulatory updates to extend their patio spaces. As a result of this modernization initiative, many hospitality businesses have successfully adapted their operations in response to COVID-19.

There are examples of how well this is working across Ontario, but I do want to share an example from my riding of Mississauga–Streetsville. Butter Chicken Roti is in the heart of Streetsville and fronts onto the Village Square, just down the street from my constituency office. Because of the changes we made previously, they were able to open a patio for outdoor dining and serve beer and alcohol. The owner, Maryam, said that being able to have a licensed patio, especially when indoor dining was restricted, brought back customers and was a significant help to her business. We want businesses just like Maryam's to continue benefiting from patio extensions, which is why we want to make these temporary changes permanent.

Speaker, our second proposal would modernize the reference to engineers under the Ontario health and safety act. This proposal will give a broader group of qualified engineers the ability to provide advice and certification as required under the act and its regulations, making it easier for businesses to comply. With the war on talent heating up right around the world, broadening the pool of qualified candidates necessary to keep more of our businesses operating would help strengthen our economic recovery.

Our next proposal would help streamline the planning system, in some cases shortening approval timelines. It would do this by allowing municipal councils greater authority to determine which decisions could be made by committees or council staff. Beyond the potential to reduce approval timelines and streamline the planning system, this change will provide municipal councils with additional flexibility to focus their time on strategic items for the benefit of their communities. This is critical, especially given the incredible housing shortage we are experiencing right across our province. By allowing council to give decision-making authority to staff on minor planning changes, affordable housing could be built that much quicker instead of getting caught up in time-consuming approvals, and, for businesses, the benefits could include lower costs and incentives to move forward with innovative plans and reduced frustration.

Our red tape reduction work goes beyond eliminating the obsolete and the outdated. It also reinforces regulatory

powers, increasing accountability and effectiveness. With this next proposal, we would deliver on our government's commitment to modernize the Ontario Energy Board, or the OEB, and strengthen public trust in its oversight of the natural gas and electricity sectors. Through operational reforms, the OEB would better serve Ontarians, operate more effectively to protect the interests of consumers and help ensure that Ontario's energy system remains sustainable and reliable. Refinements to the OEB's governance structure would enhance the independence and efficiency of the adjudication function performed by commissioners. Attracting highly trained professionals with specialized skills would help the OEB continue to protect consumer interests, including reasonable and affordable rates.

Our next item would further reinforce the electricity sector, one essential to our lives and, of course, our businesses. We're proposing a two-year limit on the Independent Electricity System Operator's, or IESO's, settlement processes for certain electricity-related settlements based on entitlements derived from legislation or regulations. This would help provide greater financial certainty, improve customer experiences and reduce the administrative burden on market participants, larger consumers and the IESO. It's one more step our government is taking to ensure that electricity rates in this province remain stable and affordable for the people of Ontario.

The following proposal puts the emphasis on consumer protections for electrical safety. It would introduce legislative amendments to broadly enable the Electrical Safety Authority to issue administrative monetary penalties, or AMPs. These changes would equip the Electrical Safety Authority with a more efficient and effective compliance framework, allowing the organization to redirect resources to public safety and educational efforts. It would also allow the ESA the opportunity to fill gaps where existing compliance tools do not provide an effective, efficient or proportional mechanism to change behaviours as well as address and deter non-compliance. AMPs are also less costly and more efficient for the ESA and stakeholders than pursuing other compliance measures such as prosecution. In addition, it would help address the underground economy of unlicensed contractors and boost the competitiveness of licensed contractors who are compliant with the regulations. Minimizing the prevalence of illegal electrical installations is a strategic step we can take to improve public safety all over Ontario.

Our next item is intended to modernize courtroom proceedings. The Attorney General, Doug Downey, has been working very hard to update Ontario's justice system, bringing it into the 21st century. This includes modernizing laws that don't match the realities of today. We are proposing to remove an outdated courtroom procedure within the Barristers Act that prioritizes the cases of senior lawyers and does not even recognize licensed paralegals. By doing so, we would eliminate a provision that is inconsistently applied and may help improve efficiency in our courtrooms.

0940

Speaker, as part of Ontario's ongoing work to modernize the environmental assessment program, or EAs, our government is proposing a minor amendment to the Environmental Assessment Act. The idea is to clarify the minister's authority to make changes to the types of projects that can follow a class EA, helping increase transparency. In fact, to protect the environment, projects that follow the class EA process would still require consultation with the public, stakeholders and Indigenous communities to develop mitigation measures and document findings in a report. We remain committed to seeking input before allowing other project types to begin following the class EA process. Any proposal to move a project type from an individual/comprehensive EA to a class EA would require additional public consultation.

Our next proposal would amend the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act to eliminate the adverse possession of land in provincial parks and conservation reserves. Changes would prevent people from claiming ownership of public lands by unlawfully occupying a public space in provincial parks and conservation reserves, helping to ensure that this land remains available for public use and outdoor recreation. To be clear, adverse possession does not apply to authorized tenancy of land, such as through a lease, licence of occupation, land use permit or easement; it applies only to unauthorized, continuous use of land for many decades at a time. This would support our ongoing work to safeguard the environment and provide Ontarians with more opportunities to enjoy our provincial parks, to get outside and boost their health and wellness.

Consistent with the prior proposal, this next item would further help prevent people from unlawfully claiming ownership of public lands for the benefit of Ontarians. It would also improve customer service and public lands administration. Through changes to the Public Lands Act, we would remove barriers to transferring land to First Nations and other levels of government. The goal is to help ensure public lands can be used for future resource-based economic development opportunities, especially in northern Ontario.

To continue boosting northern Ontario's community and economy, our next item would amend the Northern Services Board Act to keep pace with the times. The amendment would allow local services boards to post public notices of meetings and minutes online, allowing them more flexibility and autonomy to communicate with their residents the best way that they see fit.

The physical distancing requirements brought on by the pandemic have reinforced the urgency with which Ontario is digitizing public services. Accordingly, this proposal is aligned with Ontario's Digital First strategy, making it easier for people and companies to do business in these communities and meet the demands of the future.

Speaker, the following proposal I'd like to discuss would further Ontario's Critical Minerals Strategy and, at the same time, minimize its environmental impact. It's a great example of how regulatory modernization and red tape reduction can create sustainable economic growth

that serves—or, in this case, enhances—the public interest.

Through proposed changes to the Mining Act, we would make it easier for mining companies to recover minerals at mine sites, while creating economic opportunities through the extraction of critical minerals. Re-processing mine waste and tailings to extract minerals will help strengthen the mining industry and our environment by providing companies with an economic alternative to opening a new mine.

Rest assured, we continue to be committed to the rehabilitation of closed and abandoned mine sites to protect public health, safety and the environment. We see this proposed amendment as an innovative way we could increase Ontario's competitiveness in the global market. We can attract investment, create jobs and build stronger communities, especially up north.

Speaker, this bill would help rebuild our economy by better supporting the workers behind it. With the following proposal, we would make changes to the Professional Foresters Act to improve the delivery of professional forestry right here in Ontario. Amendments would modify its scope of practice to more clearly define professional forestry and reduce the overlap with other natural resource professionals like arborists. The goal is to support professional foresters in the province with improved oversight by the Ontario Professional Foresters Association and strengthen public confidence when seeking professional forestry services. These changes will not have an impact on the environment or the protection of our forests.

To help keep more workers safe and more employers aware of their responsibilities, our next item would amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act. Changes would clarify and streamline what obligations employers have, as well as the processes that happen when a serious injury occurs in the workplace.

Our government is also proposing changes to the act to provide future opportunities to tailor elements of workplace programs, such as in response to serious injuries in the workplace. This proposal would help support businesses and enhance the role of workplace parties following injuries at work by modernizing workplace roles, obligations and processes.

Speaker, our next item would help keep a major Ontario economic hub running and a vibrant community moving. We know that investing in better, faster transit can unlock sustainable growth, so we're working in partnership with York region to expand the subway network, in keeping with our commitment to build the Yonge North subway extension.

Through this bill, we're proposing changes to the Development Charges Act to help York region fund its portion of the subway. These changes would enable York to recover more of the eligible growth-related costs of the extension through development charges while also protecting taxpayers' best interests. This will also ensure we can remain on schedule to build this necessary infrastructure connecting residents of York region to reliable transit into and out of Toronto and get people moving.

The Yonge North subway extension will strengthen connectivity across the region, reduce travel times and greenhouse gas emissions and provide more people with access to rapid transit. This transformative project will create thousands of jobs per construction year and drive regional investment for decades.

Along with improved rapid transit to the people of York region, the proposed transit-oriented communities along the line will bolster much-needed housing supply, including affordable housing, and support economic development by creating thousands of jobs and new employment spaces.

The next item would save people time while improving government services. Currently, people who wish to harvest trees on crown land for personal use, like firewood, undergo the same process as businesses applying for industrial or commercial use, like a logging operation. Our government is proposing changes to the Crown Forest Sustainability Act to distinguish authorization requirements for wood harvested from crown lands for personal use from those harvested for industrial or commercial use. This proposal would scale the approval process to fit the request, saving time and effort for people and government. It's another way that we're cutting red tape in line with appropriate requirements.

We're also modernizing regulations under the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act, also known as HARPA, to allow for new, emerging medical technologies to be used in Ontario. Proposed changes will also align the province with the current Health Canada safety codes and help with the backlog of appointments for X-rays and other diagnostics that has occurred due to COVID-19.

These changes would also improve the review and approval timelines for the designation of new CT machines and streamline burdensome approval requirements to replace these devices in hospitals. We will also revise forms and guidance documents to clarify policies and help the industry and our health care partners better understand legislative requirements, clarifying roles and responsibilities.

0950

Speaker, our final item would save people money, reduce administrative burden and promote richer, stronger communities across Ontario. We're proposing changes to the Police Record Checks Reform Act to eliminate processing fees related to criminal record checks and criminal record and judicial matters checks for people applying for volunteer positions. Through these changes, up to five copies of these results would be available upon request at no charge.

By reducing costs for people looking to volunteer, this proposal would boost a valuable source of talent for our communities. It would also reduce administrative burden for busy police services across our province.

Volunteers have been instrumental to our health, our well-being and safety throughout the pandemic. They enrich our communities, and our government is so proud to support their selfless contributions. Ontarians volunteer over 600 million hours each and every year. This is a true

example of the Ontario spirit that we have seen throughout the pandemic, and we want to ensure it continues as we look towards the future.

Though COVID-19 still remains a part of our daily lives, Ontario really is making steady progress. Vaccinations are going up. Cases are coming down. Employment in the province has returned to pre-pandemic levels. Thanks to their collective commitment to the public good, Ontarians are helping to turn the tide on this latest wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Last week, our government announced our plan to safely reopen Ontario and manage COVID-19 for the longer term, outlining a gradual approach to the lifting of remaining public health and safety measures over the next six months, in line with key public health indicators.

Yesterday, capacity limits were lifted in the vast majority of settings where proof of vaccination is required, such as restaurants, bars and other food and drink establishments; indoor areas of sports and recreational facilities, such as gyms and where personal fitness trainers provide instruction; casinos, bingo halls and other gaming establishments; and indoor meeting and events spaces.

We've implemented measures to keep people safe, such as temporary proof of vaccination in higher-risk indoor settings, and we've partnered with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce to distribute rapid antigen testing to any business with 150 employees or less to minimize the chance of transmission. To date, with the help of 128 participating chambers, this program has distributed more than 2.63 million tests to over 21,000 small and medium-sized businesses across the province.

Just last week, together with some of my colleagues in Mississauga, we visited the Mississauga chamber of commerce distribution centre, and we saw and learned how rapid antigen tests were used and about the employees and employers that they were going out to serve, and they have been such a huge success. Speaker, we are seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, and it's never been brighter.

Bills of this size and with so many ministries involved are no easy feat. It's because of our entire government's approach and collaboration, our ongoing partnerships across ministries, that such a bill is even possible. I do want to thank all of our partner ministries with items in the bill and the overall package for your ongoing work to reduce red tape, support businesses and improve the lives of people across the province. I'd also like to thank my staff for their really hard work in getting this bill together, getting it announced and introduced.

This bill, our seventh proposed piece of red tape legislation to date, addresses the demands of the pandemic, and it opens the opportunities for a brighter future well beyond it. We look forward to working together with members on all sides of the House to make life easier for people and businesses while upholding what we all value. I think it's very critical, as we sit here today and look at the work that we're doing in government with input from people from all sides of the House. I think we can all agree that we want to make life easier for all Ontarians. We want to make sure that all of our businesses can succeed. We all

want to support our local shops. We all want to help them get that great online presence that helps them succeed and, for many of them, really just stay afloat throughout this pandemic.

With that, Speaker, I'd like to thank you and all members of this House for the time today.

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: I thank the associate minister for her presentation. I'd like to ask her a question about not-for-profits.

Last week, I was in one of the Legions in my riding, the Welland Legion. They've had a really difficult time, as Legions all across Ontario have had. They can't raise money. It's very difficult. They can't run their dart league, their pool league. They can't even run their cribbage league, because they have to move from table to table. They're really struggling.

I think that the government has really passed up an opportunity in this pandemic to support not-for-profits. They're a huge sector. I talked about a women's shelter in my riding a couple of weeks ago that's struggling. Why has the government not stepped forward and given more support to the not-for-profit sector through this pandemic?

Hon. Nina Tangri: I do want to thank the member for his question. I'm a very proud member of the Legion in my riding. We've done magnificent work throughout the pandemic. It has been very, very difficult. There were streams of funding that were available to our Legions, some of which my Legion did apply for, some of which they were eligible for and some of which they were not. But they have been able to stay afloat.

Having said that, we have really wanted to make it so much easier for our Legions and other not-for-profits to be able to go online to register that not-for-profit, to be able to file online, to be able to do more of the work online that they were not able to do in the past.

Another area is with the volunteer approach that we're proposing: to have police record checks done for free. So many of us want to volunteer, and we do volunteer in our Legions and many organizations. This is one way that we are supporting them right across our province.

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

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: When we talk about regulations, people get concerned. They don't know what would be the impact on them or on their day-to-day life or business.

Even hard, tough regulations were created for a reason. Many were created for safety and had a purpose when they were created. When we say "red tape reduction," people worry that cutting regulation can harm them instead of move them forward.

My question is: Are there guidelines or a framework that is used for when the government looks to cut red tape?

Hon. Nina Tangri: I want to thank the member from Mississauga—Erin Mills, my neighbouring riding, for his question.

Speaker, as you heard many, many times throughout my presentation this morning, environmental areas will be

protected significantly. Any time we look at reducing red tape or regulation or any burdens on our community, we have to go through what we call a regulatory impact analysis, or a RIA. For any legislation that's being produced, we take that and we look at what those impacts are on our communities, on our health, on our safety and on our environment. Only if we are satisfied with what's coming through will we present that forward, for any legislation that's coming through from any ministry.

1000

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: The member talked this morning about context being important, and I couldn't agree more. We're still reeling from COVID-19 and the impacts of COVID-19, especially when it comes to our seniors living in long-term care. We all remember the Premier famously saying that there was going to be an iron ring around our residents of long-term care; unfortunately, 4,000 people died. That's an important context. And here is more shocking context, Speaker: We're learning now that this government is giving millions and millions to for-profit long-term-care corporations, like Orchard Villa, where 70 people died. So there is some shocking context.

My question this morning is: Why is there nothing in this bill that will protect our long-term-care residents, our vulnerable seniors, when we have experienced such tragedy?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. As we've seen throughout the pandemic, it has been so critical—it's been devastating. What we have seen through many of our long-term-care residents' passing—not just those, but everyone across the province, and our heart goes out to them, their families, for the tragedies that have happened.

It's been so important when we've looked at the way that our long-term care has been at full capacity, with not enough beds. For decades, this sector has been unbelievably neglected by previous governments, supported by the NDP. What we're doing: Our proposal is to make sure that we get 30,000 new beds up and running. The work that we're doing with our PSWs is to make sure that they have at least four hours of care given to each and every resident. That is so important, that they're not just looking in and seeing them. They're making sure that they are clean, they're making sure that they are fed. It's so important that we protect our seniors in long-term care and making sure that—

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

The next question.

Mr. Jim McDonell: COVID-19 has been an absolute tragedy, creating a lot of stress in the lives of Ontarians and individuals across the globe, but it has also caused governments to modernize their services at record speed. In Ontario, there have been temporary regulatory changes to address unique and long-term issues during this extraordinary time. Some of those temporary regulations made so much sense that we've decided to make them

permanent. Can the member talk about some of the changes our government has made permanent, including extending patios?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you to the member for the question. I've visited many, many areas across this province and many different sectors of business. Where we've been going to visit our local restaurants—sometimes they're independent, sometimes they are larger. But for our small, local restaurants that we need to support so much, the ability to allow them to have the licensed patios, to create them or extend them, was so important. Yes, we do have to have the buy-in of the municipalities, but we're now allowing them to do that, something that they couldn't do in the past. It's been not just something where they can make money, it's something that kept them afloat throughout the pandemic, and it's something they've asked us to keep permanent. We believe, and I think all members in this House can agree, that that's something that, if this bill passes, we are going to make permanent.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Yes, I do, Speaker, and I'm glad to have the opportunity to pose a question to the associate minister of red tape and small business reduction—no, small business and red tape reduction. Well, I guess it depends on the perspective.

Speaker, to the minister: We still have people writing to our office, across the province, who are still waiting for their Ontario Small Business Support Grant. They applied in April and are still waiting. We've had businesses who were approved, to find out months later that they're no longer eligible. Some got the money, some didn't. Sole proprietors that, because they didn't have a business account, were not eligible.

There's no appeals process. Many small businesses who believe they were wrongfully denied have no way to prove their eligibility. Small businesses call the support line—no answer. Some get a real person, but couldn't even pull up their file to verify—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Pose your question, please.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is: Small businesses are still in flux. There's no third round of this. It's been a mess. What would you have me say to those businesses in my community?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you to the member for the question. Our government recognized right away that small businesses impacted by public health measures required immediate support so they could continue serving their communities and employing, of course, all the people across Ontario.

Our goal was to get the money to businesses quickly, because we recognize that enormous economic shock, that employers were affected. Businesses—those who were eligible—received between \$20,000 and \$40,000. Our government was very disappointed to see that the member opposite chose to vote against providing an additional \$1.4 billion in support in this program for the second round of

payments. The opposition, instead of working with our government, chose to play political games during the worst of the pandemic. But the people of Ontario know that our government stepped up to support businesses and families when they needed us most, and we allowed businesses to use that money as they saw fit.

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Why is it so important to make more government digital, and is the digitization of government only internal, or will businesses and people benefit from this digitization as well?

Hon. Nina Tangri: It's absolutely critical that we work together within government, that we can work together to make things more collaborative and to work more smoothly. When that happens, when people are working with government and they're able to access more things online and have a one-stop shop, it really does support our businesses and our communities and the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 101(c), changes have been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business, such that Mr. Tabuns assumes ballot item number 19 and Mr. Bisson assumes ballot item number 33.

Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to rise today to join the debate on Bill 13, the Supporting People and Businesses Act, on behalf of the official opposition and our leader, Andrea Horwath.

The first thing I want to say is I suggest the government might want to look at a new title writer for their bills, because pretty much every bill that we have seen come through that deals with red tape has very similar language about supporting people and businesses—better for people, smarter for businesses—and it's getting very repetitive. The problem is that when you actually look into the content of these bills, you often find that there is nothing in the bill that actually meaningfully provides the support that people need and the help that businesses have been asking for.

I do credit the government: This time, at least they didn't pretend that this is a COVID recovery bill, which is what we had seen in previous red tape reduction omnibus packages of legislation that the government claimed were going to help Ontarians get through the pandemic and recover from COVID-19 and actually did not speak to COVID recovery. This bill doesn't make those claims. It actually doesn't speak at all to the ongoing pandemic and to the needs of this province to move through the last stages of the pandemic and into a full recovery for our province.

I have to say, Speaker, as we often say when we are looking at government legislation, it really does represent a missed opportunity and, more importantly, it represents a fundamental misreading of what the people of this province have been asking for, what the small businesses of this province have been asking for. There have been

ongoing calls to support small businesses more effectively by fixing the problems with the small business grant program and also to move forward with a third round of small business funding.

Now, we know, even as we look forward to moving through this pandemic and small businesses, restaurants are able to increase their capacity and are looking forward to trying to get their revenues up to where they were pre-pandemic, but at the same time, they have identified some of the supports that will be necessary for many, many months ahead. To really enable that robust recovery that hospitality and other small businesses need, the government should really be looking at another round of small business grants. But, unfortunately, we don't see that reflected today in this bill.

1010

What we do see are some largely technical amendments—technical changes to 25 different statutes—and there are an additional 30 regulatory changes proposed. So this bill is an omnibus bill. We've seen a lot of omnibus bills coming through this Legislature and, as I have pointed out before, one of the challenges with omnibus bills is they are so packed with legislative amendments that it is often difficult to do the due diligence that's required to really understand the impact of each of those amendments. We certainly see that before us today, looking at the number of changes that are proposed to legislation, that cross many, many different ministries. It is challenging to do the necessary analysis to understand the impact of all of those amendments.

But more troubling, with this particular bill, Bill 13, is the fact that many of the changes that the minister referenced in her remarks, that are outlined in the background that accompanies this act, many of the changes are being achieved through regulation. One of the concerns about governments that overuse regulatory power is that regulatory changes can be made with no public debate, with no or little public input. Sometimes regulatory changes are posted for a period of public input, but oftentimes they are not. So there are significant policy and regulatory changes that are embedded in this bill and are referenced in the background that could have very significant impacts on the people of this province. As I said, it is a bill that brings together a very wide-ranging list of amendments to different statutes across different ministries as well as different regulations.

I want to begin my remarks—which I will be concluding this afternoon, but I did want to acknowledge the work of the critics in our caucus, who have tried to do the analysis and the review that is necessary to really understand this bill and the implications moving forward. I want to acknowledge our finance critic, the member for Waterloo, who is assigned the principal role of critic on this bill, but I also want to acknowledge the role of our small business critic, the member for Kingston and the Islands, and also our critic for economic development, the member for Essex. These are very strong members of our NDP caucus, but all of the members of our NDP caucus are really champions for small business, champions for

economic development in our regions and in our local communities and champions for making the most effective use of public dollars—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I apologize to the member for London West for interrupting, but the clock is at 10:15, which moves us along to members' statements.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DRIVER EXAMINATION CENTRES

CENTRES D'EXAMEN DE CONDUITE

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: I rise in the House today to speak on behalf of my constituents in my riding of Mushkegowuk—James Bay who are frustrated and tired of waiting for their in-person drive test. I've written to the Minister of Transportation numerous times about drive test examination issues. Oddly, the issue is unresolved. My letters remain unanswered and northerners still have to wait several months, close to over a year, to book their in-person drive test.

Northerners are calling our office frustrated because they can't book their appointments online—nothing is available—and can't book because the system is down. They are tired of being told they have to wait. Although many additional temporary road test centres have been opened, none are in the north.

Speaker, explain to me how someone who lives in London is using the online booking system to book their in-person drive test in Kapuskasing. It doesn't make sense, right?

Parlons d'une jeune demoiselle de mon comté. La jeune fille essaye d'avoir un rendez-vous chez « DriveTest », ça fait un an et demi, et rien n'est disponible en ligne jusqu'en 2024. Elle déménage pour l'école. Elle doit laisser son auto en arrière et elle paye des assurances dessus en espoir d'avoir sa licence.

Je demande à la ministre des Transports—I demand of the Minister of Transportation once again, once and for all: Answer to northerners, set proper geographical restrictions for online booking and open more temporary DriveTest centres in my riding.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Last week on October 13 and 14, I had the pleasure of joining the Honourable Jill Dunlop, Minister of Colleges and Universities, as her parliamentary assistant to tour Ottawa's colleges and universities: Algonquin College, Carleton University, Collège La Cité and the University of Ottawa. We were joined by our Ottawa caucus colleagues Minister Fullerton and MPP Roberts.

The tour began at Algonquin College led by President Claude Brulé to see the Allied Health labs for nursing and

PSW and the Algonquin College Centre for Construction Excellence, where we got to speak with a few students about their career aspirations.

Next was a tour of Carleton University with President Benoit-Antoine Bacon where we had the chance to meet several staff, faculty and students at the Centre for Advanced Building Envelope Research and postdoctoral fellowship, who showed us some of their amazing innovation and research in engineering and design.

At Collège La Cité, the minister announced that the Ontario government is investing more than \$400,000 towards innovative training and hands-on learning opportunities for French-language nursing students in Ottawa so that they can continue to receive world-class education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, to end the tour, we were at Ottawa university, which is my alma mater, where we announced that we're supporting an accelerated, flexible French-language teacher education program through a partnership with the University of Ottawa that will address the critical shortage of French-language technological education teachers.

Our government looks forward to continuing to collaborate with and support important initiatives at Ontario's colleges and universities to ensure that we can continue to provide the best post-secondary education in Canada and internationally.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Jennifer K. French: People care about their health, and they clearly understand the importance of optometric eye care and are not willing to allow this government to play games with people's sight and eye health.

My office is hearing from folks on ODSP like Arnaldo, who says, "I'm diabetic. I need my eyes checked every year. I gotta get it every year, I am due for my glasses. I missed a year because of the pandemic. So, what are we going to do about that? Seniors and diabetics and young people need glasses. The \$39,000,000 is a slap in the face. I'm stuck between a rock and a hard place."

We're hearing from parents like Lee-Anna, who wrote, "I am writing to you today as a parent of two daughters in Oshawa. One who currently wears glasses and contact lenses ... and one who this week has mentioned to me that she is having a difficult time reading the whiteboard at school. I have done what any parent would do in this case, I phoned my optometrist to make an appointment. My eldest needs new contact lenses and my youngest likely now needs corrective lenses. To my horror I learned that not only is OHIP not covering our exams, but I can't even choose to pay to have my daughters' vision checked. I am left with one daughter who now cannot get contact lenses because her prescription is more than a year old and another who can't effectively learn because she is unable to see properly, and no options to resolve this for my kids."

1020

Speaker, I've written to this Minister of Health about the many calls and letters from Oshawa seniors, folks and

families who cannot access the eye care they deserve. I will continue to present petitions and advocate for this government to return to the negotiating table and restore OHIP-insured eye care services to all youth and seniors.

Despite the challenges for many to accessing eye care in Ontario, everyone can see plainly that the government is unwilling to fairly fund optometric eye care. Do the right thing, Premier, and save eye care in Ontario.

MARLAND E. MALONEY

Mr. Jim McDonell: I rise today to bring attention to another example of the spirit of volunteerism that helps us to make Ontario and my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry the caring and best place to call home.

The township of South Stormont annually selects an individual to receive the volunteer of the year award named after Fran Laflamme, a long-time volunteer. For the year 2020, the recipient is Marland E. Maloney, who began his journey of community service at the age of 13.

Marland personally felt the community's generosity when a logging accident left him injured at the age of 16. The community rallied around him, raising needed funds with a community benefit dance. He has never stopped paying forward their kindness. His beneficiaries include snowmobile clubs, Easter Seals, the old car club and, most notably, Cornwall Township Lions Club. Through the Lions he's undertaken nearly every task and held all positions within the club, helping them organize and raise money for many causes over 57 years—still going strong at the young age of 73. If there is an event, Marland is there, in the hall named after him.

Thank you, Marland, and congratulations on this much-deserved honour.

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. Chris Glover: This past weekend, we had 10 shootings and four deaths in the city of Toronto. That makes 343 shootings, 38 deaths and 140 injuries in the city so far, but my riding of Spadina–Fort York has been the site of too many of these shootings on our streets and in Airbnb rentals. Across this city and across this province, people are suffering from the scourge of gun violence.

In 2018, I brought a motion to the Toronto Board of Health, asking it to recognize gun violence—exposure to gun violence—as a social determinant of health. My thinking has changed since then. I now realize that these are political determinants of health. Louis March of the Zero Gun Violence Movement says that if we don't deal with the roots of gun violence, they get deeper.

This government has been deepening the roots of gun violence in this province with all of its actions: freezing of the minimum wage, everything that leads to the growing gap between rich and poor, an Ontario Works rate of \$733 a month, ODSP at \$1,069 a month. We have low-income, segregated, largely racialized communities where people are desperate and where it's easier for a young person to get a gun than it is to get a job.

We can stop gun violence. It is in our hands to do it. But it needs to stop. The police alone cannot do it. The Toronto police have even said we cannot arrest our way out of this problem.

We need political action to reduce the growing gap between rich and poor and to raise the level of jobs and opportunities for low-income communities in this province, and then we can solve gun violence once and for all.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Jim Wilson: I rise this morning to thank the Minister of Health for keeping her promises. Last session, Minister Elliott promised cystic fibrosis patients that the life-extending medication Trikafta would be approved for funding at the earliest opportunity after the drug cleared regulatory requirements. In September, we learned that the minister's hard work on this file paid off. Ontario became the first Canadian jurisdiction to list the treatment on its drug benefit program. After years of fighting, people living with cystic fibrosis in our province now have timely access to the effective treatment options they need to plan for a future that many feared they may not live to see.

This past summer, the Minister of Health also kept her promise to visit Collingwood to learn first-hand about the need to replace the aging General and Marine Hospital. The facility has been serving the fast-growing southern Georgian Bay community, with an increasing senior population, for more than 60 years with limited upgrades. Minister Elliott announced a \$15-million investment to allow the General and Marine to move to the next stage of planning to ensure the constituents in the north end of my riding have access to the kind of high-quality care that will be required to meet their future needs.

On behalf of the hospital and the communities it has served so well, I want to thank the minister and the government for its commitment to putting an end to hallway health care in our region and across the province.

BILL ADSETT

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Today I want to recognize former Eramosa councillor, Wellington county warden and publisher Bill Adsett, who passed away on October 5.

Bill was a public servant in the best way possible. But he was also a volunteer, historian, farmer, husband and loving father.

Bill accomplished many things. To his constituents, he brought water and sewer services, improvements to Wellington Place, a new Wellington Road 7 bridge over the Elora Gorge and renewal of the Wellington county administration centre in Guelph—a project he championed from concept to completion.

Bill was also a businessman. He founded a successful newspaper, the Wellington Advertiser. His vision: a free newspaper for everyone in Wellington county. He brought it to fruition. The Advertiser continues to serve every community in the county, proudly and independently. It goes to over 40,000 homes and businesses each week.

Bill was an active member of the Drayton Legion, Fergus-Elora Rotary Club, Guelph's men club and Trinity United Church in Guelph.

His accomplishments are impressive; his dedication and decency are even more so.

I know I speak for all of us, and certainly you, Mr. Speaker, when I say that Wellington county and indeed all of Ontario is better off because of Bill.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: For years, parents have struggled to afford Ontario's astronomical child care costs, the highest in Canada. Now more than ever, parents need child care that's affordable and safe so they can return to work or make their household budgets work.

I'm talking to parents in my riding who tell me child care costs are almost as much as their mortgages and certainly, in many cases, more than they pay in rent.

Premier Ford needs to get moving and get Ontarians a deal now, rather than leaving federal money on the table.

The Ontario NDP is committed to working with the federal government to bring in a universal system of high-quality, public and not-for-profit child care that costs families only \$10 per day.

While Premier Ford's Conservatives argue with the federal Liberals over signing a \$10-a-day child care deal, Ontario families are paying the price. So far, seven provinces and one territory have inked a deal with Ottawa to provide \$10-per-day child care. We know it can be done.

So I repeat: The Ontario NDP is committed to making child care affordable by working with the federal government to bring in universal, high-quality, public and not-for-profit \$10-a-day child care. We think governments can and should get that done, and get it done right now.

BARRY TURNER

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I rise today to pay tribute to a great Canadian. Barry Turner passed away last Wednesday after a courageous battle with cancer.

Barry's career in service to his community was extensive. He served as the member of Parliament for Ottawa-Carleton. A devoted conservationist, he served as a director with Ducks Unlimited. He was chair of the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians, as well as chair of the board at CHEO in Ottawa.

His experience was diverse. Prior to elected office, he worked as a game warden in Tanzania and wrote a wonderful book titled, *From the Plains of Africa to the Jungles of Parliament*.

Personally, Speaker, Barry was somebody who helped mentor me as I started my political journey. He came out and helped door-knock with me throughout both my nomination and election. It was a great boost for a young man like myself, just getting his start in politics.

On behalf of everyone here in this Legislature, I would like to pass along my sincerest condolences to his partner,

Susan, and his entire family and thank Barry for his years of service to the Ottawa community and to Canada. Thank you, Barry.

1030

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm very pleased to inform the House that page Graden Lynch from the riding of Markham-Stouffville is today's page captain. We have with us today at Queen's Park his brother, Jack Lynch, and his sister, Claire Lynch.

Also, we're joined today at Queen's Park by the mother of page Fraser Litchfield, from the riding of Guelph: Shona Litchfield. Welcome to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. We're delighted to have you here as well.

WORKPLACE FATALITY

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Niagara Centre has a point of order.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent of the House to observe a moment of silence for the St. Catharines General Motors worker who tragically passed after a workplace incident on Friday.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Agreed? Agreed. Members will please rise.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Members may take their seats.

QUESTION PERIOD

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question this morning is to the Premier. The Premier is rewarding the worst people that provided service in long-term care over these last number of years, the worst players in the long-term-care system.

These companies make profits off of the suffering of our seniors. They're being handed 30-year contracts and literally billions in public dollars that line the pockets of for-profit corporations.

New contracts are an egregious situation. These companies failed to provide the basics that our seniors deserved in long-term care. They're being rewarded for that bad behaviour, which is not only extremely problematic, but it's a knife in the heart to all of those family members who lost a loved one to COVID-19 in long-term care.

My question is, why does this Premier think it's okay to reward the very companies that neglected Ontario's senior citizens in for-profit, private long-term-care homes?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply on behalf of the government, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Obviously, what we are doing is continuing the build out of more long-term-care beds

across the province. We knew when we came to office that this would be a priority for the people of the province of Ontario. I've said it on a number of occasions, as has the Premier. The inability of the previous Liberal government to invest in this sector is certainly what caused some of the problems that we saw at the beginning of the pandemic.

We brought in a number of different initiatives. It's not only about building new long-term care in the province of Ontario, it's about adding care. We are going to a North-American-leading four hours of care daily. We are hiring 27,000 additional PSWs. We're paying for the education of a number of PSWs.

We know that there is a lot of work that needs to be done, Mr. Speaker. We're increasing inspections across the sector. Nothing changes from the fact that we need to get new beds in the system, and we are doing that over the next number of years.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: We saw this government's priorities. The first thing they did when they came into office was cut the inspections and reduce funding to long-term care. That was their priority, and as a result, we saw what happened: A broken system under the Liberals was made much worse by this government, and literally, people suffered unspeakable situations. People lost their lives because of this government's lack of the right priorities.

The Premier is literally handing over to Orchard Villa—one of the very worst actors in this whole nightmare—733 new beds and over 1,000 redeveloped beds. That's the reward that Orchard Villa is getting from this government after the armed forces went in there and unveiled the nightmare that was happening, where 70 people lost their lives. That home did not face one single penalty. They were one of the worst.

The government's own inspectors said this: "Basic care including bathing/showering, oral hygiene, nail care, assistance with eating and drinking and fall prevention monitoring was not" being done.

Why is this Premier rewarding his buddies and for-profit long-term care instead of protecting our seniors?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, Mr. Speaker, it's just the opposite. What we're doing, as the member highlights in her question, is building out thousands of new spaces across the province of Ontario. We had a problem even before this government was elected, but we decided prior to the election that we were going to focus on long-term care in the province of Ontario. That is why we initiated the rebuild and the construction of 30,000 new beds.

There is still more work to be done. That's why we're hiring 27,000 new PSWs. I know, earlier today, the minister announced the hiring of hundreds of new inspectors to ensure that these new beds we are bringing online, with the new inspections that are happening, with the 30,000 new placements, the 27,000 new PSWs, the over 3,000 new nurses who are being brought into the system—that we have one of the most robust systems in long-term care. Four hours of care—these are massive investments that are being made.

It should have been done decades ago; I acknowledge that, Mr. Speaker. But this government is getting it done.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And the final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Oh, they're getting it done, all right, Speaker. They're literally pumping billions of dollars into a broken long-term-care system that is giving the worst-performing providers of long-term care, these for-profit corporations, even more public money.

In this province, 57% of our long-term-care beds are operated by private sector players, the highest in Canada. This government's decision, after the debacle, after the horrors that happened through COVID-19, is going to bump that up then to 60% with these announced investments.

Speaker, CTV reported this just yesterday, at Orchard Villa: "An inspection report from July"—July 2021, just a couple of months ago—"notes the licensee failed to ensure that the staff followed the home's infection prevention and control practices"—just a couple of months ago.

The FAO said that in 2021 the government is spending more than \$6 billion of our public health care money to line the pockets of their for-profit buddies in for-profit private long-term-care homes. Why would the government pour billions of dollars into the same people that caused such tragedy throughout our province during COVID-19?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, what we're doing is pouring billions of dollars into the long-term-care system, investments that should have been made by the previous Liberal government, Mr. Speaker. They weren't. They should have been forced upon them by the previous NDP, who, as opposed, waited for stretch goals in insurance.

What we're doing—again, I'll be very clear, Mr. Speaker—is we are investing to bring on 30,000 new spaces. We are investing to ensure that there's four hours of care. That is the North-American-leading level of care. We are bringing on hundreds of new inspectors into the system. The Minister of Health has been transitioning to Ontario health teams so that we can have better infection prevention and control measures.

But the member is correct: For far too long, the investments weren't made in long-term care, which led to homes that were not up to the standards we expect—standards that we are putting in place, standards that we moved on very quickly after being elected in 2018. And we are going to rebuild homes. We're going to invest in new homes. We're going to invest in care. We're going to invest in the PSWs to manage that care and have the most robust system of inspections in Canada.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. But we know exactly—everybody knows—what they're doing. They're handing more money over to their friends in private, for-profit long-term care, into a broken system. They're expanding basically a broken system.

1040

But my next question is about the advice that the Premier has been getting from the science table, which is very, very clear. They say mandatory vaccines for health care workers just make sense, that it makes sense to have a mandate for vaccines for health care workers in our province. Let me remind the Premier that this is exactly what the science table said: “Requiring that health care workers be vaccinated against certain communicable diseases is evidence-based and protects the public.”

My question to the Premier is: When will he say yes? When will he say yes and bring in mandatory vaccines for front-line health care and education workers in our province?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I think it’s really important to note that this is not a simple issue. There are a variety of views being expressed by the science advisory table and also by the many groups that the Premier wrote to, to receive their information—CEOs of hospitals, other health groups—to understand what the results would be if a mandatory vaccination policy were to be brought in. There is a concern that health human resources, which are already strained—our front-line health care workers are doing an amazing job and have for the last 20 months, but they are exhausted. Some of them are leaving for other reasons. Some of them may leave because they don’t want to be vaccinated.

We need to have that information. We are receiving the responses from all of those various groups, and we will put that all together, analyze it and then make a determination on what needs to be done.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And the supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It’s really hard to understand why this Premier never just says yes to science. The hospital association also weighed in about a week ago, and they said exactly the same thing, Speaker. I don’t know why the Premier hasn’t seen their letter. Maybe it’s still on his desk.

Julia Hanigsberg, the president of Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, says, “A universal vaccination policy across the health care sector is the safest approach for our patients and our teams.” And contrary to what the Minister of Health just said, the science table said, “A requirement ... can enhance safety and reduce the risk of staffing disruptions due to COVID-19.” So now I guess the health minister is not listening to science either.

The health care experts the Premier asked for feedback have given their feedback, Speaker. When will he listen and bring mandatory vaccines to all of our health care settings?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Our government has been listening to science and clinical evidence since the beginning of this pandemic, and we will continue to do so. We listen to what the science advisory table has to say. We listen to our Chief Medical Officer of Health and all of the

people who are advising him. We’re listening to the CEOs of hospitals. We’re listening to everyone. We want to understand what the ramifications of a mandatory vaccination policy would be.

We know that if there’s someone unvaccinated can infect other workers or other people in hospitals, but we also know that if there is a requirement for vaccinations, some people will leave. We need to know how many will leave, because we need to make sure that all Ontarians who are in hospital will receive the care that they require.

This isn’t just a simple “yes, no, do it.” We need to understand what the ramifications will be, and we’re analyzing that now.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This is not the first time this Premier and this government have decided to ignore science or to pay lip service to science while they’re trying to appease their anti-vaxxer base. At the end of the day, Speaker, the evidence is in. The experts have spoken. In fact, the worry is that if people take COVID-19 as unvaccinated folks into hospitals as workers, they could spread it to their co-workers. There’s hesitancy because people don’t want to go to work if they think that their co-workers might be unvaccinated. There’s risk that patients will become infected with COVID-19 and that outbreaks can occur with our most vulnerable.

Everybody is saying the same thing except this government. When will they finally listen to science, finally do the right thing and make sure we have a vaccine mandate to protect our workers, to protect our patients, to protect our families throughout our health care system?

Hon. Christine Elliott: It’s very clear that our government has taken every step possible to encourage everyone who is able to receive the vaccine to do so. We’ve asked that. We’ve made it easy for people to go and receive the vaccine. It’s available in many locations. We now have GO-VAXX buses going to where people are and not expecting them necessarily to come to where the centres are. We want people to be vaccinated, and the vast majority of health care workers have already done that.

But there are still some, for a variety of reasons, who are not choosing to be vaccinated. We need to understand how many there are because we need to make sure that our hospitals will be able to operate, not only for all of our patients; we now have received nine patients from Saskatchewan as well who are in very difficult circumstances. We need to make sure that we have the health human resources that we need in place to be able to care for people.

It’s also important to know that people who are not vaccinated are still tested very regularly to make sure that they do not have COVID. So we are protecting the health and well-being of all Ontarians.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Premier. Last week the Northwest Catholic District School Board voted

unanimously to call on the province to mandate vaccination for all education workers. They followed boards like the Toronto District School Board, Ottawa-Carleton and Superior North Catholic, who have all taken matters into their own hands in the absence of leadership from this government.

It has meant that families are left with a patchwork of vaccine policies in our schools, one that is leaving students with more or less protection just depending on where they live in this province.

Speaker, does the Premier think it's acceptable for unvaccinated school staff to work with our children who can't yet benefit from the protection of vaccines?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I thank the member opposite for the question. We're proud in this province to have literally one of the highest rates of immunization for youth in the country. We're also proud to have one of the lowest case rates for young people in Canada. That's because we follow the best medical expertise of the Chief Medical Officer of Health. That is not a coincidence; it is because we put in a layered approach coupled with high immunization rates.

With respect to our schools, we're very proud to have invested in air ventilation, a leading request and recommendation of the Ontario science table. Every school has improved air ventilation, from mechanically ventilated as well as the deployment of 70,000 HEPA units.

Speaker, the logic of the member opposite, to require that mandate, would mean that we would potentially be terminating 50,000 workers in the education space. That's the position of the New Democrats: to fire pink slips to tens of thousands of hard-working educators at a time when we are already challenged by staffing in the province of Ontario. I think we have to be coupled by realism and ensure that any staff member who enters our school has a double test, a negative antigen test, to ensure they are safe, to ensure our schools could be staffed, and these kids can continue to go to school everyday—

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: It boggles the mind, Speaker, why this government will not take this action that parents and boards across this province are demanding.

The news that Health Canada is finally reviewing vaccine applications for the five-to-11-year-old age group is a huge relief to parents, especially considering that we surpassed 4,000 cumulative school cases last week. But given the province-wide scavenger hunt that we saw with earlier phases, Ontarians are rightly worried about how they're going to get their kids vaccinated.

This government has ruled out a pre-registration system like the one that BC created, and public health units again are being left to pick up the slack or we're going to be left with this disjointed patchwork of plans.

Speaker, why can't this government be proactive for once—for once—and deliver a plan that will ensure a smooth rollout of vaccines for five-to-11-year-olds?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you for the question. We have been very successful in our vaccine rollout for adults. We have one of the highest levels of vaccination in the world right now. We are over 87.9% of first doses and 83.9% of second doses. This has been successful.

It has been successful in reducing hospitalizations. We currently today have 269 cases of COVID in Ontario and 138 in intensive care. That includes the nine from Saskatchewan.

We are working on vaccinating children ages five to 11. We are in regular contact with the federal government as to when they expect that Health Canada will be able to complete the review and allow for it to proceed. I will have more to say in my supplemental about exactly what we're doing with respect to that age group.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Lorne Coe: My question is to the Minister of Long-Term Care. After years of neglect where the previous government only built 611 net new beds from 2011 to 2018, the wait-list for long-term care grew to over 40,000 people. Now, while I've heard the minister talk about our government's progress in building 30,000 new long-term-care beds in Ontario, we know that we need innovative solutions to dealing with the wait-list.

1050

Last Friday, I joined the minister in my riding of Whitby to announce an investment of \$82.5 million to expand the Community Paramedicine for Long-Term Care program to an additional 22 communities. Can the Minister of Long-Term Care please explain what this investment means for seniors on the long-term-care wait-list?

Hon. Rod Phillips: I thank the member for Whitby for his question and the great work he does representing his constituents. The Community Paramedicine for Long-Term Care program leverages the skills of our paramedics who do such great work in our communities, focusing on supporting those who are waiting for a place in long-term-care homes.

Mr. Speaker, over the two years leading up to our government coming into power, the wait-list increased by 11,000 people. As the member noted, we have a plan to build 30,000 long-term-care beds; 220 projects under way. But the additional \$82.5 million that we announced last week now expands the community paramedicine program to cover all of Ontario so that all Ontario seniors who are waiting for a long-term-care bed can now get the support of community paramedicine. That brings our total investment to \$250 million, serving all communities across Ontario with this vital support.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you to the Minister of Long-Term Care for that response. I'm glad to hear of the proactive steps that are being taken to provide quality care to seniors in my riding and across Ontario.

Speaker, seniors in my community want the peace of mind to know that they have a safe option to receive quality health care without having to go to the hospital while they wait for a long-term-care bed. After seeing the stagnancy and neglect of previous governments, how can residents be sure our government will improve the health care outcomes for seniors here in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Rod Phillips: In the region of Durham, that \$250 million province-wide amounts to \$7.5 million to support our seniors through the community paramedicine program. What that means is access to 24/7 support for our seniors, and I should say that that is in coordination with our vital home care services, bridging this situation for seniors who don't have access right now to a bed as we build them. It means home visits. It means in-home testing, ongoing monitoring. As the paramedics pointed out to me, it means a reduction in 911 calls because of the support that's being provided very directly to these seniors.

It helps support our seniors. It also helps support our hospital system, and in doing that supports our communities.

GRAPE AND WINE INDUSTRY

Mr. Jeff Burch: My question is to the Premier. Ontario's domestic grape industry has a legacy we should all be proud of. Niagara's wine tourism industry attracts 2.4 million tourists and generates a tourism-related impact of \$847 million annually.

Growers have invested in research and technology to mitigate the risks of climate change. However, this year our Niagara and Ontario grape growers are facing a harvest that is challenging at best, and devastating to some. The weather conditions this fall are making it difficult to harvest the crop. Grapes are perishable, and picked at maturity they cannot be stored. Coupled with the difficult weather conditions, our Ontario-grown grapes are rotting in the field because they are competing with imports. This is a time when world supply chain issues and shortages are making headlines, but local grapes don't get stuck on cargo ships.

Will this government stand up today and ensure that local growers aren't left behind while importers get a place on the shelf?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, it probably wouldn't surprise the honourable gentleman that I too want to make sure that there is always a good grape harvest in the province of Ontario. This is maybe an opportune time to give a shout-out to my relatives who are actually in the process of making their own wine this year, but that's not to diminish the importance of this sector to the province of Ontario, especially in the honourable gentleman's region. Of course, the tourism sector has been very, very hard-hit and we have put in a number of significant investments into the sector to make sure that they can come out of this more robust than they went into it before.

I will take the honourable member's comments, and I will be able to advise him a little bit later on. I apologize that I can't give him the appropriate answer that he's looking for specifically to that industry, but I recognize how important it is and I will make sure that I endeavour to get back to the honourable gentleman at the conclusion of question period.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Speaker, we need the government of Ontario to stand up for locally grown grapes and wine that is made from 100% Ontario-grown grapes. We need "Ontario grown" to be first on the label and in the bottle, and no grape should be left on the ground.

Growers have a collective legacy of investment of an estimated \$647 million in 18,000 acres of land and vineyards. It costs about \$40,000 an acre to establish a vineyard and takes four years from planting to mature production. It is a long-term investment in our land base, with most of the vineyards located in Ontario's specialty crop areas of the protected greenbelt.

This government has said that "made in Ontario" is one of the pillars of the COVID-19 recovery strategy, but what will it do to make sure Ontario grapes get into a bottle of wine that is grown in Ontario and on the shelf of the provincially run liquor control board today and into the future? How long do growers and wineries have to wait to see action?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, I will agree with the honourable gentleman that this is an incredibly important industry to the province of Ontario and incredibly important to his region. I would agree that our grape growers are some of the finest in North America and that our wines, as a result, are also the finest.

We have made a lot of progress with respect to opening up our markets here locally to expand the availability of beer, wine and spirits across the province of Ontario—something that the members opposite, of course, have voted against every single time. So it is surprising, but I guess I'm somewhat grateful, that the honourable member is now shifting the NDP. Earlier, we had them shifting towards support for the oil and gas sector, thanks to the great work from the member for Sarnia-Lambton. Now, we're hearing, finally, support for local industries such as our grape growers. So I thank the honourable gentleman.

More has to be done, and we'll make sure that it gets done so that it remains a vibrant—

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

The next question.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Minister of Health. Speaker, last week, the CEO of Royal Victoria hospital in Barrie announced a new south campus to be built on a greenfield site in Innisfil township. The planned facility is to first serve as a health hub, focusing on outpatient care, and then eventually expand to become a full-service hospital.

While this is exciting news for south Simcoe, it has many of my constituents asking how it will impact the timing of the redevelopment of Stevenson Memorial Hospital in Alliston. Stevenson received stage 2 planning money 16 months ago, but has heard nothing since.

Speaker, can the minister tell my constituents when Stevenson Memorial can expect to move forward with the next stage of its much-anticipated and desperately needed redevelopment?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member opposite for the question as well as for your tremendous advocacy on behalf of the cystic fibrosis community. You played a major part in the approval of Trikafta, so thank you for that.

It is true we have received a submission from the Royal Victoria hospital for a new south campus, but nothing has been decided yet. We're just in the preliminary review of their application. As you know, having been in this position before, we receive numerous capital requests for hospital projects, and we are working through a number of them now, including the one from Stevenson Memorial, which was announced in our 2019-20 budget. We are continuing to engage with the hospital to advance planning for the first phase of the hospital's redevelopment project, which is major.

This is an important project, and we are taking the time, working with the hospital, to make sure that it serves the purposes that the community needs.

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

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to the minister: As I was pleased to inform the House earlier this morning, the Minister of Health visited the Collingwood General and Marine Hospital in August. While there, she announced a \$15-million investment to fund the next stage of planning for the hospital's future. I sincerely thank the minister and the government for fulfilling that promise to come to Collingwood.

1100

But the second part of the minister's promise over the years has been that she will also tour Stevenson Memorial Hospital in the south end of my riding. This commitment is just as important to my constituents and would allow the government to see first-hand the desperate—and I mean desperate—need for Stevenson's redevelopment. Speaker, can the minister tell my constituents when she plans to come to Alliston and tour Stevenson Memorial Hospital—and I hope she will—and will she be bearing good news when she comes?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Well, I can't commit to the latter part of your question; however, I know that the Stevenson Memorial redevelopment project is major, leading to 89,000 square feet and new bed capacity. So it is significant, I know, for the constituents in your riding. We want to make sure, as I said before, that we take the necessary steps to get it in the right space and the right place for all of the residents.

While I can't commit to a specific time for a visit, I would certainly be happy to come and tour the hospital

when time permits. Unfortunately, I can't advise with respect to any announcements at this point, but I certainly will attend if I'm able to, and thank you for the invitation.

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is for Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated a great shift in how we work: Today in Ontario, almost 30% of people aged 15 to 69 currently work from home. While some constituents in my riding of Flamborough–Glanbrook have enjoyed the flexibility that this offers, they also worry about their days getting longer and longer while time with their family is getting shorter and shorter.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister please share with the members of this House how the Working for Workers Act will help hard-working parents who feel burnt out?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I want to thank the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook for that very important question. The future of work is here and our jobs have all changed dramatically. This is why our government is taking action to ensure these changes are working for workers. Yesterday, I was proud to rise in this Legislature and introduce the Working for Workers Act.

People are more than their jobs: They are moms and dads, community volunteers, members of faith communities and so much more. Our legislation makes it crystal clear: When you're off the clock, you're off the clock. We're standing up for workers, and especially after the last 19 months our workers need a break.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And the supplementary.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you, Minister, for that response. We have seen a disturbing trend on the rise with more big corporations using non-compete agreements to hold workers back and stifle our homegrown talent. Recently, I read that tech salaries in Toronto are only about 65% of the average US tech salary. I believe there is absolutely no reason for workers here in Ontario to be vastly underpaid compared to their American counterparts.

Can the minister share how our government is tackling this trend and freeing workers to advance their careers?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Thank you again to the member for that. Speaker, our Working for Workers Act will ban non-compete agreements. They are an injustice, and they have no place in Ontario. Banning these agreements will also help us attract top talent to strengthen our economy. I'm pleased to say that we received the support this morning of 1,600 tech companies, mostly small and medium-sized, supporting this initiative.

Mr. Speaker, we're also levelling the playing field to help grow the innovative ideas that are being developed here in Ontario's backyard. Ontario is a province of opportunity, where hard work pays off and big dreams come to life. Our government has a plan to build the future of our great province, and we're taking the side of workers.

DRIVER EXAMINATION CENTRES

Mr. Michael Mantha: My question is to the Premier. DriveTest is currently facing a backlog of 700,000 tests. This is forcing people to wait months on end to book an appointment. With the provincial order extending G1 and G2 licences set to expire in a few months, Ontarians are scrambling to book an appointment, only to find that there are none available. For many, driving is how we get to things like groceries, school, work, doctor appointments. This is especially true for those living in rural and northern Ontario. This backlog is clearly not sustainable. It will further hinder Ontario's economic recovery, and it increasingly adds stress on hard-working Ontario families.

Will the Premier tell the people of Ontario what the government is doing to address the growing backlog in drive tests across Ontario?

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

Hon. Stan Cho: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. This is an important issue, and DriveTest backlogs are something people are suffering from. I can relate to their frustration throughout this pandemic, a very difficult time. That's why we're attacking the problem at its source, from the beginning. In June, of course, we did announce a \$16-million plan, with 251 additional drivers.

But the member asked specifically about the north, and I'm happy to say that there are programs tailored towards the unique needs of the north. There are 27 Travel Point locations providing services on a part-time basis in northern communities, that make up 43% of the DriveTest network, and under this new plan to help address the backlog in the north, every DriveTest location in northern Ontario will receive at least one additional drive examiner. This is expected to increase testing capacity in the region by approximately 150%.

I appreciate the member's concern. We have to address this backlog. We're going to make sure we get that done and get back to prosperity here in Ontario.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: Again to the Premier: Backlog for drivers' tests were an issue in the north before COVID-19. Now, the number of people waiting to get tests has reached a crisis level in the north. Despite this, the government has not opened a single new testing location in northern Ontario.

This is affecting residents in my riding like Charlie Wardell from Thessalon, who is struggling to book a G test before his licence expires and he is forced to start the process over again; or Norm Lacroix, a bus dealership owner, who needs new bus drivers in Chapleau. Tests are backed up to the point where they cannot book an appointment to December 2022—others, 2024.

As the member from Sudbury said recently, "The north is where we use highways to get to work, not subways." This backlog is causing major disruptions to everyday life in the north. Will the Premier commit to opening more

DriveTest locations in northern Ontario to ensure no one loses their licence because they cannot book a test?

Hon. Stan Cho: I'm glad the member referenced the question from the member for Sudbury last week, because he's right: The north has unique challenges. To Charlie and Norm, coming out of these very difficult 19 months, we understand the frustration of trying to get through these backlogs because the northerners rely on these types of programs to be able to live their daily lives out there.

And that's why, specifically to the north, we have allocated additional resources to make sure every DriveTest location in the north will receive one additional drive tester. This is also part of a bigger plan to go after the highest-volume areas where these backlogs are being created. We are going to address this problem.

I appreciate Charlie and Norm are going through a difficult time, so I will say directly to them: Once we're through this backlog, you will find that we will return to the normal status of life and keep the northern locations in Dryden, Espanola, Fort Frances, Kapuskasing, Kenora, Sudbury, Thunder Bay and Timmins, making sure we have year-round access to get those drivers' tests done and get back onto the road.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is to the Premier. When you sent thousands of students back to packed classrooms this fall, you claimed that schools had what they needed to keep our children safe. We were led to believe that the fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic would not be the same as the waves that came before, that the government had learned from its mistakes and that parents could expect learning gaps in their children's education to shrink, not expand.

The reality, however, is alarming. In my riding of Scarborough—Guildwood, parents and teachers are telling me that conditions have not improved. Schools do have portable air filters, but the other COVID measures that we know work to limit the spread of COVID-19 are absent. The latest school in my riding to face a COVID outbreak is Cedarbrae Collegiate. That's five schools now in my riding that have had to deal with an outbreak, and many people fear that there will be more, as infection rates in schools are nearly one in four of COVID cases.

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Last wave, the Minister of Health prioritized vaccine hot spots during the early stages of our vaccination program. Will the minister do the same for vaccinations for our children, so that they can get the vaccine as soon as it is approved?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member for the question. We are working to protect all children in school. We already have the vaccinations for students aged 12 to 17; for those in elementary school, we're waiting for the results from Health Canada for approval of the use of the vaccine for children ages five to 11.

We are already putting a plan in place. We are not waiting. We will be ready to go as soon as this has been approved by Health Canada. We've already been in touch with the chief medical officers of health in the 34 Ontario regions. We have their plans. The plans differ according to the various units, depending on what's available, but we are reviewing their plans right now and making sure that in all 34 of those regions, they will be ready to go as soon as the vaccine is approved.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Ontarians have sacrificed a lot in this pandemic, especially in hot-spot communities in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood. We've done our part to get people vaccinated and to follow recommendations and guidelines, in hopes that 2022 will look more like 2019 than like 2020. The sacrifices will not end until the remaining percentage of the unvaccinated gets even smaller.

A significant portion of this unvaccinated group, as you know, are those who are not eligible presently: our children under age 12. This group will soon be eligible based on the fact that Health Canada is now reviewing the one approved vaccine for that age group. The federal government has pre-ordered 2.9 million doses, Minister. You say you have a plan, and I'm wondering if you will share that plan today with this Legislature, on what you will be doing to make sure that the unvaccinated under 12 are done as quickly as possible; and that there is equity built into that, so that hot-spot communities where the virus continues to spread receive prioritization; and that you coordinate with school boards so that clinics are—

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, there are 34 different plans, because there are 34 public health unit regions within Ontario. They vary depending on what resources are available within their units, but we are working with them directly right now. Schools, as you indicated, are likely to be a major place where the vaccinations will occur—not necessarily within school hours, because most parents of children of that age would like to be with their child when they receive the vaccine. But in evenings and weekends, that's likely to be a major location. Some will be done in primary care as well.

But there is a plan. It is being finalized right now, so that as soon as Health Canada advises that it's all right to move forward, we will be getting those vaccines out to the local public health units and start that right away. Based on the success of our adult vaccination program, people can rest assured that we will bring the same rigour to the vaccination of children as well.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: My question is for the Minister of Education. When our government came to power in 2018, we immediately began cleaning up the mess left by the previous government. Over 15 years, we saw education neglected as schools closed all over our province, and

with the COVID-19 pandemic, the delivery of education in Ontario and across the globe has been severely impacted. School boards, educators, and students and their families in my riding of Carleton have demonstrated resiliency and flexibility in responding to changes in their learning environments, and have come a long way in embracing new ways of teaching, learning and connecting.

Through you, Mr. Speaker: Can the Minister of Education tell us how our government plans to right the wrongs of the previous government and ensure that there are enough schools to meet the needs of Ontarians?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to thank the member for Carleton for being a strong advocate for her families, for delivering new schools for the next generation of residents in the Ottawa region.

Our government, under the Premier's leadership, is absolutely committed to rebuilding schools after a decade of darkness under the former Liberal government where 600 schools closed and where the repair backlog increased by over \$15 billion. That is unacceptable. We know we can do better. Our kids deserve better, which is why our government has allocated over half a billion dollars each and every year to rebuild schools and to build new schools—modern, accessible and technologically connected—for all children in the province.

In fact, there are over 150 projects that have been approved by this Progressive Conservative government and there are over 300 schools and child care projects that are currently under way, under construction. I'm proud to highlight two: The first is in Etobicoke, Bishop Allen Academy. Two members from Etobicoke have helped to deliver a brand new Catholic high school for families in that community. Likewise, in Halton, the new North Oakville Catholic elementary school will help support children in growing communities right across this province.

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Mr. Speaker, through you, this is excellent news. I'm really glad to learn that new schools are coming for these communities, especially after the previous government failed to support students across the province.

Thousands of families outside of the GTHA depend on us. They are counting on our government to deliver high-quality, world-class education to their children for decades to come. Can the Minister of Education tell us how our government plans to invest in the next generation of Ontarians beyond the GTA?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I think it's fair to say that families in rural and remote parts of Ontario, and families that live outside the GTHA also, deserve these modern schools, accessible schools. We absolutely would agree, especially noting the equity disparity that took place under the former government where many of our rural schools in communities outside of Toronto just didn't get the investment they deserved. That's why I'm proud that the member from Carleton has delivered the new Riverside South public secondary school in Carleton, delivering

parents and young children in those communities a state-of-the-art school. Likewise, in Brantford, our hard-working member has delivered the new St. Charles Catholic elementary school that will support families in that community. And the Premier's commitment to the people of Essex is to build a new Kingsville public elementary and secondary school that's going to make a big difference for families in Windsor.

Speaker, we are investing in all regions of Ontario with one commitment: to ensure schools are modern, kids are safe and they continue to learn each and every day.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: My question is for the Premier. Premier, a 77-year-old senior in my community desperately needs your help. Since June, four months ago, Joyce has been unable to eat solids and is vomiting constantly, becoming more and more frail and sick. Joyce requires a specialized CT scan to find out what's going on and figure out how to treat it, but because of the long wait-list, she will have to wait until December. Even worse, Joyce's daughter experienced the same symptoms, only to later find out she had esophageal cancer, a cancer that claimed her life. May she rest in peace.

Premier, I know all of this through Joyce's family, because she is in no state to talk to me. Imagine what this family is going through. They're desperately awaiting the scan and are fearing the window might close on potentially life-saving treatment as the clock ticks away.

Premier, time is of the essence. Will you help Joyce and countless others who are desperately stuck awaiting urgent scans, procedures and surgeries?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member for this important question. We know that people like Joyce have been anxiously awaiting surgeries and diagnostic procedures for some time as a result of COVID, where we've had to delay or postpone some of these procedures. But we are very cognizant of the issues here. We want to get people back into good health and to make sure that we can diagnose any illnesses before they advance further.

That's why, as part of our \$1.8-billion investment into hospitals, we are also dedicating \$300 million to reduce the wait-list for surgeries and procedures. That's in addition to the \$200 million we announced last fall to deal with some of these procedures, because we know that people have been waiting long enough. We know that they need surgeries, and the diagnostic procedures as well so that Joyce and her family can get the results that they need and get her, hopefully, back on the road to wellness.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Back to the Acting Premier: I that hope your government will move quickly, because time is really of the essence in Joyce's case and so many others'.

Backlogs and long wait-lists aren't the only problems in health care today. We just don't have enough front-line

health care workers in our hospitals and our communities. It makes the work of our front-line health care heroes even harder and has a direct impact on patient care.

Yesterday, the Ontario NDP tabled a vital motion addressing the nursing shortage, but the government voted against it. Other provinces have taken real action to deal with this issue. Why won't you?

Hon. Christine Elliott: We certainly recognize the health human resources issue, which is one of the reasons why we're treading very carefully and really reviewing carefully the issue of mandatory vaccination for front-line health care workers. We know that many people on the front line have been working over the last 20 months. Some of them are exhausted, some of them don't want to continue, some of them don't want to proceed with vaccination, so we have to look at that very, very cautiously.

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But we are spending money. We are looking at retraining people, making sure that we keep people in nursing and other professions, making sure that we have the laddering prospects so that if somebody is a personal support worker and wants to become a registered practical nurse or a registered practical nurse wishes to become a registered nurse—we're putting those systems in place so that people can do that, because we want people, whatever their entry point is in working in the health care system, to stay in the health care system and to look forward. Some people may be happy where they are, other people may want to advance. We recognize that, and we're creating programs to train people and keep people in those programs and to train people for the higher levels in terms of surgery, intensive care and emergency work as well.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: My question is for the Deputy Premier. Last week, after government members said in this Legislature during debate what the government has been doing for weeks, pushing and supporting employers in health care to end the employment of those workers who do not comply with new mandatory COVID-19 vaccine policies, government members then reversed course, followed my lead and voted against Bill 12, which would have resulted in many losing their jobs in Ontario in health care and education.

So why yesterday was it reported that this government is still considering putting such a mandate in place in health care that will result in Ontarians losing their jobs? Why, if the government voted against Bill 12, will they not reject COVID-19 vaccine mandates in order for one to keep their job in health care?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member for her question. We've dealt with this issue several times today in the Legislature, and there is an issue, as you know, with respect to health human resources and making sure we have the people we need in order to care for people in our hospitals and in home care as well. It is something that we need to consider very carefully. That is why the Premier sent the letter out to the hospitals, to other health

care organizations: to understand what the ramifications would be if we were to bring in a mandatory vaccination policy. How many people would we lose?

As the previous question indicated, we are in a health human resource shortage right now, and we need to carefully look at this situation to understand what it means in terms of people who are not being vaccinated who still have to be tested on a regular basis before they come into work. But this isn't a simple question, and it deserves the proper scrutiny.

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

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Also last week, the Minister of Labour said we have a labour shortage of some 293,000 jobs, and so he proposed making it easier for immigrants, as opposed to any other Ontarian, to get licensed in certain professions by removing work experience requirements. And yet, this government is the one making the labour shortage worse by allowing for and encouraging employers to terminate employees who do not comply with made-up mandatory vaccine requirements.

In just some examples, in construction, EllisDon and PCL announced mandatory COVID-19 vaccine requirements for employment; at SickKids, 147 employees have been put on unpaid leave; and at University Health Network, 1% of their workforce will be terminated.

To the Deputy Premier: Why is this government allowing policies to be put in place that have Ontarians losing their jobs, all while the Minister of Labour is making it easier for immigrants to be licensed professionals in Ontario by eliminating the work experience requirements that every other Ontarian had to do to get the same job?

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

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I thank the member opposite, and she is right: We are moving forward to fill the labour shortages here in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I think often of the opportunities in the skilled trades. One in three journeypersons today is over the age of 55. We have this challenge in front of us with all of these workers retiring. That's why we want to get more people into the skilled trades, into these meaningful opportunities with six figures, with defined pensions and benefits. This is how we're going to build back a stronger province.

We are going to level the playing field for the people of Ontario—and for immigrants who are already here, actually. In fact, 25% of immigrants that live in Ontario are actually working in fields that they've studied for. Many of them, as we all know, have been driving a taxi for many, many years. We're going to ensure that all licensing requirements are in place, all the proper testing protocols, and we're going to give these people the hand up that they deserve.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is for the Premier. Brett Davis is a Fanshawe College student in

London. He has autism, depression, anxiety and OCD. When his apartment burned down last August, he and his mom, Jaselyn, found out how difficult it is to actually find affordable housing in London. His sole income is ODSP, which means he has to live on about \$1,100 a month. He was paying \$700 a month in rent, and that means he has \$400 left for other expenses. Imagine more than 60% of your income just to put a roof over your head.

After reaching out to nine agencies, none of which that could provide meaningful help, Brett has now found a home through a fluke: through Jaselyn's mother, a friend was able to offer assistance.

In London, the average rent for a room is \$500, and \$1,000 for a studio apartment. On the current rate for OW and ODSP, how are Ontarians supposed to live? And will this government commit to raising rates for OW and ODSP?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant and member for Ottawa West—Nepean.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. Our hearts, of course, go out to Mr. Davis on the tragedy that occurred at his home.

In terms of government support for individuals with disabilities, our government raised ODSP and Ontario Works rates in the first year that we took government. During the COVID-19 pandemic, knowing the challenges posed by the pandemic, we invested more than \$1 billion in the Social Services Relief Fund and expanded access to temporary emergency assistance to those in financial crisis. We are going to continue supporting those who are most vulnerable, including through this work, and we're going to be there throughout the pandemic and beyond.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is back to the Premier: Brett is not alone. According to the latest Vital Signs report for London, 77% of low-income tenants surveyed reported their rental units needed significant repairs, while the average price of rent has increased 7%. As of September, over 1,300 people are experiencing homelessness and 6,000 folks are on a wait-list for social housing.

Brett is on two wait-lists for housing, one for two years and the other for nearly five years. When Jaselyn reached out for assistance, some of the programs told her that because Brett was able to stay with her while looking for housing, they weren't able to help. Brett was so desperate that he went to the newspaper to get some help. Brett doesn't want to be in this situation going forward, and he wasn't eligible for service simply because he was living with his mother.

Why must Ontarians be in crisis before they are supported? And what are we doing to help Ontarians so they don't end up on the streets?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Our government is committed to ensuring that we are reforming and revitalizing these vital services that Ontarians rely on. We know the Ontario Works and the ODSP program are critical to helping those who are most in need.

The system itself is facing challenges that limit our ability to help people get back on their feet, and the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated those challenges. That's why we are currently working with our municipal partners and developing a shared vision for social assistance for the future. The focus of this vision is on the people we serve and how we can connect them to supports that respond to their unique needs and the barriers they face.

This vision will ensure that front-line workers have more time to focus on connecting clients with supports like job-readiness programs, housing, child care, skills training and mental health services. This vision is the start of our collaboration, not the end, and we will continue to work with our partners across the sector to improve this system for the future.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

M^{me} Lucille Collard: My question is for the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development. I have heard from many new Canadians who are qualified to work in jobs which are in high demand, but they can't work in their field: lawyers, engineers and doctors.

Recently, I've heard from a highly qualified francophone teacher from France who ended up going to work in Quebec because she couldn't find a job in Ontario. She wanted to teach in Ontario, but the rules and processes for the certification from the Ontario College of Teachers were so complicated and slow that she simply gave up. With Ontario facing a critical shortage of French teachers, we should be simplifying our rules to make it easier for immigrants to become teachers in our province.

The recent professional registration and licensing changes announced by the government don't go far enough. What additional plan does the government have for allowing more teachers, particularly francophone teachers, to come to Ontario and practise their profession?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. We are aware of the long-standing challenge nationally of recruiting, hiring and retaining French-language educators in Ontario. It is a real crisis, because we have great growth within our francophone communities and, by extension, within our schools.

We announced a collaborative, enterprise-wide policy, a French-language recruitment and retention strategy for educators, that has already yielded since its announcement in June new educators recruited internationally, including from France. We announced this just last week with the consul general from France, as well as my colleagues the minister of francophonie and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education, all of whom celebrate the fact that we already have internationally trained educators from France and the broader Francophonie in this province educating as we speak.

Clearly, we have to do more. We have to support the sector, which is why I increased funding for French-language education at the highest level ever recorded in

provincial history. I recognize where we have to continue to work hard, which is why we've allocated over \$19 million in educational loans specifically targeted to the recruitment of educators and a reduction of red tape at the Ontario College of Teachers.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I do appreciate the response from the minister and that efforts are being made. However, the only major change that the government brought forward is the elimination of the requirement to have work experience in Canada. But that ignores the heart of the problem, which is that professional bodies refuse to recognize certifications from other jurisdictions or to enable training for immigrants to renew their skills.

We are in an urgent shortage of health care and education professionals, and we have trained doctors and teachers driving taxis and working checkout counters. The bill I will be introducing this afternoon lays a path for identifying certification issues and to develop a strategy. I invite you to consider it.

My question is, will the government commit to an expansion of the recognition of diplomas from other jurisdictions?

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

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Thank you very much, and this is a really important question. Mr. Speaker, yesterday we tabled the Working for Workers Act, which is going to create a clear path for new Canadians to find meaningful work here in Ontario to fully apply their skills. This will help thousands and thousands of new Canadians who are actually here in Ontario today.

This is an issue that the former Liberal government did nothing to address. Today in the province, 300,000 jobs are going unfilled. Only 25% of immigrants are working in their field of study. This is an injustice to all of those people who are here in Ontario today who might be working for Uber or driving taxis. They should be doing what they were trained for. Mr. Speaker, we're going to help them, give them a hand up, and also ensure that we fill the labour shortage—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. That concludes our question period this morning.

And I want to, if I can, for a moment, thank the House for the co-operation that we demonstrated to each other today and the standard of civility that was achieved. Well done.

There being no further business at this time, this House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1133 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ADVENTURE LEARNING EXPERIENCES INC. ACT, 2021

Mrs. Wai moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr51, An Act to revive Adventure Learning Experiences Inc.

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): Pursuant to standing order 89, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

PREVENTING WORKER
MISCLASSIFICATION ACT, 2021
LOI DE 2021 VISANT À EMPÊCHER
LA CLASSIFICATION ERRONÉE
DES TRAVAILLEURS

Ms. Sattler moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 28, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to the employer-employee relationship / Projet de loi 28, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne la relation employeur-employé.

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): Would the member for London West like to explain her bill briefly?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: This is a bill to prevent the misclassification of gig and other workers as independent contractors when they are actually employees, which excludes them from any of the protections of the Employment Standards Act.

The bill would make Ontario the first province in Canada to legislate the gold standard ABC test for worker classification, which puts the onus on employers to prove that a worker is not an employee by showing that the work is being done: (a) without the direction and control of the person hiring; (b) outside the usual course of the business of the person hiring; and (c) by someone who has their own independent business or trade doing that kind of work.

The bill also sets out the criteria for legitimate business-to-business contracting relationships for freelancers and entrepreneurs.

CANNABIS LICENCE AMENDMENT
ACT, 2021
LOI DE 2021 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LES LICENCES
LIÉES AU CANNABIS

Ms. Stiles moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 29, An Act to amend the Cannabis Licence Act, 2018 / Projet de loi 29, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2018 sur les licences liées au cannabis.

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): Would the member for Davenport care to explain her bill?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Today I am very pleased to be re-introducing the Cannabis Licence Amendment Act, a bill that would give Ontario's municipalities a greater say in the licensing of cannabis retail outlets as our local economies recover from COVID-19.

The shuttered businesses and empty storefronts dotting our once-vibrant main streets are a reminder of the harsh impact this pandemic has had on small businesses. At the same time, a flood of new cannabis retail licences entering the market has led to less diverse main streets where other types of business simply cannot compete.

Cannabis is legal in Ontario and should be accessible to the public. The bill simply aligns the licensing process with that used for liquor licences, giving more weight to municipal voices in considering where and how many licences should be awarded in a given area, in line with their own planning and community priorities.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I believe I'm obliged to remind members that when they explain their bill, it's to be as brief as possible—ideally, reading the explanatory note that comes with the bill.

FOREIGN CREDENTIALS
ADVISORY COMMITTEE
ACT, 2021
LOI DE 2021 SUR LE COMITÉ
CONSULTATIF DES TITRES
DE COMPÉTENCE ACQUIS
À L'ÉTRANGER

Madame Collard moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 30, An Act to establish an advisory committee for foreign credentials / Projet de loi 30, Loi créant un comité consultatif pour les titres de compétence acquis à l'étranger.

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'd like to invite the member for Ottawa-Vanier to briefly explain her bill.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: The bill enacts the Foreign Credentials Advisory Committee Act, 2021. It establishes the Foreign Credentials Advisory Committee to review the legislation and other rules that govern the recognition of foreign credentials in Ontario to identify obstacles, make recommendations on how to improve the recognition of foreign credentials in Ontario, and make any other recommendations to make Ontario more prosperous and more inclusive with respect to the recognition of foreign credentials.

1921628 ONTARIO INC.
ACT, 2021

Mrs. Wai moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr52, An Act to revive 1921628 Ontario Inc.

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): Pursuant to standing order 89, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

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NANCY ROSE ACT (PAEDIATRIC
HOSPICE PALLIATIVE CARE
STRATEGY), 2021

LOI NANCY ROSE DE 2021
(STRATÉGIE DES SOINS
PALLIATIFS PÉDIATRIQUES)

Ms. Shaw moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 31, An Act to provide for the development of a provincial paediatric hospice palliative care strategy / Projet de loi 31, Loi prévoyant l'élaboration d'une stratégie provinciale des soins palliatifs pédiatriques.

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 member to briefly explain her bill.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'm reintroducing the Nancy Rose Act, Mr. Speaker. This is a bill named in honour of my little sister who died from leukemia as a young child, but it is dedicated to all the children and families in Ontario who have suffered the unimaginable.

The bill enacts the Nancy Rose Act. The act requires the Minister of Health to develop and implement a pediatric hospice palliative care strategy for Ontario. The goal of the strategy is to create equity of access to high-quality pediatric hospice palliative care across Ontario.

CARBON BUDGET
ACCOUNTABILITY ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021
SUR LA RESPONSABILITÉ
EN MATIÈRE DE BUDGET CARBONE

Mr. Schreiner moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 32, An Act with respect to a carbon budget for Ontario / Projet de loi 32, Loi préconisant un budget carbone pour l'Ontario.

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): Would the member for Guelph care to briefly explain his bill?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: This bill enacts the Carbon Budget Accountability Act, 2021. The act requires the Premier and the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks to ensure that Ontario's total net emissions of greenhouse gases do not exceed the specified carbon budget.

The minister is required to prepare a carbon budget report each year and lay the report before the assembly before March 31 in each year.

SIKH GENOCIDE AWARENESS
WEEK ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LA SEMAINE
DE LA SENSIBILISATION
AU GÉNOCIDE DES SIKHS

Mr. Gurratan Singh moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 33, An Act to proclaim Sikh Genocide Awareness Week / Projet de loi 33, Loi proclamant la Semaine de la sensibilisation au génocide des sikhs.

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'd like to invite the member for Brampton East to briefly explain his bill.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: The violence of the Sikh genocide at the hands of the Indian government continues to impact Sikhs across the world today—from the invasion of the Harmandir Sahib complex and the countless Sikhs who were killed throughout India in November 1984 to the countless Sikhs and untold Sikhs who were disappeared by the Indian government.

Sikh Genocide Awareness Week will provide the Sikh community with a time to learn, reflect and heal from the trauma and pain of the Sikh genocide.

PETITIONS

PALLIATIVE CARE

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I have a petition entitled "Support the Nancy Rose Act—Pediatric Hospice Palliative Care.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas for children with serious or life-limiting illness, a palliative approach to care can increase quality of life and decrease their pain and suffering;

"Whereas there is currently no comprehensive, coordinated and funded provincial strategy to address pediatric palliative and hospice care;

"Whereas the Nancy Rose Act would require the province to develop a strategy with the goal of increasing access to pediatric palliative and hospice care across Ontario;

"Whereas the strategy contained in the Nancy Rose Act would include targeted supports for families of children receiving palliative care, including mental health supports and respite;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass the Nancy Rose Act and call for all-party support."

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas St. Margaret’s Public School was built in 1972, is now approaching 50 years of age, is severely overcrowded and currently operating at 121% utilization;

“Whereas St. Margaret’s Public School has 16 portables that are old, in very poor condition, have reached the end of their usable life and suffer from mould, faulty heat and water leaks;

“Whereas repair and replacement backlogs are so massive St. Margaret’s Public School needs to be rebuilt, as recommended by the TDSB in its 2021-22 capital priority projects submission to the Ministry of Education;

“Whereas St. Margaret’s Public School is situated in one of Toronto’s high-priority neighbourhoods, serving a disproportionate number of children from low-income and single-parent families;

“Whereas the quality of the learning environment is known to be strongly correlated with the quality of education students receive;

“Whereas the Ministry of Education has not provided the Toronto District School Board with funds to rebuild St. Margaret’s Public School;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to instruct the Ministry of Education to provide funds to rebuild St. Margaret’s Public School and to create the quality teaching and learning environment all Ontarians deserve.”

The petition is signed by 50 individuals from the community, and I will sign this petition in agreement.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have a 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 the government only pays on average \$44.65 for an OHIP-insured visit—the lowest rate in Canada; and

“Whereas optometrists are being forced to pay substantially out of their own pocket to provide over four million services each year to Ontarians under OHIP; and

“Whereas optometrists have never been given a formal negotiation process with the government; and

“Whereas the government’s continued neglect resulted in 96% of Ontario optometrists voting to withdraw OHIP services beginning September 1, 2021;

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

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately commit to legally binding, formal negotiations to ensure any future OHIP-insured optometry services are, at a minimum, funded at the cost of delivery.”

Of course, I support this petition. I will affix my signature and send it to the table with page Yamama.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I have a petition entitled “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 the government only pays on average \$44.65 for an OHIP-insured visit—the lowest rate in Canada; and

“Whereas optometrists are being forced to pay substantially out of their own pocket to provide over four million services each year to Ontarians under OHIP; and

“Whereas optometrists have never been given a formal negotiation process with the government; and

“Whereas the government’s continued neglect resulted in 96% of Ontario optometrists voting to withdraw OHIP services beginning September 1, 2021;

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

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately commit to legally binding, formal negotiations to ensure any future OHIP-insured optometry services are, at a minimum, funded at the cost of delivery.”

I have hundreds of signatures here, Mr. Speaker. I’ll put my signature and hand it over to page Sujay for the table.

1520

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas the government only covers an average of 55% of the cost of an OHIP-insured visit, the lowest rate in Canada; and

“Whereas optometrists must absorb the other 45% for the over four million services delivered annually under OHIP; and

“Whereas optometrists have never been given a formal negotiation process with the government; and

“Whereas the government’s continued neglect resulted in 96% of Ontario optometrists voting to withdraw OHIP services beginning September 1, 2021;

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

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately commit to legally binding, formal negotiations to ensure any future OHIP-insured optometry services are, at a minimum, funded at the cost of delivery.”

Speaker, I have petitions that are signed by hundreds of individuals. I will now sign it and give it to page Tanvi.

ABUSE AWARENESS
AND PREVENTION

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to give an amazing thank you to Charmaine Loverin for coming here this afternoon,

on the front lawn of our beautiful Legislature, to present these petitions to me.

The petition is entitled “*Loverin’s Law*.”

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government of Ontario does not provide direct use of education and real life skills language, nor prevention tools about abuse in elementary (specific to first reader ages Grade 1+), middle schools and high schools; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario does not provide direct use of education and real life skills language, nor prevention tools for five top abuse situations facing many Canadian and diverse families today: physical, neglect, emotional, verbal and sexual, grooming; and

“Whereas abuse affects ages younger than 5 and 93% of abuse happens in the hands of those that young people or youth are supposed to trust; and

“Whereas statistically two in five girls and one in six boys are currently abused in Canada today, not including unreported; and

“Whereas abuse has no culture, status nor religious divide and is a long-term injury that causes stigma, shame, guilt, anxiety, even isolation that can result in bullying, self-harming behaviours, depression, youth addiction and even suicide; and

“Whereas early education, including evidence-based and new community prevention programs, will greatly benefit intervention, awareness and empowerment for prevention of bullying, addiction and suicide for victims and early offenders;

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

“Request an act to designate an ‘annual awareness of abuse prevention week’ in all Ontario primary, middle and high schools, and to provide for abuse curricula for healthy families and safe community policies, administration and accountability” by year 2020.

I agree with this petition wholeheartedly.

Once again, I want to thank Charmaine Loverin for her dedication in pursuing this matter.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. John Fraser: “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 the government only pays on average \$44.65 for an OHIP-insured visit—the lowest rate in Canada; and

“Whereas optometrists are being forced to pay substantially out of their own pocket to provide over four million services each year to Ontarians under OHIP; and

“Whereas optometrists have never been given a formal negotiation process with the government; and

“Whereas the government’s continued neglect resulted in 96% of Ontario optometrists voting to withdraw OHIP services beginning September 1, 2021;

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

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately commit to legally binding, formal negotiations to ensure any future OHIP-insured optometry services are, at a minimum, funded at the cost of delivery.”

I agree with this petition. I’m affixing my signature and giving it to page Sujay.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have a petition here that has been signed by Dawn McIlmoyle and many other folks across the Durham region.

“Affordable housing.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas for families throughout much of Ontario, owning a home they can afford remains a dream, while renting is painfully expensive;

“Whereas consecutive Conservative and Liberal governments have sat idle, while housing costs spiralled out of control, speculators made fortunes, and too many families had to put their hopes on hold;

“Whereas every Ontarian should have access to safe, affordable housing. Whether a family wants to rent or own, live in a house, an apartment, a condominium or a co-op, they should have affordable options;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately prioritize the repair of Ontario’s social housing stock, commit to building new affordable homes, crack down on housing speculators, and make rentals more affordable through rent controls and updated legislation.”

Of course, I support this. I will affix my signature and will send it to the table with page Lamees.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPORTING PEOPLE AND BUSINESSES ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 VISANT À SOUTENIR LA POPULATION ET LES ENTREPRISES

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 26, 2021, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 13, An Act to amend various Acts / Projet de loi 13, Loi modifiant diverses lois.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to continue on from where we left off this morning talking about Bill 13, which is the Supporting People and Businesses Act.

Speaker, I was just explaining that this bill is what is known as an omnibus bill. It brings together many different statutes that cross many different ministries, and that always presents a challenge for members on this side of the House—to be able to do the proper kind of analysis and review that is required.

One of the particular challenges with this bill is that many of the changes that are proposed, which are very consequential changes, are presented in regulation or policy; they are not actually included in the legislative amendments that are set out in this bill. I am going to address some of the legislative changes, as well as some of the regulatory changes, because I think that it is important to understand the implications of many of the changes that are proposed in this legislation.

I want to begin with schedule 11, which deals with the ability of restaurant owners to create or extend outdoor patios. We know that this was really a game changer for a lot of restaurants in our communities that were seriously considering having to close because of the pandemic. Last spring, when the weather created the opportunity, when the lockdown was lifted, many restaurants that did not already have patios looked forward to creating a patio, and those who had smaller patios looked forward to expanding their patios, so that they could bring customers in and start getting their revenues up again.

On June 2 last year, I was very happy to write on behalf of one of those London West restaurant owners, Jess Jazey-Spoelstra, who owns a restaurant—an excellent restaurant, if I do say so—called Craft Farmacy in London West. Jess reached out to me because she was interested in creating a patio. They had a parking lot in front of their restaurant, and they believed that there would be the opportunity to convert that parking lot into a patio. They had the full support of the city of London. The city of London was behind the restaurant owners who wanted to expand or create patios, but at that time the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario was not accepting or approving licences. So you can imagine, Speaker, how discouraging that would be for restaurant owners like Ms. Jazey-Spoelstra, who looked forward to having that opportunity. Fortunately, shortly after I sent my letter, the government announced the change, that the new provisions around patios would be moving forward.

1530

I do have to say, Speaker, that this change that is proposed in Bill 13 is a welcome one, and it's important for all of the restaurants that exist in our communities that have patios or want to create patios. It's important for them to know that this ability will be in place in legislation going forward. But at the same time, there are many restaurants—they may be located in malls; they may be located in specific communities—that don't have an option to create a patio or expand a patio; it's just simply not on the table. For those restaurant owners and for so many other small businesses in this province, we know that this minor change to enshrine the ability to create or expand patios is not going to provide the help and support that those businesses need. We've heard from the restaurant industry, from the chamber of commerce, from others, that businesses are looking at least—at least—at 18 months post-pandemic for that recovery to take hold. So there is a need for much longer-lasting supports to be put in place to enable that 18-month period of recovery to get these businesses back on their feet.

One of the primary tools that this government has available to it, which we don't see reflected in this bill, is the Ontario small business grant.

I have to draw the government's attention to the letter that was written by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce back in April of this year, outlining a number of concerns with the Ontario small business grant. They said there are concerns about lack of communication with applicants. Applicants are being denied without reason. They can't find a live person to speak to when they call the helpline. They're told that they're ineligible because they didn't provide the information that was needed, but they're not given an opportunity to provide that additional information. There were concerns about lack of clarity. Businesses who thought they were eligible were rejected with no way to follow up with the government to find out why they were rejected. Businesses were declined because they were self-employed and they used their personal bank accounts rather than a business account. There were concerns about the technical issues with the system. The system was crashing; applicants' information wasn't saved. Finally, applicants were being asked to provide additional information before the second round of payments but were given links that simply did not work.

These were problems that were outlined back in April by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. Sadly, I think all of us have heard from small businesses in our community that very few, if any, of these concerns were acted on. That would have been meaningful action to address red tape that businesses are encountering in our communities.

I want to share some of the experiences of small business owners in London West and the frustrations that they had to go through, trying to access the small business grant.

Tom Broome operates the Canadian ESL Centre, which provides English lessons to new Londoners. He applied for the small business grant. There was a mistake at the CRA with his business number. That delayed the application while he was working it out with Service Canada. Months later, just recently, the program suddenly asked him to provide proof that he applied and that he had followed up on the problem before the application deadline. He had to send them phone records to prove that he had been trying to resolve this, because the program had kept no records whatsoever of his numerous phone calls and conversations that he had had with staff at that program.

We also have talked to numerous business owners who had problems like a mistake in their banking information or a typo in their business name, and it took weeks or months for them to be able to correct the problem and have their application processed.

In London, just like the Ontario Chamber of Commerce pointed out, some people had their applications denied arbitrarily because whoever at the program end of things was reviewing the applications didn't understand the nature of their business.

Cathy Brown-Swanton in London is a reflexologist. She was mischaracterized as a registered health professional, even though reflexology is not, as we know, a registered health profession. So she was denied the grant

even though she was eligible, and she has not yet been able to get this situation resolved. Again, this is a problem that was clearly on the government's end, because they denied her for inaccurate reasons, and yet the government has taken no responsibility whatsoever to correct their mistake.

We've had people who had their applications approved and never got the money. Maybe they got the money in the first round but have not been able to access the money in the second round, even though the second round of grants was supposed to automatically go to the businesses. Many of these businesses were asked to send in more information for another review when they contacted the program to ask for the status of their funds.

Speaker, it's unfortunate that the government didn't use the opportunity that was presented in Bill 13 to deal with some of those problems. And they also have continually refused to agree to a third round of grants.

I want to again recognize a business owner in London West, Lisa Shackelton from Yoga Shack in Old South, a beautiful neighbourhood in my riding. She has been advocating—relentlessly, actually—for a third round of grants, because she, as an owner of a yoga studio, owns one of the many kinds of businesses that were not allowed to reopen until step 3. Having been closed all those months, the revenue hit that she had to try to absorb was particularly impactful. So a third round of funding would be especially important to businesses like hers that had to wait until step 3 before they could reopen at all to bring in customers and get revenues going again.

I have many other examples of business owners in London West who have experienced these kinds of barriers accessing the small business grant. But then we heard from the minister of tourism that there was going to be this new grant program, the Ontario Tourism and Travel Small Business Support Grant. I have to say, Speaker, that even though perhaps some of the logistical challenges appear to have been improved somewhat with that grant program, we still encountered the same problems about lack of eligibility for that program. So many tourism and travel businesses were deemed ineligible to access that grant.

1540

I met with a London West constituent, Krista Tovell, who is an independent travel adviser. Again, she took a significant revenue hit as borders were closed and nobody was travelling. She had to access her own personal funding in order to be able to keep her business going—or not close down. She has been deemed ineligible as an independent travel adviser because she does not hold a TICO operating number.

We know that in BC, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Quebec, provincial support was available for independent travel advisers. But for some reasons that have not been fully explained, this government decided that they were not going to extend grant eligibility to independent travel advisers in Ontario.

I understand that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business supports the regulatory changes that are set

out in this bill, and I appreciate their support for those changes. What I find interesting is that the CFIB, when they were posting petitions on their website to engage Ontarians in their efforts to make the government aware of what kinds of supports they needed, did not post a petition about the changes that were set out in this act. They posted a petition saying, "Dear Premier: Ontario small business owners need more financial support!" They called on the government to reinstate the Ontario Small Business Support Grant and expand access to any—any—business owner who experienced a revenue decline due to the stay-at-home order.

We know that dry cleaners, for example, didn't have to shut down. They were essential businesses, but you can imagine the drop in revenues that they experienced, as nobody went in to work anymore, as everybody worked from home and didn't access dry cleaning services. But dry cleaners have been deemed as not eligible to access the financial supports.

The CFIB also called for a third round of Ontario Small Business Support Grant payments. That is something that, on this side of the House, the Ontario NDP has been calling for over and over again.

The CFIB also called for a new grant to cover expenses associated with enforcing vaccination passports, including hiring, training and technology-related costs.

So there would have been opportunities for this government to step forward in a very meaningful way to support small businesses. I think that the minor changes they have proposed in this bill are useful, but they won't really do anything to provide the support that small businesses in Ontario need.

The other thing that we have seen in connection to the restaurant industry and the kinds of supports that the restaurant industry needs—yes, patios, but also, the restaurant industry needed a government that prioritized small mom-and-pop operations in our communities rather than always looking first to what big box businesses were lobbying for. We saw that most recently when the government decided to relax restrictions on food venues at Maple Leaf Gardens, the Rogers Centre and those big venues. Those food operators were allowed to reopen at full capacity. Meanwhile, the small independent and franchise restaurants in our communities had to wait for the capacity restrictions to be lifted. We had seen that before with this government. We had seen that before with retail, when the government allowed the big box stores like Walmart and others to continue to sell consumer goods at the same time that they were selling groceries but, meanwhile, closed down other retailers that were only selling consumer goods. We saw that early in the pandemic.

I want to speak a little bit more about the restaurant industry. In particular, I want to talk about restaurant industry workers.

There was a report that came out just a couple of weeks ago from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives that found that more than 180,000 hospitality workers across Canada have left the restaurant sector. I'm sure that we

have sometimes heard or read some of the disparaging comments that may have been made about restaurant workers during the pandemic, about the labour challenges that many restaurant owners are experiencing right now as they're trying to staff up to get their businesses going again. Because they were closed, because their workers were collecting CERB, there have been accusations that these workers no longer want to go back to work; that these workers are sitting at home; that while CERB was still available, they would rather collect CERB than go into work. The analysis that the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives conducted really debunked that view of these restaurant workers. It shows that, yes, 180,000 workers have left the restaurant sector, but it also shows that other sectors, professional sectors, have gained 180,000 or thereabouts workers. So it's not so much that these workers have decided to exit the workforce; these workers are transitioning into other jobs.

Let's face it, restaurant jobs are not great jobs. I was a server in my youth, and I suspect that many of us in this House were food servers when we were younger. It is not a great job. You can imagine, in particular during a pandemic, when you have to wear masks all day, you're exposed to a deadly virus—and we know that restaurants were one of the workplaces that have seen outbreaks of COVID-19.

So we have these restaurant workers who have to wear masks all day. They have to deal with abusive customers who challenge the mask policy. At the entrances of these restaurants, oftentimes we have young adults, 18-to-20-year-olds, who are now required—and understandably, we want people's vaccine certificates to be checked, but these 18-to-20-year-olds are having to challenge people, to point out that it's not 14 days since their second dose. If somebody refuses to present the vaccine certificate and is arguing about why they can't get into the restaurant, it's these young servers who are faced with dealing with those customers.

We have heard from restaurant industry workers that working in restaurants is a toxic work environment. It's an industry that has been well-documented for high rates of sexual harassment among servers; 80% of servers are women. It is an industry where workers face abuse, as I mentioned, both from other staff members but also from patrons. It's a difficult industry because of the long hours that many workers are forced to work. You're standing on your feet all day.

There are a lot of issues with the restaurant industry that would potentially explain why restaurant workers are leaving in such great numbers, and why restaurant owners are now experiencing challenges getting staff in place.

1550

Another issue—this was a finding of a survey that was conducted by a mental health advocacy organization for restaurant workers called Not 9 to 5. They surveyed restaurant workers about their well-being. Some 90% of the respondents to the survey said that they lived with mental health or substance use problems.

Speaker, these are all workplace conditions that restaurant workers have to deal with on a daily basis, and

so many of them, quite understandably, have chosen to leave the profession.

One of the other realities that restaurant workers face, and particularly restaurant workers in licensed establishments, are the low wages that are paid to minimum wage workers in this province, and in particular to liquor servers.

Earlier this month, we saw a big announcement of an increase to the minimum wage of 10 cents.

Mr. Michael Mantha: What? Ten cents?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Yes, 10 cents. The minimum wage increased by 10 cents earlier this month. We saw, right after they were elected in 2018, one of the very first things this government did was to reverse the planned increase in the minimum wage, to cement the below-the-poverty-line wages of minimum wage earners by refusing to make that promised increase. Not only that, but they also took away the two paid sick days that every worker in this province had access to. Again, that is another reality that restaurant workers face—lack of access to paid sick days.

You can read studies about restaurant workers, because of the low wages, because of the lack of access to paid sick days, going into work with gastroenteritis, with other highly communicable diseases—not because they want to infect their co-workers or their customers, obviously, but because they don't have a choice. And this government is okay with that. This government is okay with the fact that these workers don't have paid sick days, that these workers are paid wages that don't even enable them to live at the poverty line.

For restaurant workers in licensed establishments, the liquor server minimum wage is even lower than the general minimum wage in Ontario. That is a huge problem. Ontario is now the only province in Canada that has a liquor server minimum wage. There is a tipped minimum wage in Quebec, which is similar, but Ontario is the only province with a specific liquor server minimum wage. At a wage of \$12.55 an hour, which assumes that liquor servers are going to collect tips, you can imagine knowing that the only way you're going to be able to take home a paycheque at the end of the week that's going to enable you to pay the rent and buy the groceries is to supplement your hourly wage with tips. The only way you're going to get tips from customers is to be nice to customers, and that means taking whatever abuse customers want to shell out. It means dealing with rampant sexual harassment. Liquor servers are put in a very vulnerable position because their monthly income relies on tips from patrons. That would have been some good red tape that this government could have gotten rid of. They could have eliminated the sub-minimum wage for liquor servers.

They could also have eliminated the sub-minimum wage for students. Ontario and Alberta are the only two provinces that have a lower minimum wage for students. I just talked about those 18-to-20-year-olds—and we've all seen at our grocery stores, at our gas stations, students aged 16 to 18 who have been there every day. They've been there every day for us throughout the COVID-19

pandemic. They have been on the front lines, working side by side with people who are earning the general minimum wage, and they, because of their age, because they are students, are earning a lower minimum wage. It really is age discrimination, and it's really unacceptable that we are putting young people in that position of having to take a lower minimum wage.

So those would have been some changes that I think would have helped restaurant industry workers, if the government really cared about restaurant industry workers, but we haven't seen much indication that they do.

I now want to offer some comments on schedule 8 in the bill. Schedule 8 is a schedule that removes references to ranked-ballot elections in the Education Act. The reason I want to comment on this schedule is because I'm very proud to represent the city of London, which is the only municipality in Ontario that ever conducted a ranked-ballot election, and highly successfully. They did surveys after the municipal election in 2018, which was conducted as a ranked-ballot vote, and they found that 68% of Londoners took the opportunity to rank their choices on that municipal ranked ballot. They appreciated that opportunity to be able to rank their ballot.

What we heard when this government decided, arbitrarily, to take away the ability of local municipalities to determine how they are going to elect local decision-makers—we heard that London was going to be in the hole \$515,000 that they had paid to change to a ranked-ballot election, plus an additional \$51,000 that it was going to cost to scrap ranked-ballot elections.

So, frankly, this reference to ranked-ballot elections that's going to be removed from the Education Act—the only red tape that that could possibly affect is London, because of the cost that London had to incur by being told that they could no longer run ranked-ballot elections. And not just London—we know other communities were seriously looking at conducting ranked-ballot elections in 2022, when the municipal elections are held again, and all of those efforts had to end, because this government passed legislation to stop ranked-ballot elections.

I have to say, while I'm on the topic of ranked ballots, it's very interesting to see the kind of debate that has taken place in the province just recently about ranked-ballot election—not at the municipal level, not at the school board level, but at the provincial level.

We heard the leader of the Liberal Party, Steven Del Duca, make a big announcement that he would resign if 2022 was not the last election that was conducted on a first-past-the-post basis, and then went on to say that a Liberal government will introduce ranked-ballot voting. Prime Minister Trudeau recognized that voters can see through the Liberal motives in favouring ranked-ballot elections. Trudeau said very clearly that he was not going to proceed with electoral reform, despite his promise that 2015 would be the last election run on first-past-the-post. He decided he was not going to proceed with electoral reform because he supported ranked ballots and he recognized that Canadians would understand that ranked-ballot voting at the provincial or federal levels actually

favours the party in the centre, which is the Liberals. The Liberals end up being the second choice of both Conservative voters and NDP voters. So it's such a cynical announcement from the leader of the Liberal Party. To say that he stands behind electoral reform, he's going to bring in ranked-ballot voting—he knows who is going to be the beneficiary of ranked-ballot voting.

1600

Speaker, I want to go on to another change that is proposed in this bill. This time, it's not in one of the schedules of the bill, as an amendment to a statute; it is in the regulatory changes that are described in the backgrounder to this bill. That is a change that is being brought on by the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development. It deals with Ontario Works employment assistance and the Ontario Disability Support Program employment supports. The backgrounder explains that the ministry is integrating employment programs from social assistance into Employment Ontario and expanding these changes province-wide. This is, again, an interesting take on regulatory change that is necessary, because we don't have people in this province—advocates for social assistance, advocates for people who are living in poverty—saying that the solution is to integrate employment programs from Ontario Works and ODSP into Employment Ontario. Nobody is talking about that. What they're talking about is increasing social assistance rates. We have to enable people in this province who are living in dire poverty to find decent housing that they can afford with the shelter allowance that's provided by this government. We have to enable them to buy groceries.

Actually, this brings me back to a point I forgot to mention, about restaurants and the challenges that they are facing. We know that food costs have significantly increased. We saw the inflation rate was announced earlier this month; it's over 4%. Food costs are increasing greatly, and yet people on social assistance have seen their rates frozen for years. In fact, it was under a previous Conservative government—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Mike Harris.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: —Mike Harris and Ernie Eves—that the rates were first significantly chopped, and they have come nowhere near to where they should be to enable people on social assistance to live in dignity.

One of the other issues that this change that is described in the backgrounder for this bill ignores is the fact that so many people on ODSP can't get into Employment Ontario. They cannot work because of the nature of their disability. We heard the then Minister of Community and Social Services at one time, early in this government's mandate, when she talked about how “the best social program is a job.” Well, I'm sorry, but for people who cannot work, for people who have significant disabilities, who rely on social assistance, who rely on ODSP, a job is not a social program. A job is not the way that they are going to be able to get out of poverty and be able to pay their rent.

I want to share some red tape related to OW and ODSP that I would have liked to have seen in this bill, that would

have helped people who are living on social assistance move forward in their lives.

I have a constituent, Pamela Walker Clark, who has a disability. She lives with her spouse, who has a disability. She is collecting a Québec Pension Plan disability pension, and her spouse is receiving support from ODSP. There is a provision in Ontario's legislation dealing with social assistance that requires a spousal clawback, so that means that for Pamela Walker Clark, the disability pension that she receives from the QPP is clawed back, to support her husband—the total household income. She sent me an email where she asks, “Why have I been unable to provide for my own medical needs, because there are treatments that I need and cannot afford because my husband is allowed \$372 a month instead of the proper amount of over \$1,100 plus his special diet amount?” She's forced to subsidize her husband or share her disability pension with her husband because of the arbitrary rules that have been created in ODSP around the spousal clawback. So that would have been red tape we would have wholeheartedly supported if that had been in this bill.

I now want to talk a little bit about schedule 10 of this bill, which sets out some changes to the environmental assessment process. The minister has described those changes as being very minor and has really tried to downplay any concerns that people may have about this government's motives in changing the environmental assessment process. But I think we have to be mindful that this government doesn't have the greatest track record on environmental protection. In fact, many people—and I agree; I think all of our caucus agrees—would describe this government as the most anti-environment government ever in the province of Ontario. Particularly when it comes to changes to the environmental assessment process, we saw them put in legislation changes to enable the use of MZOs to pave over farmland, to sell off environmentally sensitive wetlands to developers. We see them determined, doubling down on moving forward with Highway 413 in the face of significant and serious opposition that has been raised by environmental groups.

Keith Brooks from Environmental Defence said very clearly, “There are no measures in this bill that will benefit the environment.” Environmental Defence actually went on to say that there are measures in this bill that could directly compromise the environment.

One of those measures is set out not in legislation, where it would have been available for all to see, but buried in the backgrounder briefing note for this bill, and that change concerns the audit requirement for tire recycling.

1610

The manager of Environmental Defence's plastics program said that the government's proposal to allow tire producers to conduct internal audits, instead of third-party ones, of how many tires they supply in Ontario is another example of the government undermining important environmental protection legislation, which in this case is Ontario's Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act. She said that if companies can simply provide their own

unaudited data, there's no way to verify how many tires are actually put on the market. Reporting a lower number of tires going into the market than the real number would make it easier for the company to reach the collection and reuse/retread/recycle targets. And what's more, producers in other product categories, such as packaging and printed paper, could demand the same treatment.

So, Speaker, not only does this legislation, as I said, offer nothing in the way of environmental protection, it actually undermines environmental protection measures that are currently in place. People are quite right to be skeptical of this government's motives in these so-called housekeeping changes to the environmental assessment process, because we have seen this government use those changes to ram through deals with developers that are extremely harmful to the protection of our environment.

I want to now turn to another change that, once again, is in the backgrounder. This is a change that is under the Ministry of Transportation—I misspoke, Speaker. It's not a change that is outlined in the backgrounder under the Ministry of Transportation. There are about eight changes—regulatory, policy changes—under the Minister of Transportation that are included in the backgrounder for this bill.

The big issue that we're all hearing about in our communities, which my colleague the member for Algoma-Manitoulin raised this morning in question period, is DriveTest. That is not included in this bill. It's not just an issue for the north. It is a serious issue for the north, but it's a serious issue, I think, for many of us in our ridings.

I want to share some of the concerns that I've been hearing from London West constituents about the long waits to book a road test at a DriveTest centre. There were 8,000 tests that were cancelled in the city of London because of COVID-19. That is a huge backlog to try to deal with.

Saeed tried to book an appointment for his daughter's G licence and was told there are no tests in all of London for all of 2022.

The son of one constituent, Tracy, found that his best option to book his test was to travel to Elliot Lake five months from now, next year. Early next year, he's supposed to travel to Elliot Lake, drive seven hours, in order to book a test. I know that it's not like there are a whole bunch of vacant spots in Elliot Lake just waiting, but that's what he found.

He's not the only Londoner who has told me that the only way that they can get an appointment for a test within a reasonable time period is to try to figure out how to get to another city when you don't have a driver's licence, when you can't drive yourself. So it is a challenge, and I have written to the minister on behalf of many of these constituents who have come to my office to share their frustrations, to urge the minister to do everything possible to deal with the backlog. That includes hiring more new driver examiners so that more appointments can be opened up. It also includes, I think, the designation of London as one of the pop-up communities for an additional

temporary DriveTest centre. The pop-up centres that have been announced are not close enough to London to be able to make a real difference for people in my community.

I now want to talk about another change that is included in the backgrounder—a policy or regulatory change—and that is the change under the Ministry of Education that deals with making it easier for children with special needs to access the therapies they need in schools. The backgrounder goes on to say that the Ministry of Education is going to be working with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services as well as the Ministry of Health to modernize how nursing and rehabilitation services are delivered to make it easier for children with special needs to access the therapies they need in school. I found this one was interesting, because yesterday in this House we had a debate about the dire nursing shortage in this province. We know that the president of the ONA has said that there's an 18% to 22% current vacancy rate across the province. And the science table has just recently reported that there are another 43% of current nurses who are considering leaving the profession because of burnout, because of stress, because of Bill 124, the bill that forces a 1% wage increase.

I just mentioned not so long ago in this speech that we've seen costs of living at over 4%, and nurses are being held to a 1% wage increase. Effectively, they're being asked to take a pay cut. That is how we are treating the front-line heroes of COVID-19 who have worked through the first wave, the second wave, the third wave, and who are preparing for the very real possibility that remains of a fourth wave. They've had to work in horrendous conditions, run off their feet, taking huge risks to themselves and their families.

But this government did not support our opposition day motion—this government did not support our proposal to immediately embark on an aggressive recruitment and retention campaign and to repeal Bill 124 so that nurses can use the constitutional right that is available to every worker in this country to bargain collectively and negotiate their wages.

It's interesting to see the government talking about modernizing nursing and rehabilitation services when we know that there is this dire shortage of nurses.

In fact, there's a story from Barrie of a student in Barrie who needs a nurse assistant with him at school, and he has basically missed a month of school because there are no nurses to accompany him to his classrooms.

Those are just some of the many, many changes that are proposed in this bill. I highlighted a couple of legislative amendments, regulatory and policy changes that are of significance to the people in London West.

I appreciate this opportunity to share these concerns and highlight these issues.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for questions. The first question goes to the member from Barrie–Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I couldn't help but listen to the member, and especially her last remarks about the student who needs a nurse. I met a little girl named Avery who

also requires assistance. In this bill we are amending and modernizing the Education Act, which would help include the need to access therapists in schools and allow them easy entry. Changes like this will help students and children like Avery. Her dad is very happy about this, and I'm sure the individual whom you're speaking to would also benefit from this.

1620

Since there's a net benefit to children with special needs, who now will have more access to the therapists they're going to need, will she now support this bill so that these students can have access to some help?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: The problem is that there are not enough nurses to fill these positions that are needed in this modernization process that will look at how nursing and rehabilitation services are delivered. If I could also say, Speaker, there are not enough nurses and specialist rehabilitation therapists in the community to support students not in school.

We know that the autism wait-list has increased to 50,000 students who are now waiting for access to autism services. This government has failed those families who have children with autism. After promising to fix the problems that we saw under the Liberals, they have just made things far worse.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question goes to the member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: I want to thank my colleague from London West for her presentation.

In my riding of Mushkegowuk–James Bay, small businesses have also suffered greatly—and it's throughout the province, it goes without saying.

I was listening to you, and you talked about the chamber of commerce and small business. You mentioned that there were a lot of businesses that were refused for lack of clarity and that there were no dispute processes, and how important, you were saying, a third wave of funding—it would be helpful, or it would help these small businesses that are struggling right now.

You were talking about 18 months, I believe, to get back to some form of prosperity, or to be able to get across—so how important is that third round that the government should pass and that we're supporting as the NDP? How important is that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Back to the member from London West to respond.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Well, certainly the organizations that represent small businesses understand how important it is. Industry analysts have said that it's going to take at least 18 months, post-pandemic, for the recovery to really take root, and that is going to require an additional round of small business support.

That's why the Ontario NDP has been advocating for a third round of the small business grant program—and not just a third round of the program that had so many problems before; we've also been calling on them to fix the problems that we saw before, to open up a third round of funding to the businesses that have been excluded.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question goes to the member from Richmond Hill.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I heard the member opposite touching on a lot of topics, but not much on transportation, other than mentioning about the licences. That has been already answered this morning. As we say, this is because of the pandemic, and we are already working on it.

I would rather like to know, does the member opposite support the building of subways, including the Yonge North subway extension?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, I find it ironic that this member is concerned that I focused on issues that are related to the pandemic, because we are in a pandemic. We are still in a pandemic, and we are in a very fragile moment in the pandemic, when things could turn very rapidly. As we look at the outcome of Thanksgiving, as we head into the holiday season, there is a lot of unpredictability right now.

I think Ontarians, when they saw the Legislature return, when they saw the government introducing a bill, quite understandably expected that this bill would provide something to support Ontarians to continue through this pandemic and into the COVID-19 recovery.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question goes to the member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: The member talked about schedule 10, the Environmental Assessment Act, and the minister saying that this is a very minor change.

The government has an absolutely abysmal track record when it comes to the environment. In fact, the court found that this government broke the law, when it comes to the Environmental Bill of Rights. First Nations are taking this government to court right now because of violations around the environmental right to consult. And now we have a government that has exempted their six-lane Holland Marsh highway through the greenbelt and through farmland. People are really, really concerned about that. In fact, a Bradford constituent said, “This is deceitful and has certainly eroded any hope we had left that the province, or our MPP, will do the right thing....”

So my question to you is, why should anyone—or does anyone—trust this government when it comes to the environment and any changes to the Environmental Assessment Act?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I appreciate that question from my colleague. And I can give a very direct answer: I do not believe that anyone should trust this government when it comes to environmental protection.

Along with reversing the minimum wage increase and taking away the paid sick days, we saw that one of the very first actions of this government was to cancel all of the green energy projects that were going forward. Then they ripped out the charging stations. Then they reversed the building code changes that would have allowed EV charging in homes. They took the federal government to court over its carbon tax, and they lost. They put stickers on gas tanks about the carbon tax, and they also lost.

Nobody should be trusting this government when it comes to protecting the environment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question goes to the member for Barrie–Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: The opposition talk about health care. I know they like to dwell on the past. They’re being very short-sighted here in the sense of, we have to think of recovery and post-COVID-19. Yes, there has been a lot done during COVID-19, but the stuff during COVID-19 and the stuff we’ve been trying to do—like hire more nurses, improve long-term care. We know there is going to be a shortage of nurses, so we prepared for that with our college system. Yet every step of the way, when we tried to improve recruitment and retention of nurses, the opposition said no and voted against it.

Now it’s your opportunity to include access for poor little kids who need the therapists and help in the schools through this act, which will modernize the Education Act, and you’re saying no to those little kids who need the extra therapists and need the help in their schooling.

So will you say yes to the extra help that we need for students and say yes to hiring nurses? Previously, you said no. Will you finally say yes?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I’m not sure what the member is referring to.

I was a school board trustee for 13 years at the Thames Valley District School Board. I understand the importance of having those health care services, those rehabilitation services available for students in schools, and I wholeheartedly support efforts to have those specialists available in classrooms.

The issue that this government is failing to address is that you can’t manufacture nurses to go into classrooms if you’re not prepared to make the investments that are necessary to hire and retain them—and to reverse harmful policies, harmful legislation, like Bill 124 that completely undermines any efforts the government is making to bring more nurses into the system.

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

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I rise to speak in favour of this great red tape reduction bill, another one that we are introducing as a government. It was a campaign commitment from this government that we were elected on—to continuously strive to reduce red tape in this province. For far too long, it was mired—businesses were halted, communities couldn’t grow, and things were at a standstill in all portfolios that affect the province’s economy, its social welfare system, its education system and things that Ontarians rely on the most. So we embarked on this great challenge.

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We’ve actually taken on many challenges as a government, and we weren’t afraid to take on such challenges. Every session, we committed to reducing more red tape by introducing a bill, and here we are again, promise made, promise kept, by talking to Ontarians. The Premier often talks about how a lot of folks have his cellphone number. It’s great to see bills like this that just come from the

people of Ontario—simple ideas, and they're practical, pragmatic and they make a difference in people's lives.

It's not just this bill; yesterday we saw the Minister of Labour introduce a bill that is really in touch with what we've learned from workers that is so needed for them—simple things like accessing a washroom. I know Dan, who used to own the Eggsmart in Alcona, in Innisfil, unfortunately had to close his businesses well before COVID-19, for personal reasons. He went on to pivot his career and decided to become an Uber driver. His frustration was, not only was he driving people around, but he also was doing Uber Eats, and he couldn't go to any washroom, and he was frustrated. He has my cell number, and he would text me and say, "Andrea, this is a significant issue." So this came right from Ontarians like Dan straight to the minister's ears, and here we are. We have a bill that was tabled yesterday that will change that.

Today, as we are talking about red tape reduction, I want to commend our new Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction. She came to Barrie to talk to our businesses. I really appreciate that, because she was just brand new, a few weeks in. I messaged her right away when she got sworn in, and she came to see firsthand the differences between the community—in Barrie, we are really founded on the spirit of entrepreneurship, which I talk about often in this House, and small businesses. That's the biggest makeup of our local economy—and, of course, we have our manufacturing sector.

She was able to talk to the family who owns Creative Bean. I'm very proud of this business. They're a great example of a family that struggled during COVID-19. I spoke about Rene in the House before. Unfortunately, he contracted COVID-19 in the early days and recovered. His whole family rallied around him, and they were able to keep their cafe and printing shop open with his wife, Tracy. They actually expanded it during COVID-19 by including things like an ice cream stand, and they've really pivoted. They now have a hot food table. Rene is from Trinidad and Tobago, so they have this great hot table. They have this thing called a double-double, which is not a coffee, but it's this amazing wrap with chickpeas. I've tried it. It's amazing. So anyone watching, definitely try that out when they have their doubles day. They're a great example of a small business, and the minister was able to speak with them. They talked about some of the challenges and things that could help them in terms of small business supports that they had benefited from, from previous changes this government introduced, and things going forward. It was nice for them, because they had the minister right in front of them. They had access.

It just shows you that this government really is down to earth, for the people. We go straight into the field, ask people for their advice, and then we come out with bills like this. Before, we had the former Liberal government—it was who you knew, backroom deals etc. This government is genuine about it. We're going straight to the people, asking, "What would make your life a little bit easier?"

So we were able to go to that business—and then there was Great Bear Products. The minister also came by Great

Bear Products. Despite the name, they do not sell bears. They customize and engrave many things. One thing that they realized through their business is—they used to do these really cool menus with the wooden cover, and they would engrave the wooden cover. Well, during COVID-19, no one was ordering wooden menus anymore. So it was out with that business model, in with a new one, and they also showed that they could pivot. But they weren't able to do that unless the red tape, supply chain stuff was cleared, and they were—great to know that this is a government that listens to their feedback, that clears some of that red tape for them so they can pivot their business easily. In fact, this government will help them expand, if they choose to expand, in the next few months as well, because, of course, through the economic development department, we have a program that helps employers expand their businesses and hire more individuals. They're a great example of not only a family-owned business that did pivot their product, but also, they hired more people during COVID-19. When we were in there, it was packed. They were running out of room, and we were going in one at a time for safety. They had three to four Georgian College students in digital design, graphic design and the business field that they employed. So not only are they giving opportunities to the next generation, young people right in the heart of the city of Barrie, affecting the surrounding economy, working with the local college all throughout the pandemic, but this is a family who doesn't give up. They were really impressed to know that the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction was right there, listening to them firsthand. Of course, they always know how to get a hold of me; I'm not that far. But they were really impressed by the fact that we're such an accessible government. So I want to thank the minister for being accessible and for listening to wholesome Ontario and Barrie folk, who work so hard.

Many of these bills wouldn't be possible without our great partners at the chamber of commerce. I talk about them quite often in this Legislature.

The Barrie Chamber of Commerce does incredible work locally. They represent Innisfil and surrounding communities within Simcoe county. For them, this bill means a lot. Paul Markle, the executive director at the Barrie chamber, said, "At the Barrie Chamber of Commerce, we help many entrepreneurs to realize their dreams to do what they're passionate about. Any effort to cut down red tape so that they can do what they do best is welcomed. These changes will certainly help many new businesses reduce their administrative burden." For him, it's simple; if businesses are spending less time on paperwork, it's less burden for them. They can hire more individuals. They can hire more students. They can partner up with our local Georgian College, give back to the community, and they have time to brainstorm good ideas—because often, when you're too busy filling in paperwork and being mired by big government, which always wants to pick your pockets and take more taxes or take more administrative burdens, you don't have time to focus on the bigger things. So now businesses can actually do this, because again, we've kept taxes low.

We've never raised taxes as a government. In fact, we reduced the small business tax the first year we got elected, in our first budget. It was a campaign commitment, and we did it. Thankfully, it paid dividends. No one would have predicted back in 2019 that we would have had this pandemic.

Certainly, we've been with them all along.

Some examples out of this budget really show you how we're listening. During the pandemic, we had some temporary measures; for example, extending outdoor liquor sale licences—and it was really effective. People benefited from it. So in this particular bill, we're extending that.

In our local community, the people there are really thrilled, and they're going to benefit from this—places like Barnstormer, the Farmhouse.

And in downtown Barrie—I have to talk about Taco Alley. This place has really been putting itself on the map and is quite famous. Thank you, Ty Jones, the owner, and your whole team that's around you. They took their nightclub-restaurant-bar in downtown Barrie and they've expanded it into this community hub. Throughout the pandemic, and even now as we're in recovery mode, they've held charitable events, where they have put together concerts, all kinds of things. They did a fundraiser for a group called Barrie Families Unite, which has been helping families all across the county. They did a fundraiser for the women and children's shelter in Barrie. They did a fundraiser for the Barrie tornado victims. As we know, this summer, unfortunately, Barrie underwent a very tragic tornado, and they helped to raise funds so those families can recover.

The latest event that I attended, which they hosted, was the Love Barrie event. It was an event to raise money for a sign that's going to say, "Love Barrie." This is really interesting, because we all got to go to this restaurant, and they had some community people who were chefs, some business owners and some politicians. I was one of them. I was partnered up with Dawn Mucci. Dawn Mucci is a small business owner who owns Lice Squad. So we all had to put together a few dishes and serve them to the audience, and the audience voted for the best dish. Of course, everyone paid to be at this event, and the funds went to this charitable cause. Not only did it go to the fundraiser for the sign, but it also went to Barrie Families Unite and some other charities.

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But you just saw the vision they had for this restaurant. It really livened it up. It was hard to believe that where we were for this event and where all these concerts took place was in a parking lot. But they were able to really take advantage of the government changes that were made by the Attorney General and my colleague in Barrie, the MPP for Barrie–Springwater–Oro–Medonte, who represents the downtown core of Barrie—to really maximize that and create a place where so many people came. They were able to forget about the pandemic for a few hours, take their minds off of it, and it was a place to socialize.

I'll quote some of the feedback that Ty Jones from Alley, the owner, had to say about this bill and some other

measures this government has done, because he went through so much red tape with some of the stuff he was trying to do. He was really trying to uplift spirits. Even when we were planning the "Love Barrie" event, he was running into some roadblocks in terms of the liquor licensing and extension of hours. Luckily, we were able to overcome those types of challenges. This is what Ty had to say: "I'm the owner of Alley, which is a nightclub in Barrie, Ontario. We were unable to operate our venue inside for the last 19 months due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Thanks to the provincial government and the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario, they gave us the opportunity to take over an adjacent private parking lot that we transformed into a large, socially distanced outdoor patio space featuring local live music and late night DJs. This was an aid that not only kept our 70-plus employees working, but also supported our neighbours' restaurant next door. We partnered with Donaleigh's Irish Public House for our food offerings," and they gave offerings from the menu to all of their guests.

So that's a great example of not only what Ty was able to do through Taco Alley, but he partnered with a great local pub, Donaleigh's, where the owners, Don Kellett and Steve Ricalis, were also trying to make the best of the situation. And they were all able to do this very safely, in a great environment, uplift spirits and, of course, help local charities.

But many of those things couldn't be possible without reducing a lot of this red tape. So as this government learned, from businesses like this, how helpful that particular regulatory burden reduction was during the pandemic, why not make it permanent? We learned a lot of—as tragic as this pandemic has been, a lot of great outcomes have come out of it that we need learn from and keep going, like the outdoor liquor sales licence and expanding our patios.

That's one example of things in this bill, but it doesn't just stop there. We also have really great ways we're going to be modernizing the references to engineers under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, by simplifying the Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act in this bill. The folks that I spoke to in my local area that I represent, they've been talking about these kinds of modernizations that need to happen for years. Finally it is happening, so they're thrilled.

It means Brotech and Jerome Horowitz from Brotech can keep expanding his business and hire more people. It means places like Innovative Automation Inc. can continue to grow and hire more people. They came up with this really cool two-sided tape, which they're exporting across the province and working on their patent—really exciting stuff. And SBS Drivetec as well, and Fabian who's there—they're also a great company that keeps expanding, keeps hiring more people. They can't hire enough. They've got more job openings than they have people. We often hear that.

My community is a great example of places where we do have more job openings than people, whether it's in the

manufacturing sector or the small business sector; whether it's the hospitality sector, in restaurants. They need people. It's one of the key reasons why this government invested in a skills training tax credit, but also encouraging people to skill up through the pandemic, and offering that government support so they're able to skill up.

But speaking of skills, the other part we have in this particular red tape reduction bill that doesn't get a lot of play—I haven't heard anyone talk about it quite yet—is modernizing the first aid requirements. This is one of the things where, unless we're in a situation where we are required to give first aid, we don't think about these things. I thought about it because my family and I all took infant and child CPR recently at Barrie First Aid and CPR Training. We learned a lot. I met the owners of Barrie First Aid and CPR Training many years ago, and they're really breaking the mould when it comes to creating defibrillator stations all across the province. We announced one this summer at Innisfil Beach Park, where we have a defibrillator, and at city hall and a few other places.

Thanks to some of the changes in this bill, not only does it help them, but it also helps Action First Aid. I visited Kevin Gee, who runs that business, a few weeks ago as well.

It's going to make it much easier. It's going to make the workplace safe, keep workers safe and really amend some of the red tape that they were undergoing in their industry. So this is all around very safe, to align things like payroll remittances for WSIB, amend various requirements that help standardize regulatory requirements for them. So all around, for them and their industry, it's really, really good news. So that's one of the things that I also wanted to highlight.

But Speaker, there's even more that I want to talk about, and I only have a few more minutes. I talked a little about Georgian College earlier, but of course part of the red tape reduction is that we've seen the ability of a lot of colleges, and also private career colleges, to step up to the plate and offer a lot of great degree training, both online and in person. One of the things you realize is that there were so many barriers and it was a lot of time before credentials and programs could be approved. So we're streamlining those at the approval process so that these colleges can pivot very quickly, they can train up more people, and also to recognize our private career colleges—who don't get enough recognition—so that they could also offer digital learning.

I've gone to a few CTS Canadian Career College graduations, and the stories of these individuals who have come out of the program are just remarkable. I remember there was one woman who was a grandmother and she wanted to pivot her career. She said, "I want to be a PSW," so she went to the CTS Canadian Career College to be a PSW.

Another lady was tired of working in the restaurant sector, because everyone around her was going off to get different types of degrees and they would come back every summer to work with her. They would go back to finish their degree and then they're gone. But she was always

there, and she said, "I'm tired of being the person who's still here. All these people are coming and going, and I'm not going anywhere." This was coming from her. So she chose to go to CTS Canadian Career College in Barrie and she changed her life. She also got into PSW work. She found it really rewarding.

But we don't give enough credit to these career colleges that really help fill a lot of the job gaps we have, especially in health care. For example, we want to hire more PSWs; we want to hire more nurses. In our first budget we introduced in 2019, we dedicated funding to hiring more nurses, and we've built on that strategy to compensate training for PSWs. But we have to look at the people who do the training, and do it well, and the outcomes that are a result of these colleges and these private career colleges.

Again, as a result of this particular bill, they will benefit, and Oxford College and CTS Canadian Career College in my community will benefit first-hand, as well as Georgian College. I want to thank them for their work locally, and highlight some of the things that will touch them personally in this particular bill.

The other one I wanted to touch on, really briefly—I only have a few seconds, but modernizing veterinary facility accreditation. My community that I get to humbly represent is truly growing, and we have many veterinarian services. Some of the veterinarians that are going to benefit from this bill are the Mapleview Animal Clinic, Allandale Veterinary Hospital, Big Bay Animal Hospital, Aldergrove Animal Clinic, Holly Animal Hospital, Essa Veterinary Services, South Barrie Animal Hospital, and as we drive down to Innisfil, we have Stroud Veterinary Hospital, Innisfil Veterinary Hospital and Alcona Animal Hospital, just to name a few. These are all small business owners, everyone that's involved in the veterinary field, and they will benefit from this bill.

So Speaker, this bill is really for the people, and I'm really excited for my community that is going to benefit from many of these measures.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): And the first question to you comes from the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I want to pick up where the member from London talked about the description of how this government is planning to privatize Ontario Works employment services. The issue of child poverty is something that we need to address more in this House, and we don't seem to do that. One in five kids in the province, at a minimum, is living in poverty, and the kids who are living in the deepest poverty are kids who are growing up on social assistance; in fact, 40% of people that are on social assistance are kids.

My question to the member would be, given that even your own manager of chronic disease prevention in Bradford West Gwillimbury said that a family of four, earning a minimum wage, is well below the poverty line and they're going to spend 60% of their income on just food and shelter, what advice do you have for these families trying to feed their kids and pay the rent who are living in the deepest poverty in our communities?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you to the member opposite for that question. My heart goes out to a lot of these families—it's a struggle. I mean, inflation is up. I come from an immigrant family. When we first came in 1992, we were just going through the 1990s recession. It's very hard when you're living either on a fixed income or you're waiting to get into the workforce, whatever your circumstances might be.

But this government finally gave hope to Ontarians when we got elected in 2019. Not only did we say you don't have to pay tax if you're earning above \$30,000, so that benefited a lot of people. They have more take-home income. We also made changes to things like ODSP so people could actually work more and not be clawed back on their ODSP.

But we've even done more things, like lift people up out of those minimum wage jobs, really pushed them and motivated them to go into some of these high-paying jobs. We need so many employees, but of course the barrier to that for some people is training. Now we're saying we'll take on that training in terms of the bottom line for the taxpayer of Ontario and give back to those individuals so they have a little more money to go a long way for their payments.

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

Mr. Michael Parsa: I want to thank my colleague for the great presentation. In your presentation, you actually talk about listening to the people and getting ideas directly from the people. I'm wondering, when these red tape packages are formed, what type of consultations occur, and when they do, where do you get these ideas from? I know a lot of people are watching, as they often do. They tune in when we have great bills like this that are being discussed to make life easier for the people of Ontario, in particular, our small businesses with great bills that make things easier for the people of Ontario, so could you tell us please a little bit about the process? How do the consultations go and how do they submit their ideas to the ministry?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I would say, first, all of our responsibility as MPPs in this Legislature is to obviously constantly listen to our constituents. Oftentimes we hold round tables or virtual round tables. So for me in my community, I always host multiple round tables. I always talk to people. We also do small business tours and really get to the heart of businesses.

For me, locally, I sought feedback from different businesses to give back to my government colleagues to inform different bills, whether it's this one and others. But over the summer and over the year, I was able to talk to people like Jennifer Halliday at Halliday House; Lynne Butler at Creative Café; Sergey at Kaleidoscope—they're doing incredible work there; Denise at Olive Oil Co. We've got James at 9Round and of course I've got Mackie at 9Round in Innisfil, so I've got to mention both of those. Legacy Taekwondo—gosh, they had a lot of suggestions because they've been through a really tough time. Tony, my heart goes out to your family. HotBod Fitness—that

gets your attention, Speaker—Christy Toms has got lots of feedback on how to grow your business, but it's from Ontarians.

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to the member from Barrie–Innisfil for her presentation. I want to ask about not-for-profits because she talked a lot about restaurants and a lot about red tape, but the fact is, 2.6% of Ontario's GDP comes from not-for-profits: \$50 billion in economic impact, over a million workers, and we don't find anything from this government really to help the not-for-profit sector.

What's happening right now is, due to fundraising competition, their funding is actually decreasing because of that competition for fundraising dollars, and those dollars support not extra programming but core programming, and they're all competing for that money while the government is not really doing anything to help them. So their problem isn't red tape; their problem is that they don't have enough money and their budgets are being squeezed continually. But they're supporting our communities, so why has this government not stepped up and helped not-for-profits?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Affordability is a big issue in this province, and from day one, this government has tackled the issue of affordability in this province, which helps the not-for-profit sector. Another thing we all know is that not-for-profits and charitable sectors are highly reliant on volunteers. I know it first-hand from places like Barrie Families Unite or Innisfil Families Unite. It's volunteer-driven, and this bill actually makes it much easier for volunteers to be able to respond to the charitable sector when they're needed, quickly and swiftly, without the red tape. So it is addressed in this bill, Speaker.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a question for the member. We all know, and I'm sure we've all heard in the House from our constituents that have been tied up or are trying to get around a lot of the red tape that's out there. Sometimes regulations have been out 20, 30, sometimes you've heard of almost 100 years, and things change. But they can be confusing, upsetting, legally trying to get around things. As people know, lawyers' times are expensive.

So for this bill, and for the broader red tape package announced, what is the goal hoping to achieve for people and businesses by eliminating the red tape and getting it down to a reasonable level—not shirking requirements, environmental assessments, things we need to get done, but just making it straightforward. We've all heard of the housing crisis, the affordable housing crisis. There were 100,000 units tied up at the OMB when we first took over—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The member for Barrie–Innisfil to respond.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: The first part of the member's question there was on legal services. Well, before, senior lawyers were given priority in the legal system, which is

really unfair and punishes people who are using a paralegal, which is more affordable. Frankly, they shouldn't be treated any differently than a senior lawyer; someone who is getting legal representation is getting legal representation. My predecessor, Rodney Jackson, is now a paralegal, actually. He sat in this Legislature too, always fighting for the local people of Barrie.

But thanks to changes in this bill now, there is no hierarchy or pecking order in the legal system. It's now equal law for everyone, no matter who is representing you. That will not only reduce the burden on the people using the legal system, but of course reduce the cost. And that's just that element. Also, it's things like we didn't have online submissions for many things. Now people can do more online submission stuff rather than filling out paper applications.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Algoma–Manitoulin has a question.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I always enjoy being in the House with the member from Barrie–Innisfil, as she does, as I do—I always relate what we're talking about as far as bills here or legislation or whatever back to Algoma–Manitoulin, as she does for her riding. It's nice to see an MPP making that connection to the businesses that are there.

I was really listening to what she had to say, and I was hoping to hear a little bit more about the questions that you put to the member from London West in regard to how the assistants will get to the schools, because in my riding of Algoma–Manitoulin, a lot of those schools have those positions available for EAs and other supports in their schools, but it's not getting there. The individuals, first, aren't there; they have the funds, but they just don't have the proper monetary compensation to get those people into their schools. So I was just wondering if there's anything that you can add to elaborate on some of the questions that you had put to the member from London West, because I'm trying to get a sense of what you were trying to ask so I can better understand—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): You're out of time. I'll ask the member for Barrie–Innisfil to respond.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: This is a red tape reduction bill, not a budget bill, so of course we're talking about red tape reduction rather than whole spending. However, if we go back to budgets, say, 2019 and 2020, you will see that we committed to training more nurses. In fact, in the COVID budget, in the COVID response introduced by the former Minister of Finance, we had things in place like hiring nurses for schools. All those things were put in place.

However, what we quickly learned in terms of barriers to schools—not only was it to bring in, say, volunteers and the checks that are involved in volunteers, but there were also barriers, for example, for access to therapists and to allow them to easily be in the school. That was identified as a barrier by many parents. Now we are eliminating that barrier within this bill.

1700

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am pleased to have this opportunity to be on the record and to share not only my thoughts, of course, but those of people from my riding and, broadly, the Durham region as we are debating Bill 13, which is called the Supporting People and Businesses Act, 2021. I appreciate the title “Supporting People and Businesses Act” not because I would argue that it connects to the bill all that much, but it will give me the opportunity to talk about those things—to talk about the ways to support people and businesses. I've got much to discuss today and only 20 minutes to do it, Speaker.

What we have here, this bill, as we've heard eloquently from our esteemed critic from London West, is an omnibus bill. It has 25 schedules. It seeks to, as the government said, address red tape or issues. There's a lot of tinkering in this. There are housekeeping pieces. As they have said and as we have acknowledged, there are some parts of this bill that have been requested to make certain parts of government smoother. But there's so much that could have been in this bill to not just make things smoother but to make programs and services actually make sense or make a difference to these people and businesses that the government purports to be supporting.

Unfortunately, while we are in the face of a pandemic, this is not a bill that is going to help them get through. It doesn't do anything to help people recover as we're in the midst of a pandemic and hopeful that one day we will not be. That's not what this bill is for.

The government has trotted out their next piece of red tape legislation, so that's why we're here.

The people of Ontario deserve good things. They deserve good health. They deserve appropriate services to meet their needs. That's not in this bill. Maybe another day.

I'm going to take today to share some of the ways that, hopefully, the government can make a better difference.

This is, as I said, about red tape and tinkering—25 schedules, just under 30 regulatory changes.

I'd like to first look at schedule 8, in which the government is making a few changes about the Education Act. I'm going to talk about education. I want us to take this opportunity today and focus on strengthening public education.

Speaker, I received a letter from an intermediate teacher. Full disclosure, before I read this letter: I will tell you that for many years, by choice, I was also an intermediate teacher, which says something about me. If you are a kindergarten teacher, you would judge me for that; if you were an intermediate teacher, you would judge a kindergarten teacher, because it takes a special type of person to teach kindergarten. They would say it takes a special person to teach intermediate. But I did it on purpose and loved it, and I miss many of those students. It's a special, special group. It's a special age. But I'm not here to sing songs about the magic of grade 7 and 8. I am going to read this letter, which is very raw and very personal and was sent to me I think in the spirit of—well, I'll read it—frustration and turning to this government for

the supports that are so desperately needed across our schools. This educator writes:

“It is not easy to paint a picture of life at a priority school in Oshawa. It is, actually, quite impossible without having actually experienced teaching and learning in the south end of Oshawa. So, where do I start? We could look at the historical impact of present-day poverty, the ever-growing disparity between low-income and high-income people, the rise in mental health issues exacerbated by the pandemic and without access to necessary resources. We could talk about homelessness, unemployment, addiction, and the perpetuation of cycles of poverty and oppression that never seem to be at the forefront of government agenda.... However we look at it though, the end results remain the same. Students and staff at priority schools are struggling and the level of adversity and despair is not shared equitably across the education system. We have junior and intermediate classes with 25-30 students, upwards of half on IEPs and several with behaviour safety plans. We have teachers ‘differentiating instruction’ to a class with students working at six different grade levels in one class. There is no academic support. There are not enough Chromebooks for juniors to be able to have even close to one each and many students can’t function without the assisted technology. We have EAs who are spread thin, with a focus only on students with behaviours, and even then there are more behaviours than EAs, SERTs and admin put together. Every single day various students are having mental health struggles that cause disruption in the classrooms and in the halls. The mental health of our students, especially apparent in the intermediate classes,” is “gravely affected. Depression, anxiety, apathy, despondence, rage make up much of the day as they try to navigate an education system that was never set up for them to succeed.

“Teachers are exhausted, overwhelmed, and feeling helpless, trying to teach the curriculum while simultaneously nurturing positive mental health. Students need them to be educators, mentors, social workers, parents. Not to mention the lack of food that many of the students experience. While we have a breakfast program that offers snacks throughout the day, it does little to address the real issues of hunger, poverty and hopelessness. The students normalize the events that occur in the school. They normalize their own struggles as being just a part of life. They all have dreams of being rich and getting out of their existences but as adults, we know the road that lays ahead looks grim. We need resources. Not just a checklist of resources. We need EAs, many, to assist students with reading and writing. Many kids graduate into high school never reading above a primary level.

“We can blame teachers. We can blame students. But the truth of the matter is there is not enough help to address the need in the school. We need child and youth workers in every division (every class would be better) to help run programs for children with mental health struggles. We need social workers assigned to each school, not just one per catchment area, to work individually with students who struggle with just wanting to live and families who

need the support. We need computers so the many students with learning issues can have access to programs at their level and with assistive technology. Many students do not have proper clothes, proper footwear, proper school supplies. We need food. Yes, food. A basic right. A breakfast program that covers lunch as well.... We need extensive training for the teachers who want to commit to a lifetime career at a priority school. Training on working with students who live in poverty.

“Our students are traumatized and angry and apathetic. They are resigned to this being how it is because it was how it was for their parents and their grandparents. But the amazing truth is these students are also creative and resilient and have unchannelled passion for what is fair and just. And the fact that they show up to school, when they do, they still have hope. If you actually care to put money where true change can occur then look at priority schools. Come visit. Talk to teachers. Talk to students. Depriving students of the very resources they need in order to have half a chance to succeed is, in my opinion, criminal.”

That was quite a letter. I appreciate the passion, I appreciate the commitment that this educator has crammed into this letter, and I’m glad to be able to share it today as we are talking about ways to support people.

Speaker, I’ve been very glad and proud to stand here with the official opposition and call for smaller class sizes, staffing supports. Custodial staff is much-needed, especially as we’re talking about COVID-19 and we’re talking about cleanliness and we’re talking about safety. Where are the testing kits and access? Custodial staff, educational assistants are needed—we heard that in the letter, but we’ve been saying that in this room—air quality standards and reporting.

Educators are wanting out and they’re trying to take early retirement, I’ve been hearing. They went into this because they would give everything to these students, and the fact that this is a government that won’t give anything to them is remarkable.

We do need safe classrooms, and we need this government to show leadership when it comes to PPE, vaccinations, health and safety, and funding education.

Let’s not forget that the pandemic came in and kind of distracted this government from their plan to slash and burn and cut education. I think that’s probably still on the agenda when we get out the other side of this pandemic. I hope that they have learned through this the importance of education, the importance of supporting the public sector and public education.

Speaker, while I’m talking about investing in the public sector—yesterday we had the opportunity to talk about health care. We had an opposition day motion. We were calling on this government to join us in creating a hiring and respect and retention plan for nurses and health care workers, who deserve to be working in safe work environments where they’re not only respected and protected but where they’re paid what they’re worth. We have come out swinging against Bill 124, and the government is doggedly clinging to that. I heard a lot yesterday about financial responsibility and whatnot.

1710

I shared part of a letter yesterday—but just that reminder from nurses. This is written by Jo-Ann, who's a nurse in my community:

“Nurses have a unique lens on this pandemic and all health care disparities prior. We are front-line workers, parents, children, neighbours and we are also patients. When we speak about the needs of nurses, we are speaking as citizens of Ontario on behalf of all Ontario. This is our professional responsibility and we take it very seriously.”

She went on to say, “If nurses of Ontario are not able to sustain and support our health care system it will not function properly.”

I thank her for her comments and for her work and the work of her colleagues. Unfortunately, this room, this Legislature, this government has not been short on thank yous, but they have been short on funding and they have been short on protections.

We have been repeatedly discussing access to optometric eye care. I have a letter that was sent to me today. Today I was proud to give a member's statement about saving eye care in Ontario, but this letter arrived after I gave that, so I want to share this. It's from Dr. Seema Koria, who is a Durham region optometrist. She said:

“Optometrists are feeling so frustrated with this whole situation, especially since the government keeps saying ‘we need optometrists to return to the table’ when we have never left and have been trying to communicate with our local MPPs non-stop for over a year.... Our patients are suffering and it's breaking our hearts. I am in disbelief almost two months into this, the government is willing to sit back and let people just not have access to essential eye care. Even if optometrists were not willing to negotiate (which is so far from the truth—we've been begging for a mechanism to negotiate for decades!), the government's responsibility is to ensure that all Ontarians have access to health care. They are the government....

“Honestly, I'm not sure how things work in the Legislature ... but if there's any way to point blank ask” the Minister of Health “why, if she agrees that optometrists should not be paying out of pocket to see OHIP-insured patients, can she not sign a commitment to a legally binding negotiation process whereby optometrists do not have to pay out of pocket to provide OHIP-insured services? This simple action would end service withdrawal. With a commitment that is legally binding, optometrists would be able to trust that a resolution would be determined....

“Their words without a commitment don't hold any weight with optometrists....

“Also, we just want someone to call out” the Minister of Health, the MPP from Eglinton–Lawrence and the Premier “and anyone else who tries to say that optometrists are ‘not returning to the table’ with a statement that acknowledges that optometrists are ‘ready, willing and able’ to negotiate but mediation is not the only way that this can happen.”

Speaker, I'm glad to bring her voice to this Legislature, but I'm going to connect it to this bill that is about

supporting people and businesses. We're seeing that constituents and potential patients of optometrists don't have access to what they need. Optometrists are also running their practices and they have been saying they can't afford to, that they're paying so much out of pocket to provide these services, that they've been begging to break even for years. And this government that says, “Hey, we're friends to business,” are letting that happen and have been for a long time.

I wrote a letter to the minister—I'm awaiting a response—and I urge them to return to the negotiating table and restore OHIP-insured eye care services to all youth and seniors. People expect the government will resolve this.

We have all spoken about people with diabetes and on ODSP; seniors who can't get their driver's licences in order to maintain their—they can't get appointments to have their eyes checked. It's just such a mess that they're losing their independence as a result.

Students in schools who are finding out as they're back this year that they can't see the whiteboard properly—oh, well, they're out of luck.

Speaker, I'm going to continue. Schedule 10 in this bill addresses the Environmental Assessment Act. I had the opportunity to stand in this place and discuss the Upper York Sewage Solutions situation when the government brought in Bill 5 to sort of stop the presses and stop that project from going forward. I gave an hour's speech on that, so I'm not going to rehash that, but I am going to take some of what I brought up there and I'm going to delve into that. That is about this government's firm commitment to urban sprawl—“Oh, look, a field; we should build on that.” It's unfortunate, because that really is problematic for the future. It's very short-sighted. The government calls us short-sighted. That's fine. We can name-call in this place—not being unparliamentary, of course, Speaker. But when we look at the history and this government, with Upper York Sewage Solutions, Bill 5—the government was throwing at us, “Well, why wouldn't you support updated environmental information?” I just thought the irony of that was magic, because when we were talking about the Bradford Bypass, for example—and we heard the member earlier talking about the mid-1990s. Well, let's all think about the mid-1990s. I graduated high school in 1996. In 1997, I was wrapping up my first year in university. I think about who I was then and what our towns looked like. Think about that.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: The Spice Girls.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: The Spice Girls.

When we look back at that time, can we possibly imagine that the environmental assessment from 1997 for the Bradford Bypass would still be okay? It is. In fact, even the conditions that went with it, back from 2002, about groundwater, stormwater challenges there, actual problems that were flagged, that they were conditions, this government recently—it has been exempted. Those conditions aren't conditions anymore.

This is your neck of the woods, folks, and your constituents who are assuming that, if you're going to

build a highway, you know what you're doing or you actually are building it doing due diligence, whether looking at environmental or planning, growth plans. "It was so long ago, it isn't relevant. We don't need it to be current in this case"—because it seems to be a pet project, which is obviously a problem.

I think the Premier is planning to be re-elected on the 413 and being a "yes" man. I am proud to stand in my place as the critic for transportation, highways and infrastructure, here with the Ontario NDP—we do not support the 413. We do not support the Bradford Bypass. While you guys are going to put that on your bumper stickers—I hope they stick—that yes, you're going through with the 413—no. No, it's the wrong decision.

This government has revived two long-dead proposals for these highways, and they're planning to build these highways without completing full environmental assessments. We're not even going to know the scale of the damage until it's too late. There's a rush job. The letters, the folks who are writing in about this—they hear it. They know.

By the way, there's an order paper question, written question number 6. I'll read it to you now. I'm still awaiting the answer:

"Enquiry of the Ministry—Would the Minister of Transportation confirm whether or not tolls are being considered for the proposed Highway 413 and/or for the Bradford Bypass." That will be a neat one. If that's going to be a toll highway, I don't think that the folks who still do support those—I don't know that they know about that. Anyway, maybe you guys should ask, because I can't get an answer from the minister.

I have a minute and a bit, but I am going to drop this nugget in here. I've written to Mr. Lindsay of the Infrastructure Ontario folks and copied the infrastructure minister. I look forward to when we can have a proper conversation about broadband and the government's proposal, because when we're talking about small businesses, the small and medium Internet service providers across the province want in on this government's opportunity to provide broadband to the underserved and rural communities. I am very concerned that while you guys have a big price tag and a \$4-billion commitment—that's a big number, but if you're not factoring in that we don't need 100 lots, we need 500 lots; that those small and medium service providers aren't going to be able to get in on this game and we're just going to have the huge companies that are not going to let the small ones tap into their fibre optic trunk lines—they're not going to be able to connect. They're going to continue to be underserved.

The Associate Minister for Small Business and Red Tape Reduction: I'm hoping that she and her colleagues, who I believe understand the need for broadband and probably do want their underserved regions to have access to it—this is something that really needs to be clear: How are these small and medium-sized ISPs going to get in the game? They've signed non-disclosure agreements, so they can't talk about it, but the large lots and large mapping is going to send them packing. They won't be able to get in

on it, and your communities will not have the Internet that they need. So maybe take a look at that and make sure that everyone has the connectivity that they need and that we really are making life better for businesses and people.

1720

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The first question for you from the government side goes to the member from Flamborough—Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon. To the member opposite: Ontario, as we know, has a very big infrastructure deficit left to us by years of neglect by the previous Liberal government, including the need for more housing. And I strongly believe that we should be finding every avenue possible to speed up approval processes.

As a former city councillor in Hamilton, I can tell you that delays in approval processes cost money. Just today, the Oxford Economics survey released the list of the least affordable cities in North America, and Hamilton comes in at number 5. Does the member opposite agree, and support the proposed changes to the Planning Act that would give councils the ability to hand over approvals, speed it up and build affordable housing?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm going to flip this back also with a bit of a question of my own, because I have stood in my place as the infrastructure critic and I've been very glad to say that we support thoughtful planning that is based on growth plans and environmental responsibility, that really does look at the projections of communities and what is needed.

When we see something like the transportation environmental study report that's to be completed—and we're waiting to see whether or not that is even going to be considered with the Bradford bypass or the 413. There's a matter of a lot of moving parts here that the government is trying just to make this go through so quickly. We're waiting to find out about the feds and an environmental assessment. But everything is such a rush job that there's so much harm waiting in the wings to happen, and we're all going to find out about that after the fact. So if we're going to talk about rushing things through, be careful, be thoughtful, and stop doing harm.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: The member from Oshawa talked about our oppo day on the nurse shortage, and what I reflected on was this government's priorities. This red tape bill is a housekeeping piece, but when they want to actually pass legislation, they can ram things through very quickly. One of the bills that comes to mind is Bill 218, where they actually shielded for-profit long-term-care homes, made it harder for families to sue those for-profit homes.

I just wanted to ask the member, why is this government not prioritizing our oppo day, on the nurse shortage, so they can actually improve the care that people get in long-term care? Can she comment on that?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: As I mentioned in my speech, it was very disappointing to put forward the voices of

nurses and health care workers and to get back that the government isn't going to invest in them, they're not going to backtrack on Bill 124, that it's all talk and not support.

You mentioned Bill 218. When we're talking about long-term care and, unfortunately, the mess that we are left with in Durham region, grieving families, we're facing a government that is not—we're facing 30-year licence renewals and extensions as an award when we have had a nightmare residence there, Orchard Villa: 30-year licence renewal, 89 new beds. Again, I don't know what their priorities are. I don't know who their friends are. I don't know how they're benefiting or whatever, but the people in Ontario are left struggling.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Perth—Wellington.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Speaker, I'm sure that you know—and maybe you've been involved in volunteer work, like a lot of us have in this House over the years before we got here and, certainly, volunteer for different things in our communities and our ridings to this day. So I just wonder, does the member opposite think that we should keep costly red tape in place for volunteers?

One of the things I'm going to ask about is something that, actually, I just found out about a while ago, that you can get a police check to, say, coach a hockey team, but go to another organization that isn't a sports field where you need a police check and they won't accept that one. You have to get another one. I wonder if the member opposite agrees that we should get rid of red tape like that, like making adults pay for costly police record checks to volunteer.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: The member opposite is delving into one of the 25 schedules—as I said, this is an omnibus bill. Some things that have been asked for, tinkering around the edges—and I'm glad that he has done volunteering, and as he has stated, many of us have, but even more of us have appreciated the work of volunteers across the community. We want people to be able to volunteer.

Some of the people who have been volunteering are small businesses. They've been volunteering to go that extra mile and do what they need to, and they've been disrespected. We have a bill here that doesn't delve into how we cut the red tape or how we make business opportunities smoother for folks. When we look at the health of our communities, we need to expect people not just to do things, but we have to support them in that, so there are parts of this bill that we support.

I'm glad to take another question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas has a question.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I want to pick up on what the member from Flamborough—Glanbrook talked about: the homelessness and the housing crisis. Absolutely, in Hamilton, we have a problem. In fact, I have a book here that was written by Denise Davy that is talking about the issues of homelessness in our community.

The member from Flamborough—Glanbrook is advocating pushing through aggressive sprawl and overlooking

any good planning, any zoning when it comes to the environment, when it comes to farmland, when it comes to our whitebelt. In Hamilton we have a group that's advocating for a no-boundary expansion when it comes to the urban boundary expansion. In fact, overwhelmingly, the people of Hamilton have voted against expanding into the whitebelt or into our agricultural land.

It is a huge issue—housing and homelessness. This government has made no connection between their highways and their sprawl—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Pose your question, please.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Can you say what huge lost opportunity this bill was for this government to actually put meaningful things in place to help people find housing in this province?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I thank the member for her question. If she's interested in a solid and awesome housing plan, I'm sure that she can refer to the Ontario NDP housing plan, as can the government members, as can any Ontarian.

But I think we all recognize how complicated and complex housing is. It's not just about building new homes out in a, you know—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Farmer's field.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you—in a farmer's field or out in an agriculturally sensitive area. It's also about intensifying and utilizing the services that we have; it's about co-ops. I read a petition earlier from Ontarians who are looking for different—not just about being creative. These are tried and tested ways of getting people housed. Whether that's rental accommodation, whether that's transitional housing, and we absolutely need to—

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: —a commitment to working with community agencies and getting that housing into our communities.

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

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: In order to continue to keep the province running to support businesses and to keep Ontarians safe, our government has made numerous temporary regulatory changes throughout the pandemic. We have heard from stakeholders that some of these changes are helpful and should be made permanent. Examples of this include the sale of alcohol with food, delivery orders and 24/7 delivery of goods to grocery stores and other businesses. Other changes in this legislation we're making are the extension of patios for restaurants. Does the member opposite support these changes that have made life easier for the people of Ontario as well as support small businesses across the province?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: The member highlights kind of a changing landscape in terms of how we eat in our communities, the amount of takeout or the chance to try different businesses with the delivery services or now patios. There are lots of things that we have had to shift

and be a part of as they've happened and we've learned from.

I'm very glad to be able to get up and answer about supporting small businesses. In fact, I hear from them all the time—those who were eligible, initially, and then no longer eligible for the Ontario Small Business Support Grant, or people who haven't been able to have an appeal because there is no appeal process. We were sad to see, frankly, that there isn't that commitment to a third round for businesses, that some who are still waiting, Speaker—still waiting—in our communities since April don't have an answer. I asked my staff who is fielding these emails and phone calls—I said, “What would you like me to ask the minister? I have the chance.” And she said, “Ask the minister what on earth I am supposed to say to these businesses who are still waiting.” So that's my response: If we want to help small businesses, let's talk to them. Let's ask them how we can help, and then let's help them. That would be super. Thank you.

1730

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

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: We all know that small businesses are the backbone of our economy. We also know that they have been the hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. I am proud, Mr. Speaker, that this government has done everything to support small businesses. We have provided billions of dollars through small business grants to help small businesses make up for their lost revenues and sustain their business. We also have set up provincial grants to help start businesses and provide PPE equipment to ensure the safety of business owners and Ontarians alike. We supplied the Digital Main Street program to help businesses go online so that they can continue servicing their customers.

We also partnered with the federal government to support small businesses with 75% of the rent they pay during the lockdown, not to mention, Speaker, that our government lowered the small business corporate income tax rate. And this was just in the face of the pandemic. As we place Ontario on a path to recovery, I'm even prouder to speak about this piece of legislation introduced by my colleague the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction. You see, Mr. Speaker, this new legislation will not only remove historic barriers faced by small businesses, but also help Ontarians in every aspect of their lives.

The bill is 25 different schedules touching many, many areas in our day-to-day lives. From making access to health services easier and making our businesses more competitive to supporting tourism and boosting rural and northern economies, this legislation is extensive in its endeavour to support the great people of this province.

For example, Mr. Speaker, Ontarians volunteer their time to serve our communities. Often at times, this requires a police record check, which comes with a cost that prospective volunteers have to shoulder. That's rather unfair to our volunteers, who are anyway providing their time for free. If anything, this serves as an obstacle for

people to volunteer, and Ontarians volunteer millions of hours of their time every year. That's why, in order to support our volunteers, who exhibit true Ontario spirit, our government is providing free processing for police record checks. Our government will always support Ontario's dedicated volunteers.

Speaking of being efficient, Mr. Speaker, restaurants and small businesses have sought multiple ways to serve Ontarians while adhering to public health guidelines such as restrictions on indoor dining. One safe manner is to set up tables outside, essentially patios, which are safer as they allow for the circulation of fresh air. That's why this legislation is proposing changes which would allow for restaurants, bars, and hospitality businesses to create or extend their outdoor patio spaces. This would not only bolster these industries, but also invite tourism, as well as contribute to our strong economy. As the PA to the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, I cannot put into words how integral this is to our economy. These industries contributed over \$30 billion to our economy pre-COVID, and I am looking forward to surpassing these pre-pandemic levels after.

Businesses were severely affected by the pandemic, and outdoor dining helped with keeping them afloat. We have seen this model work around the world: in New York, in Europe, in Paris and everywhere. It's also prompted Ontarians to go outside, as they have been sitting at home due to the lockdowns. And speaking about boosting tourism, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to talk about how this legislation also proposes the introduction of large cycles. Similar to rickshaws, as seen in south Asia and in Europe, these large cycles are zero-emission vehicles which encourage tourism and lightweight mobility.

Furthermore, the pandemic has caused us to really assess our health care system after years of neglect. Our government added 30,000 long-term-care beds in three years. Mississauga by itself got 1,084 beds. After 14 years of neglect by previous governments, which only offered 640 beds for the whole of Ontario in seven years, I'm proud that we have made historic investment after historic investment in renovating hospitals, adding long-term-care beds, as well as making it easier for PSWs and health care professionals to enter the industry.

Similarly, this legislation will make it easier for children with special needs to access the therapies they need in school. We will be reducing barriers to accessing nursing, speech language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy. These changes will allow for easier access and more choice for families, while ensuring that all children in the province receive the education they deserve.

Speaking about health care, I am proud to bring to your attention, Mr. Speaker, the fact that this bill will update the safety requirements in HARPA regulations. This will align with the updated national guidance to ensure the requirements reflect the best available evidence and evolving technology. This bill will improve the review and approval timelines for designation of new CT machines, fast-tracking the burdensome approval requirements to replace

a CT device in hospitals. We have seen first hand during COVID the importance of procuring machines like ventilators quickly, and I am glad that this bill is building the groundwork for approving equipment faster. This bill will do so by revising forms and guidance documents to clarify policies. In doing so, it will help industry and health system partners better understand legislative requirements and clarify roles and responsibilities. Put simply, this bill will ensure that equipment like CT devices is approved and installed into hospitals on a quick timeline, thereby saving countless lives.

Last but not least, Mr. Speaker, in the realm of health, this bill also seeks to modernize the regulatory framework for laboratories. This is to ensure Ontarians can continue to receive the high-quality health care they need. As part of this work, the bill will introduce a streamlined process for licensing approvals and renewals so that laboratories can continue to support Ontarians in their health care decisions. This will allow Ontarians to benefit from additional flexibility in laboratory operations as they will have more services available to them at the same laboratory. This will not only be convenient, but also save valuable time for Ontarians, preventing them from needless commuting to specialized laboratories and waiting there for a longer time.

But health care is more than that. Let's not forget the health of our animals and pets. After all, they form an integral part of our economy through farming and, of course, our lives. This legislation recognizes that there is an imbalance in the level of health care throughout the province. In rural areas especially, agricultural communities do not have access to the best health care for animals and pets, who are of course an extension of their businesses and families. That's why this bill is going to create greater access to veterinarians by developing a "one health" approach to veterinary facilities that will benefit farmers. It will do so by modernizing the accreditation model for veterinary facilities offering services to a wide range of species and clients. This will ensure that our animals receive the best health care no matter where they are in the province.

1740

In the same vein, this bill will improve the Ontario Feeder Cattle Loan Guarantee Program by introducing initial changes that improve program responsiveness, reduce administrative burdens and provide flexibility in emergency events, ensuring the continued success of the program.

It will also amend regulations under the Milk Act. As part of Ontario's Open for Business Action Plan, it will propose amendments to regulations that support the economic success of the industry and reduce burden, while continuing to protect food safety.

Speaking about the benefits this bill proposes for rural and northern economies, I am happy to see the proposed amendments to the Mining Act. As a part of our Critical Minerals Strategy to attract global investment, this government will expand the industry and create jobs by opening up new opportunities to recover minerals and cut

red tape. Through this legislation, our government will also make it easier for companies to retain the proceeds from testing their samples during exploration, which will bring more certainty to mining businesses and help mining projects advance.

This brings me to my next point, land. We in Canada have a history, and we on this side of the House understand the importance of respecting sovereign rights. This bill proposes to make the best use of public lands by removing barriers to transferring lands to First Nations and other levels of government; preventing people from unlawfully claiming ownership of public lands; and lastly, helping to ensure public lands can be used for future resource-based economic development opportunities, especially in northern Ontario.

Speaking of helping professionals in a variety of industries, it is important that we also think to help people get into these very industries, especially those who have been hardest hit by the pandemic and have unfortunately been laid off or are unemployed. That's why this bill includes the Second Career program, which will help unemployed, laid-off workers train for occupations in high demand in Ontario. I am proud that this program builds on the changes introduced in December 2020 to help laid-off workers. With this redesign, the government can strategically refocus these supports to better meet the pandemic-related shifts in the labour market.

On that note, I am also happy to talk about how this bill will provide more options for advanced learning. This government is considering the expansion of credentials in the public college system to include applied master's degrees. It is also proposing to expand degree-granting authority to publicly assisted colleges. In addition, this government is also considering increasing college degree-granting caps. This change would give students more opportunities to access high-quality education and ensure they graduate with skills, expertise and credentials that meet labour market demands. I am proud of these things because our government is adapting, in real time, to the needs of this province, to spread prosperity through employment and education.

Speaking about adapting in real time, I would like to talk about digital government. We are the first government in the history of the province to have a dedicated Associate Minister of Digital Government. This is because we recognize the importance of digitizing our government. Over time, we have seen commercial activities, banking services, health services, learning, education, schools all shifting online. It's now time that the government also makes more services available online. For the past year and a half, we have all been functioning online due to the pandemic. Hence, we will be digitizing our government, step by step, as is seen in this bill.

As I have just mentioned, we have seen e-banking, e-learning, e-health. It's time to have e-government. And this bill does just that.

For example, this bill will review Ontario's approvals processes for land transactions, reducing duplication where possible. It will also make it easier for purchasers

of land to get the environmental information they need by moving from a manual paper-based process to a much faster digital delivery platform. When we imagine calling to check on one of our applications and staying on hold for half an hour, an hour, until we get somebody to answer some questions—sometimes, and sometimes not. Having all those applications online, you can log online and check the status of the application in two minutes and upload requested documents, if needed, in two minutes.

So I will support any digitization process the government will add because it makes people's lives easier. It makes it more accessible—easier accessibility to the end customer.

If passed, this bill will support businesses on the ground and help government deliver clear and effective rules to promote public health and safeguard the environment without sacrificing innovation, growth or opportunities.

We need to give access to the end-user. We need to empower the end-user to log on, follow up with his application, view the progress of the application, understand if there are any requirements he can do, and get the ball going, instead of having that paper-based work, paper-based process, as well as a manual process in checking or adding or responding to any requirements. Any service we add online means it's available 24 hours. It's not 8 to 5; it's not 12 to 6; it's 24 hours. I can log in at 2 o'clock in the morning and check the status of my application—very similar to checking my bank statement or checking a transaction or purchasing something. If I can go at 2 a.m. in the morning on Amazon and purchase something, why can't I go online and check the status of an application? When I finish my studying or when I finish my work in my own convenient time, I can log in and check, or apply, or upload, or change anything on my application.

I think this piece of legislation, because of the variety of schedules it touches, is actually a huge improvement in the day-to-day lives of Ontarians.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleague the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, because she is taking on a variety of topics and trying to improve the lives of Ontarians.

1750

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for questions, and the first one goes to the member from Mushkegowuk—James Bay.

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: We are talking about Bill 13, Supporting People and Businesses Act. Today we heard a lot about small businesses. Some small businesses are really struggling, and we've heard that for some of these businesses it will take 18 months for recovery, to get back on their feet. We've heard about small businesses that, for lack of clarity, were refused. There were no dispute processes. There were technical issues. There were all kinds of problems. In my riding also, we dealt with this, and every riding in Ontario dealt with this. But we are not hearing in this bill about a third funding process—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Pose your question please.

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: I'm asking, why is the government not giving a third round of financing to these small

businesses that are struggling right now, that are still struggling?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much to the honourable member for the question. It makes much sense.

That's what we're doing now. This is now not talking about the pandemic; we're talking about opening Ontario for business. We're talking about what we are doing, what we are in the process of, to get those businesses back to normal. How are we inspiring those businesses to come up with ideas, come up with solutions to get back into business and go back to the same levels they were at before?

I did go around visiting small businesses, small restaurants, small hospitalities, small coffee shops, and they are happy about the patios. They are asking us, "Please keep the patios. The patios are good business."

We are all doing what we can do to support them and will come up with other ideas to help the businesses open and go back—

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

Mr. Michael Parsa: Mr. Speaker, through you to the member: Thank you very much for the great presentation. He has an extensive background when it comes to small businesses, and he knows how difficult it can be for businesses to operate when it comes to dealing with red tape.

When I got elected and I came here, I heard a lot of terms—there's a ton of acronyms and all kinds of things being thrown out here.

For the people, why is it so important to remove red tape, to get the economy going, to make it easier for businesses to be able to get their product to and from places? What's stopping them? Why is it so important for our government to be able to remove red tape and make it easier, especially as we start going towards a recovery from the pandemic?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I would like to thank the member for the question.

Actually, reducing the red tape was a request I had been hearing even before we came to power. I was talking to one of my friends who was starting a business. He had to get permission and licensing, some provincially, some municipally, and some from different associations, and inspections and all kinds of stuff. He was saying that doing business in Ontario is like peeling an onion. Every time you remove a layer, you get another layer; you remove a layer, you get another layer. You can't get to the bottom of that, and that takes a long time.

I myself experienced that when I won my seat in Mississauga—Erin Mills. This is a new seat. We got the office and we tried to get permission—it took us six months to get the requested permission. It's tough—

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: When you look at the red tape bill that this government is bringing forward, you really look at—from an Ontarian's perspective, how do we take what the government is doing as serious? When you look at previous bills—and I'll go with this one that I just went

and dug up, which was Bill 5. When you look at the content of Bill 5, Bill 5 is this government indemnifying themselves for actions that could have, did or might possibly happen. So how can Ontarians look at this government as far as trusting them on the environment? How can Ontarians look at this government—and I listened to this member talk about getting responses in a proper fashion, where we have, time after time, stood up in this House and we talked about the Ontario Tourism Recovery plan or the small business grant. We still have businesses that are waiting for responses from this government. Seriously, how do you respond to Ontarians and their questions that they have towards this government?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much. I would like to thank the member for his question. Yes, we see small businesses sending emails, saying, “We are not getting the response,” or “We are not getting the money,” or “We are not getting the grant or didn’t qualify.” We have to go back and figure out what’s wrong with their application or what’s wrong with the requirements or the criteria. Sometimes, they don’t have the criteria. Sometimes, they made a mistake. Sometimes, they did something wrong with the application. Sometimes, they didn’t supply the requested information.

I can talk in general terms, but we have, I think, 120,000 businesses that already got the grants. Some businesses fall through the cracks. I understand that, and it always will happen. It happened, and it will happen, but slowly we are getting there. It was overwhelming. You have to understand that.

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

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: I’d like to thank the member from Mississauga—Erin Mills for his great presentation today. I wanted to ask you, for this particular bill and in the broader red tape package that’s been announced, what is the overarching goal that the government has and hopes to achieve for people and small businesses in Ontario?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much to the member from Oakville. The whole goal of the bill is to make life easier, make steps not redundant. If you already got the permission, we can’t remove all the requirements, but if you already did something, you don’t have to do it once for the province and once for municipal—redundancy. We have to get this redundancy cleared out so that we can unleash Ontario, unleash the businesses. The businesses have to be able to get to business as fast as possible. When a business starts, they put up capital

funding, and every day that passes, they are losing money. Every day that passes, they are putting money from their own pockets. We have to help them.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I’m glad to be able to ask a question as we’re discussing the Supporting People and Businesses Act. The Ontario small businesses that we’ve been hearing from—and the member has acknowledged and others have acknowledged that it was a pretty rocky rollout. For some small businesses, they got their money right away, automatically got the second round with no issues. That’s great for them, but others have been chasing their first payment. They still haven’t received it. There hasn’t been a fair process. It’s added unnecessary stress during a pandemic. They’ve been doing all the right things, locking down and all of this, to keep our communities safe. We want the government to do right by them.

We were hoping to see a third round of the Ontario Small Business Support Grant. The member talked about how great it is for people to get phone calls. I don’t know about this magical Disneyland where phone calls get returned by this government. I don’t live there. Our offices don’t; our businesses don’t. So I’d love to know about the support line, how that’s going to be improved. And why on earth aren’t we seeing a third round when you know that that’s what businesses have been asking for, direct support?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much for the question. I would like to say that, yes, as I mentioned, some businesses called us and emailed our office—and I am sure that all the members got some of those calls. But again, there is a way to check what the status of their application is. Sometimes, they did something or they didn’t meet the criteria, because it’s not open for any business just to walk in and get money. There are requirements. You have to have a payroll. You have to have the previous year volume of sales and stuff like that. There are some documents required for them to be able to get the money. I understand that some businesses could have some hurdles in there, but we are working on it. There is no hierarchy in there. It was before, but now we say, “This is the hierarchy or the apparatus to give grants, but we are working on it.”

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The time for debate on this item this afternoon has expired.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

Report continues in volume B.

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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
Roberts, Jeremy (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
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
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
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
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associée déléguée aux Petites Entreprises et à la Réduction des formalités administratives
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
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
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
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	
Vacant	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vacant
Teresa J. Armstrong, Toby Barrett
Lorne Coe, Rudy Cuzzetto
Goldie Ghamari, Randy Hillier
Christina Maria Mitas, Judith Monteith-Farrell
Michael Parsa, Randy Pettapiece
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

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

Chair / Président: Vacant
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vacant
Ian Arthur, Will Bouma
Stephen Crawford, Catherine Fife
Ernie Hardeman, Mitzie Hunter
Logan Kanapathi, Sol Mamakwa
Jeremy Roberts, Dave Smith
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Julia Douglas

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Président: Logan Kanapathi
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Mike Schreiner
Jill Andrew, Robert Bailey
Will Bouma, Guy Bourgouin
Chris Glover, Mike Harris
Logan Kanapathi, 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
Deepak Anand, Aris Babikian
Gilles Bisson, Lorne Coe
Wayne Gates, Robin Martin
Norman Miller, Billy Pang
Amanda Simard, Marit Stiles
John Yakabuski
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tanzima Khan

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lucille Collard
Lucille Collard, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Natalia Kusendova
Jim McDonell, Suze Morrison
Randy Pettapiece, Donna Skelly
Gurratan Singh, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Kevin Yarde
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

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

Chair / Président: Vacant
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vijay Thanigasalam
Rima Berns-McGown, France Gélinas
Goldie Ghamari, Faisal Hassan
Jim McDonell, Sam Oosterhoff
Laurie Scott, Vijay Thanigasalam
Jeff Yurek
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**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
Christine Hogarth, Michael Mantha
Taras Natyshak, Michael Parsa
Amarjot Sandhu
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: Vacant
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Fraser
Aris Babikian, Lorne Coe
John Fraser, 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 / Présidente: Natalia Kusendova
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Bhutila Karpoche
Aris Babikian, Jeff Burch
Amy Fee, Michael Gravelle
Joel Harden, Mike Harris
Bhutila Karpoche, Natalia Kusendova
Jeff Yurek
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, Tom Rakocevic
Donna Skelly, Sara Singh
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell