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5 octobre 2021

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Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
Greffier : Todd Decker

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 5 October 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 5 octobre 2021

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ROYAL ASSENT SANCTION ROYALE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to a certain bill in her office.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): The following is the title of the bill to which Her Honour did assent:

An Act to amend the Election Finances Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur le financement des élections.

RESIGNATION OF MEMBER FOR DON VALLEY EAST

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I also beg to inform the House that, during the adjournment, a vacancy has occurred in the membership of the House by reason of the resignation of Michael Coteau as the member for the electoral district of Don Valley East, effective August 17, 2021. Accordingly, I have issued my warrant to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a writ for a by-election.

TABLING OF SESSIONAL PAPERS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I also beg to inform the House that, during the adjournment, the following documents were tabled:

—the 2020-21 annual report from the Office of the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario;

—the 2020 annual report and statistical report from the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario;

—order in council 918/2021, dated June 24, 2021, appointing Dr. Kieran Moore as Chief Medical Officer of Health for the province of Ontario, for a fixed term of five years, effective June 26, 2021;

—the 2020-21 annual report from the Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario;

—the 2020-21 annual report from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario;

—a report entitled, Expenditure Monitor 2020-21: Q4, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario;

—a report entitled, Municipal Infrastructure: A Review of Ontario's Municipal Infrastructure and an Assessment

of the State of Repair, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario;

—a report entitled, Ontario's Credit Rating: 2021 Update, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario.

I also beg to inform the House that during the interval between the first session of the 42nd Parliament and the second session of the 42nd Parliament, the following documents were tabled:

—a report concerning Stan Cho, member for Willowdale, from the Office of the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario;

—a report concerning Catherine Fife, member for Waterloo, from the Office of the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario; and

—a report entitled, Expenditure Monitor 2021-22: Q1, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario.

APPOINTMENT OF PRESIDING OFFICERS

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: If you seek it, you will find unanimous consent that the order for government notice of motion number 2 be called immediately, and that the question on the motion be put without debate or amendment.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Agreed? Agreed.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I move that the order of the House dated July 18, 2018, be rescinded, and that Bill Walker, member for the electoral district of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, be appointed Deputy Speaker and Chair of the Committee of the Whole House;

That Lisa Gretzky, member for the electoral district of Windsor West, be appointed First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House;

That Percy Hatfield, member for the electoral district of Windsor-Tecumseh, be appointed Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House; and

That Jennifer French, member for the electoral district of Oshawa, be appointed Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House.

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

Motion agreed to.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: If you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to move a motion without notice respecting private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Agreed? Agreed.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 101(e), the notice requirements for ballot

items 1 through 9 be waived; and that, notwithstanding standing order 98(a), the House shall not meet to consider private members' public business on Tuesday, October 5, 2021, Wednesday, October 6, 2021 and Thursday, October 7, 2021; and that a change be made to the order of precedence on the ballot list drawn on September 27 such that Mr. Fraser assumes ballot item number 2 and that Mr. Wilson assumes ballot item number 7.

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

Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I move that the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight be reappointed with the same mandate and membership that existed prior to the prorogation of the first session of the 42nd Parliament, and that it resume its business at the same stage of progress as at prorogation.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Jones has moved government notice of motion number 1. I look to the Solicitor General to lead off the debate.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As I do every time we discuss COVID-19 measures, and particularly given the start of this new legislative session, I would like to begin first by thanking the staff of this Legislature for continuing to distinguish themselves through the care and professionalism with which they have ensured this House remains open and accessible, even during this global pandemic. When the people of Ontario have needed you to go above and beyond in your service to this democratic institution, you have never faltered.

Off the top, I would also like to take a moment to acknowledge that Sunday was Firefighters' Memorial Day, an opportunity to honour firefighters who have given their lives in the line of duty. If you haven't already, I would encourage members to signal their gratitude and appreciation to Ontario's firefighters in each of your respective communities.

This week is also Fire Prevention Week, an educational week to inform Ontarians about how to keep themselves, their loved ones and their property safe from fire. The theme for this year's annual safety week is "Learn the Sounds of Fire Safety!", and we are encouraging Ontarians to get loud and test your smoke and carbon monoxide alarms to ensure they are working properly. Thank you, Speaker, for the chance to mention these two items that I know are very important to all members of the chamber.

0910

I'm honoured to rise to discuss the important motion before this House, and that is to re-establish a Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight. Members will recall that a similar motion was brought before

this House in July 2020, as we were debating the Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act.

As we resume our important work as legislators in this second session of the 42nd Ontario Parliament, I am particularly pleased to note that this motion is up for debate very early on, in what I have no doubt will be a very busy legislative calendar. This speaks to our government's commitment to ensuring that the important work that the select committee carried out for the last year can continue, with the objective of keeping Ontarians safe, informed and engaged. I trust that all members of the House share in this important commitment.

As members may know, the prorogation of the House last month dissolved the previous select committee established last July. In order for the important work of the committee to continue, it needs to be reformed, and we are taking the first possible opportunity to move ahead.

The motion before us is similar to what members debated last July. In this same spirit of transparency and accountability to our constituents in each region of the province, it would, if adopted, establish an all-party select committee to receive oral reports from the Premier or his designate on the orders made under the reopening Ontario act that have been extended or amended.

Before I speak specifically about the motion before the House, I want to remind members of the context this motion fits into with respect to the reopening Ontario act. After that, I will speak to some specifics of the select committee and, finally, provide a brief update to the House regarding the status of orders that have been continued under the reopening Ontario act.

To remind members, the reopening Ontario act was brought into force in July 2020 to serve as a tool to ensure that Ontario could continue to respond to the long-term impacts of COVID-19, while acknowledging that the government no longer needed the extraordinary tools available pursuant to the declaration of emergency made on March 17, 2020.

When the reopening Ontario act entered into force last July, orders that had been made pursuant to the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act transferred over from one act to the other. I noted in this House back in July 2020 that, as legislators, we have a duty to deliver a practical and flexible plan that supports the hard-earned progress that has been made as our communities have banded together to respond to the pandemic, while recognizing that COVID-19 will still be with us tomorrow. Given the developments in the COVID-19 pandemic since that time, the sentiment rings truer than ever.

The reopening Ontario act has given Ontario the flexibility we needed to support our continued efforts to respond to the ever-changing situation, whether that was cautiously reopening Ontario when appropriate or strengthening public health measures when necessary.

The reopening Ontario act includes key differences from the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, such as the inability to create any new orders from what was in place on July 24, 2020, as well as limitations on the ways in which orders could be amended. Those

limitations mean that amendments to orders can only be made for a very narrow and targeted set of agreed-upon reasons, including:

—closing or regulating places, including any business, office, school, hospital or other establishment or institution;

—providing for rules or practices that relate to workplaces or the management of workplaces, such as authorizing the person responsible for a workplace to identify staffing priorities or to develop, modify and implement redeployment plans or rules or practices that relate to the workplace;

—prohibiting or regulating gatherings or organized public events; and

—requiring people to act in compliance with any advice, recommendation or instruction of a public health official.

These very specific criteria for amendments are in contrast to the extensive powers provided under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, which include, among others: authorizing facilities, including electrical generating facilities, to operate as is necessary to respond to or alleviate the effects of the emergency; as well as evacuating individuals and animals and removing personal property from any specified area and making arrangements for the adequate care and protection of individuals and property.

Of course, the reopening Ontario act does not in itself prohibit the province from declaring a state of emergency if the orders maintained under the reopening Ontario act are unable to guarantee the necessary protections. It is important that this extraordinary measure remains within reach of government, in case it is needed to protect our communities and save lives, when it is deemed essential by public health experts. Indeed, due to rapidly deteriorating public health indicators, the government, in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, declared a second and third emergency in January and April 2021, respectively. These measures were taken in response to the rapid increase in COVID-19 transmission, the threat on the province's hospital system capacity and the increased risks posed to the public by COVID-19 variants.

As our government stated on numerous occasions, declaring these states of emergency in response to COVID-19 were not actions that we took lightly. We had been upfront about the severity of the threats we faced if the public health indicators began moving in the wrong direction. We had said we would not hesitate to explore and exhaust all options necessary to protect Ontarians if the situation worsened.

The orders made under the declarations of emergency, such as the stay-at-home orders issued, complemented the existing measures that have remained in place under the reopening Ontario act. In a concentrated effort to reduce opportunities for transmission, the stay-at-home order required Ontarians to remain at home except for the purposes set out in the order, such as exercise, going to the grocery store or pharmacy, or accessing health care services—of course, including getting a vaccination.

As Ontario's health care capacity was threatened, the stay-at-home order and other new and existing public health and workplace safety measures worked to preserve public health capacity, safeguard vulnerable populations, allow for progress to be made with vaccinations and ultimately save lives. Once the stay-at-home order expired in June 2020, these restrictions were no longer in effect.

As the Premier has insisted throughout the pandemic, orders should not be in place a day longer than they are needed. An important example of this is that since the reopening Ontario act came into force, eight orders have been allowed to lapse. Some, such as work redeployment in the education sector, are no longer needed, while others, such as virtual signing of wills and powers of attorney and other breakthroughs in moving justice services online, have been made permanent and codified into legislation.

As we've seen, when compared to other jurisdictions across North America, Ontario's plan is clearly seeing an effective curbing of the Delta-driven fourth wave. As a result of Ontario's extremely cautious approach, including maintaining strong public health measures such as indoor masking, the province's public health and health care indicators remain stable or are, in fact, improving. At a recent rate of 38 cases per 100,000 people, Ontario continues to report one of the lowest rates of active cases in the country, well below the national average. Intensive care unit occupancy, while generally in flux on a day-to-day basis, has stayed consistently below the level of 200 throughout the summer and into the fall.

And on the vaccination front, Ontario and Canada continue to lead the world in terms of vaccine uptake, with over 86% of those eligible to be vaccinated having received at least their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. Over 21 million vaccine doses have been administered across Ontario, with over 200,000 doses administered each week. Every single public health unit has at least three quarters of its population—and I want to highlight especially Leeds, Grenville and Lanark public health unit, which leads the province with over 96% of their population—with at least one dose of the vaccine. As a government, we have been taking this vital challenge from all perspectives to ensure that every Ontarian who wants to get their first or second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine is able to as quickly and as easily as possible.

0920

To reach parts of the province where vaccination rates are lower than the provincial average, we've been working with our partners to expand access to the vaccine through methods such as direct outreach from family physicians to their patient base, as well as pop-up clinics at convenient locations such as workplaces and places of worship.

And, of course, I would be remiss not to mention the three GO-VAXX buses travelling around the province every single day. These GO buses have been temporarily retrofitted to serve as mobile vaccine clinics as part of the province's last mile strategy to reach those who have yet to receive a second or first dose. This innovative partnership with Metrolinx has led to nearly 9,000 doses administered through walk-up appointments. The GO-VAXX

buses will continue to travel to malls, festivals, community hubs and events throughout the fall across Ontario. No appointments are needed, and anyone aged 12 and over can get their first or second doses while supplies last.

By bringing vaccines directly to the people, we are helping more residents get the protections they need to keep themselves, their families and their communities safe. As Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health said in August, thanks to Ontarians rolling up their sleeves to get vaccinated, case rates will fluctuate, but thanks to the protection offered by vaccines, growing case counts will not have the same meaning as during the previous waves of this pandemic. As Dr. Moore noted, the reality is that COVID-19 is not going anywhere any time soon and we have to learn to live with the virus.

However, Ontario has the infrastructure in place to manage outbreaks, including a high-volume capacity for testing, and people on the ground to perform fast and effective case and contact management when necessary. Of course, this is important news for Ontarians looking to return to a semblance of normalcy after a gruelling 18 months of this pandemic.

Yesterday's speech from the throne made it abundantly clear that, as the world continues to deal with COVID-19, Ontario will be there to keep people safe. The province has pursued the most cautious reopening in Canada, consistently guided by the latest science and evidence when making decisions on how to keep Ontarians safe and healthy.

Most recently, we further strengthened the protections for long-term-care homes by requiring all staff to be vaccinated unless they have a valid medical exemption. This is in addition to surveillance testing and inspections. Ontario was also the first province in Canada to provide third doses of vaccines to residents of long-term care.

If additional public health measures are needed, they will be localized and they will be targeted. On the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, they will seek to minimize disruptions to businesses and families. The ultimate goal shared by all is saving lives and keeping communities safe.

Investments made by our government into health care and other sectors, including education and long-term care, are vital to help manage and contain COVID-19 and its variants. So too are the orders made under the reopening Ontario act. The full name of the reopening Ontario act includes a description that says "a flexible response to COVID-19," and with good reason. I have often described this legislation as ensuring that the province continues to have access to a dimmer switch, rather than an on-off switch, when it comes to public health measures.

Absent the reopening Ontario act, orders made under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act would cease to exist in their entirety when they expire. Thanks to this legislation, we have been able to strengthen or adjust any public health measures as necessary and respond accordingly to new developments in the fight against COVID-19. For example, Ontario's temporary vaccine certification system is made possible thanks to the reopening Ontario act.

It goes without saying, Speaker, that these are extraordinary powers for extraordinary times, which is why, when we drafted the reopening Ontario act, we built a number of rigorous accountability and transparency measures directly into this legislation. All orders continue to be subject to 30-day renewals by cabinet, which is similar to the provision required for orders during a provincial emergency. The government is also required to regularly report to the public with respect to the orders that remain in force under the act. In addition to when changes are announced via media conferences or news releases, Ontarians can visit ontario.ca/alert for a full list of all orders that remain in force in Ontario.

The legislation is also time-limited with a sunset clause. If not extended by the Legislature, the authority under the reopening Ontario act would expire one day after it came into force, July 24, 2021. The Legislature has the authority to extend the legislation's authority for additional periods of up to one year at a time.

Members will recall that I stood before this House in the spring, in advance of the one-year expiry date of the legislation in July 2021 to propose an extension of the reopening Ontario act until December of this year. We introduced this resolution after careful consideration. It took into account the evidence available to us at the time, our experience to date with COVID-19, and the valuable input and advice of public health experts who have been providing guidance and expertise since the start of the pandemic. At the time, we noted the importance of this extension to December "due to the fact that, in the medium term, even with vaccination rates increasing, COVID-19 transmission rates still need to be assessed. Based on current evidence and our experience in combatting COVID-19, it is anticipated that the province will require some level of public health and workplace safety measures, such as wearing a mask, until at least late this summer and into the fall of this year."

With the benefit of time having passed, and as I noted earlier, we can see both those statements were astutely made, and I once again thank the public health experts who continue to provide valuable guidance to government and vital insights to members of this House.

We know that vaccination offers a great deal of protection against COVID-19. As Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor noted in yesterday's speech from the throne, "Getting vaccinated protects you from the worst of COVID-19. It will save your life." The data is clear: Unvaccinated people are 43 times more likely to be in an intensive-care-unit bed compared with their fully vaccinated counterparts.

Ontario's cautious reopening plan, made possible by the reopening Ontario act, with appropriate public health and workplace safety measures in place, has helped to prevent transmission levels from climbing. This approach included some of the highest vaccine thresholds for easing restrictions. We've maintained effective public health measures, like indoor masking, while implementing vaccine policies to protect our most vulnerable in retirement homes, hospitals, home and community care, schools and post-secondary institutions, amongst others.

Most recently, we further strengthened protections for long-term-care homes by requiring all staff to be vaccinated unless they have a valid medical exemption. This is in addition to surveillance testing and inspections. Ontario was also the first province in Canada to provide third doses of vaccines to residents of long-term care.

The extension of the expiry date for the powers under the reopening Ontario act—that is, the power to extend or amend existing orders under the ROA—to December 1, 2021, meant that there was no change to the length of time that orders could be extended; the power to amend orders continues to be subject to the criteria I previously outlined; and, finally, the requirement to provide a rationale for every extension still remains.

The legislation also requires that a report be tabled in the House 120 days following the one-year anniversary of the reopening Ontario act coming into force, similar to the reports required under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act. Members can look forward to this report in the coming days.

0930

Of course, the legislation requires regular reportings to a committee of the Legislature, which brings us back to the motion before us regarding the re-formation of a Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight. The legislation requires that:

“At least once every 30 days, the Premier, or a minister to whom the Premier delegates the responsibility, shall appear before, and report to, a ... committee designated by the assembly concerning,

“(a) orders that were extended during the reporting period; and

“(b) the rationale for those extensions.”

My parliamentary assistant, the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore, will go into further detail about the meetings themselves later in this debate. But I want to highlight specifically the important role that the committee questioning plays in our parliamentary democracy.

While it can sometimes feel that the COVID-19 situation has become commonplace or routine through the passage of time, the orders put in place through the reopening Ontario act are important and deserving of attention. The opportunity for direct legislative questioning on orders does not exist for orders made under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, which is yet another reason why this legislative opportunity is so important for members. If I can channel the House leader for a moment, these measures of legislative accountability are critically important and even more so during COVID-19.

It has been a hallmark over the last year of dealing with COVID-19 that, in Ontario, we put the authority of this Legislature first. This government has gone above and beyond the call of duty to make sure that the Legislature has been able to exercise this important role throughout the pandemic. Unlike some other Parliaments, the Ontario Legislature, as you know, has continued to meet safely to get important work done for the people of this province. That is in no small part thanks to the dedication of assembly staff, whose dedication has allowed us to meet here.

That work has included often rigorous debates over extensions to the declaration of emergency, as well as discussions over the reports produced as a result of those declarations and the many pieces of legislation brought forward to help the people of Ontario get through the pandemic. We've changed the way we vote, the way that we conduct committee business and the way that we take meetings as members and ministers, all to make sure that the important work of governing this province continues safely. The work that is accomplished by parliamentarians on all sides of this House is vital for this Legislature to fulfill its responsibility to Ontarians. We must ensure the select committee can continue to provide these opportunities for members and their constituents to be actively engaged in these critical proceedings.

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

Finally, I want to note that there was no meeting of the select committee in September due to the prorogation of the House. As such, I would like to take this opportunity, the first available, to outline briefly the status of orders under the reopening Ontario act since the August meeting of the select committee.

Twenty-eight orders remain in place and, subject to further extensions, remain in place until the first instance of October 17. They are:

—O. Reg. 364/20, rules for areas at step 3 and at the road map exit step;

—O. Reg. 363/20, steps of reopening;

—O. Reg. 345/20, patios;

—O. Reg. 263/20, rules for areas in step 2;

—O. Reg. 240/20, management of retirement homes in outbreak;

—O. Reg. 201/20, management of long-term-care homes in outbreak;

—O. Reg. 195/20, treatment of temporary COVID-19-related payments to employees;

—O. Reg. 193/20, hospital credentialing processes;

—O. Reg. 177/20, congregate care settings;

—O. Reg. 163/20, work deployment measures for mental health and addictions agencies;

—O. Reg. 158/20, limiting work to a single retirement home;

—O. Reg. 157/20, work deployment measures for municipalities;

—O. Reg. 156/20, deployment of employees of service provider organizations;

—O. Reg. 154/20, work deployment measures for district social services administration boards;

—O. Reg. 146/20, limiting work to a single long-term-care home;

—O. Reg. 145/20, work deployment measures for service agencies providing violence against women residential services and crisis line services;

—O. Reg. 141/20, temporary health or residential facilities;

—O. Reg. 132/20, use of force and firearms in policing services;

—O. Reg. 121/20, service agencies providing services and supports to adults with developmental disabilities and service providers providing intervener services;

—O. Reg. 118/20, work deployment measures in retirement homes;

—O. Reg. 116/20, work deployment measures for boards of health;

—O. Reg. 114/20, enforcement of orders;

—O. Reg. 98/20, prohibition on certain persons charging unconscionable prices for sales of necessary goods;

—O. Reg. 95/20, streamlining requirements for long-term-care homes;

—O. Reg. 82/20, rules for areas in shutdown zone and at step 1;

—O. Reg. 77/20, work deployment measures in long-term-care homes;

—O. Reg. 76/20, electronic service; and

—O. Reg. 74/20, work redeployment for certain health service providers.

Amendments continue to be made to the various stages of reopening to facilitate technical course corrections on the current public health measures in place across Ontario. The proof of vaccination requirements and some workplace vaccination policy requirements that have been put in place have also been facilitated through amendments to the stages of reopening orders.

I want to thank members of this Legislature for continuing to engage in respectful and constructive debate in the vital matters that we have discussed today, which would continue to be examined closely through the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight's proceedings. This is not the time to waver or allow obstacles to get in the way of these important opportunities for members of the committee to do the work that we each were elected to do as members of this House. We need to keep discussing, engaging and working together to put Ontarians and their well-being first, because we know that communities that are informed and engaged on this important public health conversation will be safer, healthier and better equipped to respond to the daily dangers of COVID-19 and its variants.

I encourage all members of the House to assist by adoption of this motion so that the committee can be reconstituted and the 16th meeting can move forward without delay or interruption. Thank you. Merci.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The minister did say she'd be sharing her time with her parliamentary assistant. The member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore has the floor.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's wonderful to be back here again.

First of all, I would like to say thank you to all those people who are front-line workers out across our communities all around the province who have done such amazing work to make sure our communities remain safe as we continue with the pandemic.

I'm pleased to join this debate this morning on this important motion. As parliamentary assistant to the Solicitor General, I want to start by echoing the minister's comments this morning about two important dates for firefighters this week. Firefighters' Memorial Day is an important day for firefighters across the province. As Ontarians, we owe so much to our dedicated fire service, especially those who have lost their lives in the line of duty. Fire Prevention Week also happens this week, and it is a great opportunity for the public to learn from their local fire services about how to keep themselves, their loved ones and their property safe from fire. The theme this week is "Learn the Sounds of Fire Safety!", and I echo the Solicitor General's sentiment for Ontarians to get loud and understand what your smoke detectors are telling you.

And, you know what, you can always call a firefighter to help you. My aunt, who is quite old, had a hard time installing her fire alarm, and she actually called her fire department and they came over to help her and they assisted her. She lives in northern Ontario. Sometimes we all don't have that help, so I just want to thank those firefighters who helped my aunt to make sure she was safe.

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As the Solicitor General noted off the top, the reopening Ontario act has been a vitally important tool that has allowed Ontario to have the flexibility we needed to support the continued efforts to respond to the ever-changing situation, whether that was cautiously reopening Ontario when appropriate or strengthening public health measures when necessary.

When we debated the original legislation last July, we noted that it included key differences from the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, such as the inability to create any new orders beyond what was in place on July 24, 2020, as well as limitations on the ways in which orders could be amended. Those limitations meant that amendments to orders can only be made for a very narrow and targeted set of agreed-on reasons, including:

—closing or regulating places like businesses, offices, schools, hospitals or other establishments or institutions;

—providing for rules or practices that relate to workplaces, or the management of workplaces, such as in the case of redeployment of staff;

—prohibiting or regulating gatherings or organized public events; and

—requiring people to act in compliance with any advice, recommendation or instruction of a public health official such as the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

The reopening Ontario act has given the province the flexibility we needed to support our continued efforts to respond to the ever-changing situation, whether that was cautiously reopening Ontario when appropriate or strengthening public health measures when necessary.

As a result of Ontario's extremely cautious approach, the province's public health and health care indicators

remain stable or are improving. This approach included some of the highest vaccine thresholds for easing restrictions. We have maintained effective public health measures like indoor masking, while implementing vaccine policies to protect our most vulnerable in retirement homes, hospitals, home and community care, schools and post-secondary institutions, among others.

At the end of September, Ontario had a COVID-19 case rate of 38 cases per 100,000 people. This is one of the lowest rates of active cases in the country—well below the national average. Although the last 18 months have been tough, it is thanks to the efforts of every single Ontarian that we are here today.

We all have stories in our riding of heroes who have stepped up during this pandemic, and I wanted to share a few with you today. In my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, we have our south Etobicoke cluster, which is run through LAMP Community Health Centre. These people came together with the ambassadors to even go out and knock on doors to make sure people were vaccinated, and I salute them. Thank you very much for your efforts. It's important that we all step up and do our part. Some went above and beyond to make sure their neighbour, their loved ones or their friends got vaccinated.

Of course, we know that vaccination remains our best defence against getting or getting seriously ill from COVID-19. Ontario and Canada continue to lead the world in terms of vaccine uptake, with over 86% of those eligible to be vaccinated having received at least their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

In my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, the community has been working together to ensure those who have yet to get vaccinated have the tools and resources they need to do so. Back in May, we had our first pop-up clinic, and that was at the food terminal. We vaccinated over 7,000 people. We had another pop-up clinic at the food terminal for a full week in July, from the 5th to the 10th, and we vaccinated another 5,000 people. In August, we had the GO-VAXX bus at the Ontario Food Terminal once again for two days, vaccinating many people, and getting many first doses out there. Those first doses right now are so important to all of us.

My riding also hosted the mass immunization clinic at Cloverdale Mall which opened on April 12. Sherway Gardens hosts an immunization clinic, right now in September, and ongoing. Just to make sure, if you're shopping and you haven't been vaccinated, please stop by and get that vaccination.

Susan Bisailon, the CEO of the Safehaven Project for Community Living, hosted a vaccine clinic for those who were just a little intimidated to get their shots. The care that Susan gives all her clients—she's just an amazing woman, so a shout-out to Susan for the work you do. She made sure that those people who needed that extra bit of care received their vaccination in comfort that was suitable for them.

And the TTC: A shout-out to the TTC for having pop-up clinics all around the city of Toronto, including in my riding at Islington Station on September 16 to 18.

Right now in Toronto there are still vaccine clinics happening everywhere, so, please, please, everybody, if you know someone who's not vaccinated, please share that information with them.

As the Solicitor General noted earlier in the debate, Ontario's cautious reopening plan has been made possible thanks to orders under the reopening Ontario act. As legislators, it's important that we have a keen understanding of government decision-making, especially when it comes to COVID-19. This is why I am pleased that the reopening Ontario act, when it was passed last July, included a number of important measures in place to ensure accountability and transparency. This included regular reporting to the public regarding orders that were amended or extended; a report to the Legislature following the first year of the act's in-force date; a sunset clause on the legislation, subject to renewal by this Legislature; and, of course, regular reporting to the committee of the Legislature regarding the orders extended or amended in the preceding 30 days.

This brings us to the motion before us regarding the re-establishment of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight. I want to build off the commentary that the Solicitor General outlined in her remarks regarding the important work that the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight conducts on a regular basis.

As the members know, the reopening Ontario act requires that at least once every 30 days, the Premier, or a minister to whom the Premier delegates the responsibility to, shall appear before and report to a committee designated by the assembly concerning orders that were extended during the reporting period and the rationale for those extensions.

As a member of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight since its inception, I want to share my experiences. I have been extremely lucky to have joined and learned from our Chair, the member for Hastings–Lennox and Addington, as well as my fellow committee members, the members for Eglinton–Lawrence, Oakville North–Burlington, Niagara West, Sarnia–Lambton and Durham, as well as others from the government and the opposition side who have joined us.

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

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

It is an extremely valuable opportunity for us, all members who sit on that committee, to ask questions, including

those that come to our office. I'm always able to ask questions that my constituents bring to my attention, and I know others do here as well. It's not just about Toronto, it's about all of the province. It's people from Nickel Belt. We have people from Ottawa. So it really covers the bases of questions from all communities, because each community has dealt with the pandemic just a little bit differently. It's a valuable opportunity to bring forward the concerns, thoughts, fears and hopes of our constituents. I'm sure that all members have heard, as I have, from so many of their constituents throughout this entire pandemic, and bringing forward their questions and concerns to the Premier's designate is extremely helpful.

I know the vast majority of Ontarians just want to understand and have confidence in their government's plan to combat COVID-19, and this committee has provided an amazing forum to do just that.

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Members of the committee have had their opportunity to hear from the Solicitor General for most of these meetings, as she has been the designate from the Premier due to her ministry's responsibility for emergency management and carriage of the reopening Ontario act itself, as well as her role as co-lead, in partnership with the Minister of Health, in the province's vaccination campaign.

I truly want to thank the Solicitor General for all of her hard work. Her tireless efforts—she was always there at committee, and she always answers all the questions, so I just really want to thank her for all her hard work. It has been a crazy year for us all. We see her on TV with the Minister of Health, and there's no holiday. There's no holiday for our ministers, so I just want to thank them once again.

The committee has also had the opportunity to hear from the Minister of Health and the Chief Medical Officer of Health, as well as Dr. Steini Brown with the COVID-19 science advisory table. The committee has provided written reports to the Legislature after each meeting, and I hope that members have had the opportunity to review them.

Speaker, I am very proud of the work that we have accomplished on the committee to date, and I'm sure my colleagues from all sides of the House are as well. This is why it is so important to ensure that the select committee can continue to provide these opportunities for legislators to be actively engaged in these critical proceedings. If adopted, this motion will allow the committee to seamlessly continue its critical role without delay. It will also ensure that the government can continue to be in compliance with the legislative obligations required by the reopening Ontario act.

This motion is yet another example of how our government has ensured that this Legislature can continue its important work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether it has been safely continuing in person or virtually through the sessions of the Legislature, making changes to the way that we vote in order to maintain physical distancing or the regular debate that we've had on

extensions to declarations of emergency and the powers under the reopening Ontario act, our government has never wavered in giving this Legislature the tools needed to continue working throughout COVID-19. I'm sure all members can agree on how important that is, and I thank the staff here at the Legislative Assembly for their work.

But, Speaker, the most important reason that this motion needs to be passed is that it will ensure that Ontarians can continue to have unobstructed access to the orders that are put in place to keep their loved ones and their communities safe. As the Solicitor General outlined, orders under the reopening Ontario act continue to play a role in Ontario's COVID-19 response, including through the recent implementation of vaccine certification requirements and vaccine policy requirements. These policies have resulted in a marked increase in vaccination rates. Between September 1 and September 8 of this year, the seven-day average for first doses administered increased by more than 29%, from over 11,400 doses to over 14,700 doses. During that time, more than 90,000 first doses and 102,000 second doses were administered in Ontario to individuals age 18 to 59.

This is an amazing accomplishment, because once people think they don't want to get vaccinated, it's hard to change their minds. So I just want to thank everybody here who has talked to somebody or said, "Talk to your doctor," to say, "Let's get vaccinated." It is so important to share that opinion. As I say, I'm a politician; talk to your doctor and get their advice, because it is so important to look after our young ones who cannot get the vaccination.

High rates of vaccination against COVID-19 are critical to helping protect our communities and hospital capacity while keeping Ontario schools and businesses safely open. As we continue our last-mile push to increase vaccination rates, requiring proof of immunization in select settings will encourage even more Ontarians to receive a vaccine and stop the spread of COVID-19.

We know that vaccination offers a great degree of protection against COVID-19. As Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor noted in yesterday's speech from the throne, "Getting vaccinated protects you from the worst of COVID-19. It will save your life."

Mr. Speaker, the data is clear: Unvaccinated people are 43 times more likely to be in an intensive-care-unit bed compared with their fully vaccinated counterparts. I'll say that again because it's truly important for people to know that: Unvaccinated people are 43 times more likely to be in an intensive-care-unit bed compared to their fully vaccinated counterparts.

These are critically important measures put in place to help continue to keep Ontarians safe from the dangers of COVID-19, which is why it remains so important for this committee to get back to work. Moreover, these measures deserve the attention of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight to ask questions and seek information from the government on its decision-making when it comes to these and other changes. This is just one example of the many kinds of work that the committee will be able to undertake once it has been reconstituted.

I want to urge all members to support the quick passage of this motion to ensure the committee can get back to work. I want to also encourage all of you to encourage people to get vaccinated. It's not about ourselves; it's for the young ones who can't be vaccinated. I always think of my nephew who's 10, and we get vaccinated because he cannot. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for further debate. I recognize the member from Black River—Stoney Creek—no, no. It's been so long, Tom; I'm sorry.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Humber River—Black Creek. My apologies.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: It's an honour to return to the chamber to represent my lifelong home, Humber River—Black Creek, the place where I'm raising my family and my favourite place in the world. I just want to take a quick opportunity to thank the members of my community who have worked so hard and have made many sacrifices during the pandemic. I want to thank our incredible local health partners. Together, we have vaccinated over 300,000 people through pop-up clinics. I've worked so hard to get accessible access to vaccinations in my community. It was certainly tough going with access at the very beginning. Vaccines were available, but we had to come together and make it work.

I'm also very happy to be back here to fight for the issues that matter to my community and to all Ontarians. I want to continue to fight for access to rapid testing in our schools and everywhere. I'm looking forward to seeing the eventual fixing of long-term care, which is way overdue. This is something we should have done a long time ago and it's time to tackle that. There are so many issues—helping businesses recover during this pandemic, giving them the support they need. I am so much looking forward to debating those issues.

Now we are debating a bill that's here because of the prorogation of the Legislature. We are debating a motion to revive the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight. It was created as part of the reopening Ontario act. I'd like to remind the people in this House what was said about the reopening Ontario act, which ultimately gave this government extraordinary powers with none of the accountability, reporting requirements or debate. During their lead, they did talk about the accountability they believe they're providing Ontarians with this committee. I could speak first-hand about the committee because I, in fact, am a member of it myself.

But I'd like to remind people about what was said about the extraordinary powers that this government has granted themselves during the pandemic. For instance, Patty Coates, the president of the Ontario Federation of Labour, called the reopening Ontario act “a blatant and unfettered power grab by” this government and “a bid to give themselves carte blanche to skirt their democratic responsibilities.”

The SEIU Healthcare union, a union which represents many front-line health care workers in long-term care,

called the reopening Ontario act “an extraordinary overreach that would allow for already precarious workers to be further exploited by the for-profit long-term care industry.” And certainly what I would like to see as we return here are thousands more front-line health care workers hired by this government, be it PSWs, nurses or more.

We've also heard from others. For instance, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association cites significant concerns they have with this legislation. The big picture issue is that the government is effectively seeking to maintain emergency powers without the emergency label, and this is problematic in terms of democratic oversight and transparency.

We heard from the carpenters' union. They said that this will allow the government to make the abnormal become normal from a labour relations perspective, which has troubling consequences.

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The list goes on and on. We heard from the OFL: “Bill 195 must not go forward. It is a blatant and unfettered power grab by the ... Conservatives.”

Finally, CUPE: “The ... Conservatives' proposed legislation extending emergency powers will give the province significant powers at the expense of front-line workers.”

So again, what they did was that they called for a huge amount of power, and in their own minds, they formed this committee as what they would state is a bit of a compromise. Do you feel, those who have been a part of the committee or those who have listened in, that this has provided significant accountability? Well, what we have seen is that once a month, roughly—and it has met about 15 times since its inception—the opposition—30 minutes of the official opposition and 10 minutes of the independents—has had the opportunity to question the government, mainly through the Solicitor General. She has been tasked with an extremely difficult position to try to answer all the questions about these emergency orders and about what's going on in the government's handling of the pandemic. Is she able to provide the level of detail—if she wants to, even—in this format? I would argue no. She has to find a way to answer the questions that are provided. Of course, the government members have the ability to ask questions and, as expected, they generally are, I think, the questions that the government is themselves comfortable to answer. But the tough questions: How are they handled?

One thing that could have really improved this committee—and since we are here and it's being brought before the Legislature once more, if we could do this committee all over again, if we could make the rules different, I have a couple of simple suggestions: Allow the committee members themselves to be able to call experts to this committee, not just the Solicitor General.

On two occasions, the Minister of Health did, in fact, show up. We were not given any sort of notice in advance, and it happened. The health minister showed up and the Chief Medical Officer of Health and they were joined by Steini Brown. This is something that we had been asking for over and over and over again throughout and from the

beginning of the inception of the committee. They showed up and then they had to face some of the challenging questions. Sure enough, they appeared once, the health minister appeared a second time and that was that. That was really what happened.

At the time, there was one question that I'd like to once again share with the members in this House. In my community, we have faced, just like many other communities, very packed buses at the height of the pandemic. The issue is, if we are trying to avoid and find ways to make the places that people are forced to gather safe, certainly you would have to consider a bus. We've taken videos and shared them; we've put it out in the public showing how people riding the buses—let's say the 36 Finch—were shoulder to shoulder in many cases.

When the Minister of Health appeared, I thought: Well, this is an opportunity to now ask the Minister of Health, "What can we do?", to let me bring that to their attention. The first thing that happened, and this was concerning for me, was that the Minister of Health seemed to not even have been aware that this could be the potential for spread of COVID-19, based on the answers. She suggested, "Give those questions to the Minister of Transportation." I said, "Well, certainly you would expect that the science table would identify this as a potential for extreme spread of COVID-19." You could see she thought about that and she then said she would take that back to the science table.

A month later, when she did return—it was the second and only other time—I asked the same question: "Hey, so what did the science table have to say?" It was like I had not even asked the question at all. She said, "Oh, okay, I'll take that to the Minister of Transportation." I felt like I was in the movie *Groundhog Day*, to be honest, in that moment.

The point is, this is sort of the question—they talk about accountability, and these are some of the things that we brought to them. We asked questions about the initial makeup of the science table—the details. Generally, when those difficult questions came, what the government did—and it was usually the Solicitor General, I guess. She didn't have the answers available. Whether she did not have the details or was unwilling to share them, we weren't getting answers to those questions that were being shared.

Another point that I want to bring up—and it's actually ironic. On the meeting of August 24, 2020, I asked the Solicitor General: "We're seeing the federal government has moved to prorogue Parliament. Of course, they're under a lot of heat right now," and at the time, the Prime Minister was dealing with the WE scandal, the Me to We scandal. I don't want to digress, but it's unbelievable, the amount of scandals this Prime Minister and this government, federally, have been involved with, and it just never sticks. But I digress.

I continued by asking, "You had mentioned that there was no intention to prorogue the Legislature, which is good to hear," because she had initially said that there was no intention. "However, when this committee was struck, it was struck such that it would not have to meet in the case of prorogation. We know that in 2013, there was a

committee struck to deal with the gas plants scandal under the former government, but even that committee was prorogation-proof. Why not make this committee prorogation-proof in case something like that happened?"

So at the time—I had asked about this last year—this was the response: "I don't really think that anticipating what the federal government did and thinking that we as a provincial government are going to do the same, frankly, is a valid argument." The minister went on to say that, "I'm not going to presuppose or guess as to what's going to happen in the months ahead."

I then replied, "Certainly, I don't think any of us can predict the future. Reliably, none of us predicted that we would be in this state today. It's just that when you're setting up a committee like this, you want to make sure that all the t's are crossed and the i's are dotted. In the unlikely event that you made the decision to prorogue like the federal government, we would have been protected from that." As well, my colleague the member for Timmins also asked the Solicitor General about it.

It's funny because, a little over a year later, we're now in this situation. So had they made this committee prorogation-proof, and in case they decide to do so again for political reasons—and, ultimately, that political reason has put the brakes on so much hard work that's been done. So many bills that are on the order paper are lost and have to be reintroduced.

Did they make this committee prorogation-proof? Will they allow members outside of their inner circle to determine who can appear? If you want to say this committee is there for the purpose of accountability, then get members of your science table; bring back the Chief Medical Officer of Health and others, but allow, also, opposition members to be able to call witnesses. There's so much that could be done to improve this, if they want to say that this real accountability.

I'm proud to be here. I am proud to fight for the issues that matter to my community, to fight for the issues that matter to all Ontarians. But I do think, if the government wants to claim this is the accountability that they think they're providing, well, I don't agree that they are providing anywhere the level of accountability that Ontarians deserve during this pandemic. If you want to improve this committee, since you are bringing it back to this chamber and allowing debate on it, make the improvements that are necessary. Bring the experts there. Don't force the Solicitor General to have to answer details and not provide the answers that Ontarians and that members of this chamber are looking for. There's so much more that could be done to improve this.

And the final thing I do want to say is there's not even the opportunity to write a dissenting report. On other committees, members can write what are dissenting reports and say, "Look, this question wasn't answered. We don't agree with this or whatnot." But the way this has been structured—and, again, it's ironic, because they're claiming that this is all about accountability—even the members cannot dissent against what has been written. So the reports that get tabled here are always favourable, because they've been structured that way.

I ask the government: Make these necessary changes. I'm hoping to hear real answers in the committee when it is struck and, ultimately, here in the House, because Ontarians deserve better.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: Thank you, Speaker. Just waiting for my mike to turn on. Thank you to broadcasting.

It's great to be back. It's an honour to rise here today on behalf of the people of Brampton Centre to contribute to the debate on the motion to restart the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight. And I want to thank my colleague from Humber River–Black Creek for starting off the debate for the opposition. I think he highlighted a number of concerns that we have with respect to the committee.

I just want to start by, first of all, thanking all of the people in a hot-spot community, like in the Peel region and in my community of Brampton, for all of the amazing work that they've done to help us get through the pandemic—not only our front-line health care workers, our essential workers, but the community at large for getting vaccinated and doing their part to help us get through COVID-19 and what we are facing now, a fourth wave.

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Speaker, it's pretty clear that the government's decision to prorogue the House had serious consequences on the work that was happening here in the Legislature. As my colleague from Humber River–Black Creek clearly outlined, bills that were on the order paper now have to be reintroduced—a lot of good work that happened that people are going to have to pick up on and start again.

With respect to the select committee, we wanted to make sure, as opposition members, that this committee would continue, even if the House was prorogued, and unfortunately, the government didn't think it was of importance to provide clarity, transparency and accountability to Ontarians, irrespective of proroguing the House. That's exactly what this committee was intended to do: to provide accountability and answer questions in terms of the government's response to COVID-19 here in the province of Ontario.

Speaker, I'm sure if you read the transcript, while there were many great questions being asked of the Solicitor General and others that appeared, unfortunately, we never really got clear answers to those questions. There was a complete lack of accountability and transparency with respect to this committee and the answers that Ontarians needed at the height of, for example, the third wave. We asked questions of the Solicitor General, who was tasked with the vaccine rollout here in the province of Ontario.

As the member from Brampton Centre and a member from the Peel region, our community was, frankly, hit the hardest. We had positivity rates well above 20% in our community. At that time, at the height of this pandemic, when our community was in crisis, this government made the decision to exclude our community from a pharmacy vaccine rollout. Why would they do that, Speaker? Well, this is what we asked at committee and we never got a straight answer. We never got the answer that people in

our community were looking for. We never got the rationale for why a community that was in crisis, facing the highest positivity rates—not just in this province but across the country—did not get its fair share of vaccines. A simple question to ask the Solicitor General, who was tasked with providing these answers to our community, to me as a member, to the committee—never once clarified why our community got a lower share of vaccines when other communities that had a lower rate of transmission received a greater supply. We never got an answer.

We asked this government very clearly at committee: Was there an equity-based approach being applied to the vaccine rollout? I don't even think the minister, with all due respect to her, understood what an equity approach would be here in the province of Ontario. They thought that a one-size-fits-all approach was what was going to be best. That meant the communities that were experiencing lower rates of transmission got a higher allocation of vaccines for their community members. Not to pit communities against another, but even those communities that got greater allocations were saying, "Send them to the hot spots, because we understand that those communities are where the warehouses are. We understand that's where the manufacturing hubs are, the logistics hubs are. That's where our essential workers are working out of, and they don't have a choice to stay home if they are sick."

Even those communities understood that communities like Peel and cities like Brampton needed a greater share of vaccines. But the government—the government that was responsible for making sure we got those vaccines—didn't do their part. And at a committee that was set up to provide answers and accountability to Ontarians, we didn't get anything.

We asked the Solicitor General on several occasions with respect to paid sick days to provide answers to Ontarians on why this government refused to follow public health recommendations and expert advice of their own science table, which indicated that paid sick days would save lives in the province of Ontario. We asked the Solicitor General to help provide a rationale on how the decisions were being made around the cabinet table not to provide paid sick days. We didn't get an answer.

What we heard time and time again was that it's the federal government's responsibility—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I apologize to the member from Brampton Centre for interrupting. However, at this stage of the day, the agenda calls for us to move from debate on the floor to members' statements.

Debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Today I want to bring up a very important issue in my riding. There are so many, but

this one is really bubbling: eye care. By the Ford government not fully dealing with the eye-care funding issue—it has been over a month since optometrists across the province have had to stop providing routine eye exams, which means it's been over a month since my constituents have had access to necessary health care services.

Speaker, do you know who is paying the price for that? It's our most vulnerable: It's our seniors and it's our children. They're being put in the middle of this issue, and they've been writing me. A senior contacted my office, and many others, and she said that after her appointment was cancelled last month—her husband and her are over 75 years old and they live with glaucoma. Having eye pressure checked regularly, along with field tests, have been measures to manage this condition. It would keep them from worsening the glaucoma, which means if it's not treated, they can actually go blind. That's how important it is.

A parent wrote and said that her 6-year-old son says he can't see the board and he complains every night that his eyes hurt: "How am I supposed to help him when I can't get him an eye exam?"

People with underlying health conditions—a woman wrote saying that she's in a wheelchair, has a very rare disease and she really depends on her sight for transitioning: "I'm trying to stay in my home without" going to a government-paid facility.

Yes, this funding shortfall started with the Liberal government, but it could end with the Conservative government. Optometrists in the province shouldn't have to pay out of their pockets to deliver OHIP coverage to their patients. This government needs to go back to the table in good faith and talk to the optometrists, resolve this issue and stop putting seniors and kids in the middle of this political issue.

CHILDHOOD CANCER

Mr. Bill Walker: I rise today to recognize that September was Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, and we saw a great deal of activity on social media and in communities across Ontario to raise awareness and express support for children and youth with cancer, survivors of childhood cancer and their families.

The Pediatric Oncology Group of Ontario, POGO, is an organization that ensures everyone affected by childhood cancer has access to the best care and support. POGO has tracked childhood cancer in Ontario since its founding in 1983, and I thank them for all they do. Our Ontario government supports POGO because of the value POGO brings through a coordinated system that emphasizes evidence-based care that addresses the unique needs of the childhood cancer population and helps ensure Ontario has the best outcomes possible.

Thanks to the data POGO collects, we know that cancer remains the most common cause of disease-related deaths among children over the age of one. Each year, approximately 500 children and youth are diagnosed with cancer in one of Ontario's specialized pediatric cancer programs,

and over 4,000 families have a child in cancer treatment or follow-up care. Today, more than 84% of children diagnosed with cancer in Ontario will survive, but cancer in childhood can mean long-term effects, including second cancers and learning challenges.

Today I think of three young people: Conah Higgins, the son of family friends, who sadly passed away from cancer at age 17; I think of Hayley Nuttal, the daughter of dear family friends, the Ruth and Nuttal families, who passed away at age 8; and I think of Brendan Rourke, a young man from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, whose father, Neal, is a tireless advocate and member of the Advocacy for Canadian Childhood Oncology Research Network, raising funds and awareness for young girls and boys whose childhoods have been regrettably cut short.

Let us all hope that we'll find a cure for all cancers. To quote my hero, Terry Fox, "Somewhere the hurting must stop."

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Jessica Bell: On October 1, Ontario's minimum wage increased by 10 cents, from \$14.25 to \$14.35 an hour. This wage increase falls well short of what Ontario's low-wage workers need to live with dignity. It is not possible for workers to pay rent, to pay for transit, to pay for food, for medicine and to provide for children on this wage, especially in a time when costs are going up faster than they have in years.

We know that many of our low-wage workers are our front-line workers: our delivery drivers, our groceries workers, our PSWs, our cleaners. We can't thank our front-line workers on one hand and suppress their wages on the other hand, but that is what this government did. If this government had kept the \$15 minimum wage, workers would be earning an extra \$2,920 a year.

But do you know who did get a pay raise during this pandemic? Canada's richest CEOs. They made an average of \$10.8 million a year and they got a 17% pay increase during the pandemic. These are the very same companies that have worked so hard to keep wages so low for the people that are struggling the most.

1020

It is our responsibility as lawmakers to address inequality in the workplace. And that is why I support increasing the minimum wage, providing benefits to workers and moving away from an economy where there are temporary jobs that are endless temporary jobs, to jobs that are good, permanent jobs that people can live on.

METCALFE FAIR

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: The Metcalfe Fair is one of the largest and oldest agricultural exhibitions in Ontario. Hosted by the Metcalfe Agricultural Society, the Metcalfe Fair has been held annually since 1856. The Metcalfe Fair is host to attractions such as the antique tractor display, agricultural education like the heavy horse show, classic car shows, home craft exhibits and—one of my personal

favourites—the demolition derby. I also can't forget to mention the delicious baked goodies from local vendors.

For the first time in its history, last year due to COVID-19, the Metcalfe Fair was cancelled. It was a sad time for everyone, as the Metcalfe Fair is something that everyone in eastern Ontario, in Ottawa and in my riding of Carleton look forward to. This year, however, on September 30, the Metcalfe Fair returned to celebrate its 165th anniversary with the unwavering support of the entire community.

I'd like to congratulate Andrea Taylor, president of the Metcalfe Agricultural Society, all of the staff, volunteers, everyone on the board of directors and those who have helped make this a wonderful event and a success every year.

Happy 165th anniversary to the Metcalfe Fair.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Joel Harden: There are 13 million COVID-19 rapid tests sitting in warehouses in the province of Ontario. This government will ship them to any business wanting to test asymptomatic employees and you get the results in 15 minutes. But two million students just returned to school; 1.3 million of those students are *[inaudible]* the rates of COVID-19 among unvaccinated kids are rising, and one in three new COVID cases is coming from our public schools. But there *[inaudible]* in the throne speech yesterday, not a mumbling word.

But Quebec just announced rapid testing would go to every single school in the province. Nova Scotia is providing free rapid tests to all kids aged five to 11. This government announced this morning that it would target some tests to some deemed at-risk schools. I call that leading from the back of the line. “We got this,” says the government who apparently has spent money on ventilators in schools or vaccinating schools, and kids will apparently have masks in crowded classrooms. Give me a break. The government has not prioritized our public schools, Speaker, from day one. They pushed staff onto picket lines last winter and they are now putting kids at risk, just like they put our seniors at risk—and we know what happened when that happened.

Change is going to happen because people will demand it. I want to thank all the parents, staff and kids for speaking out for rapid tests. Keep it up. Demand better for our schools.

CANCER TREATMENT

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: This past September was the 41st annual Terry Fox Run, which raises funds for cancer research. This run is now very personal for me and my family: In November 2020, my husband, Jim Karahalios, was diagnosed with osteosarcoma in his femur—the exact same cancer that Terry Fox had 41 years ago. For 10 months, he was under the care of a team of surgeons, doctors, nurses, assistants, physiotherapists and imaging technicians, which comprise many facets of

Ontario's health care system. Under their care, he underwent six rounds of aggressive chemotherapy; three surgeries, including reconstructive leg surgery, where 80% of his femur was replaced with a prosthesis, two of his quadriceps were removed and a full knee replacement, as well as weeks of aggressive antibiotic treatment.

When Terry Fox was diagnosed, his leg could not be spared, and survival rates were poor. Today, because of great strides made in medicine, particularly related to osteosarcoma, survival rates are at least 80%. We are fortunate in Ontario to have one of the best osteosarcoma teams in the world.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and personally thank all those involved in providing care for Jim, including:

- Dr. Kimberly Cai in Cambridge;
- the imaging teams at Cambridge Memorial Hospital;
- director of clinical research, immunodeficiency clinic of Toronto General Hospital, Dr. Sharon Walmsley;
- orthopaedic surgeon and surgeon-in-chief, Dr. Jay Wunder;
- the lead for medical oncology, Dr. Albiruni Abdul Razak; and
- each of their extraordinary osteosarcoma teams at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto.

As well, I'd like to give a special thank you to the home care nurses Debbie Charron and Darina Tsoлова, and the entire team at Grand River Physiotherapy, including Frances Harrington and Valerie.

Thanks to all of their efforts, in only 10 months, my husband is walking again. His leg was spared, and the cancer removed. Jim is now back and better than ever. And that, Mr. Speaker, is what we call science.

SAM AULT

Mr. Jim McDonell: Recently, the township of North Dundas and Lactalis Canada recognized the legacy the Ault family left on the community of Winchester and Canada's dairy industry.

It began when Jack Ault opened a small cheddar cheese factory in Cass Bridge, just outside Winchester, in 1891. He was one of many small producers who transformed Ontario's agricultural sector from wheat growing to milk products. Over time, his one-building operation became known for its quality, as it absorbed many small, neighbouring dairies. In 1926, he established Ault Foods Ltd.

Jack's son Sam joined Ault Creamery after serving with the Fourth Canadian Armoured Division in Europe, and finished his science degree at U of T. Although his business had been sold to Ogilvie Flour Mills in the late 1930s on sudden death of his father, Sam treated it as a family business and, by the late 1960s, had grown it into the largest dairy operation in Canada.

Sam was a key leader in the modernization of the cheese industry in Ontario, producing cheeses that won awards in Canada, the United States and England. He also served as president of the Ontario Concentrated Milk Producers' Association, the Ontario Dairy Council, the

National Dairy Council and a member of the advisory committee on the Canadian Dairy Commission.

A true community builder, Sam was instrumental in bringing a new high school, a park, a curling club and a hockey arena to Winchester. He was made an honorary companion of the University of Guelph and, in 2012, was awarded the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal for his service to community and country.

The Winchester community celebrated the Ault family legacy last month with the unveiling of a mural at the Winchester Arena, renamed in Sam's honour.

ADDICTION SERVICES

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: It's great to be back in the Legislature. Today, I want to bring to the House's attention, once again, the ongoing opioid epidemic in this province, and especially in my riding in Thunder Bay.

Last year, 64 people died of an overdose in Thunder Bay, an increase from 38 deaths in 2019. This is a preventable tragedy. Mothers in Thunder Bay and across Canada are working to end this epidemic. They are called Moms Stop the Harm. They are putting pressure on governments across this country to do better so that more families don't have to experience the overdose of a loved one.

Enough is enough. We need to act and end this crisis. The solutions are there, but this government and previous Liberal governments simply have not done what is necessary. Unfortunately, the throne speech made no mention of the countless people who have died in this epidemic and how the COVID pandemic has only made things worse. Why is this not a priority? Communities are suffering.

Moms Stop the Harm's vision should be this province's vision. They call for an end to the failed war on drugs, and provide evidence-based prevention, treatment and policy changes. They support a harm reduction approach that is both compassionate and non-discriminatory for people who use substances.

I hope, this session of Parliament, this government finally gets serious about ending the opioid epidemic.

WASTE REDUCTION

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: We have a beautiful province, but far too often, people have told me they're sick and tired of seeing litter. As a result, in 2019, I passed the day of action on litter, the first day of action in all of Ontario, where we designate the second Tuesday of May as a cleanup day. This campaign had great take-up. We had a digital audience of 1.2 million, with 139 different authors for our campaign, as well as lots of individuals across the province participating in the campaign.

1030

This summer we launched Waste-Free Wednesdays to build on that success. Since I've done the day of action on litter and the Waste-Free Wednesdays campaign, we've managed to clean up 150 bags of litter. That's 3,300 pounds, which is the equivalent of a female hippo,

Speaker. Thanks to the efforts of all Ontarians, we have collected more than 80 bags of recycled material, as we try to sort and separate as often as we can. We've also been able to collect 160 pounds of glass, and it could go on.

This would not be possible without the great volunteers and the entire Ontario effort. Its participants—we have Youth for Lake Simcoe, the Derry Village Seniors Club. We also had people participate through Clean Up Barrie, Clean Up Innisfil; Jan Slik, who takes his scooter out and actually does cleanups using his scooter; the Highway of Heroes; and many of my colleagues throughout the province who participated this summer—Earth Rangers. And we've got the members for Oakville, Oakville North-Burlington, Lincoln, and Mississauga-Lakeshore. We went to Scarborough-Rouge Park, Markham-Thornhill, Port Hope, Barrie, Oro-Medonte, Simcoe North, Mississauga-Malton, King-Vaughan, Vaughan-Woodbridge and Etobicoke-Lakeshore. We look forward to doing cleanups in more of the province.

AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Speaker, over the years, I have been proud to speak on Ontario Agriculture Week. Former MPP Bert Johnson, one of my predecessors, established it through a private member's bill. I've been proud to recognize and thank our hard-working farmers, farm families and everyone in the agriculture industry.

Each day, there are nearly 49,000 Ontario farmers who plant, grow and harvest over 200 types of food. They produce fresh fruits, vegetables, high-quality meats, poultry and fish, nutritious eggs and dairy, delicious honey, maple syrup and world-class wines. We are grateful for their work and we're thankful for the food they put on our tables.

They worked hard despite the COVID crisis and the uncertainty across global and domestic markets. They worked hard despite challenges, both seen and unseen, including the mental health crisis affecting so many farmers. Through it all, they worked with skill, dedication, determination and innovation. That is why we enjoy a strong and stable food supply, something we so often take for granted.

On behalf of the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and our entire caucus, I want to thank each and every farmer in this province for being the agri-food heroes we depend on. I also want to thank the farm organizations, local and provincial, who support them, and the communities who surround them in good times and in bad.

Working together, Ontario's agriculture sector will continue to thrive, not just to benefit farmers but everyone in this province for generations to come.

HOUSE SITTINGS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnett): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 9(g), the government House leader has provided written notice that a

temporary change in the weekly meeting schedule of the House is required and that tomorrow the afternoon routine shall commence at 1 p.m.

THANE MURRAY

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I understand the member for Toronto Centre has a point of order.

Ms. Suze Morrison: I'm seeking the unanimous consent of the House to observe a moment of silence in memory of Thane Murray, a 27-year-old city of Toronto youth worker and beloved community member in my community of Toronto Centre who was tragically killed in a shooting in Regent Park on September 18.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Toronto Centre is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to observe a moment of silence at this time. Agreed? Agreed. Members will please rise.

The House observed a moment's silence.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Point of order, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Leader of the Opposition on a point of order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I seek unanimous consent to bring forward a motion without notice calling on the Ford government to immediately implement mandatory vaccination for Ontario's education, health care, residential and congregate care workers to protect students, patients, residents, people with disabilities and other vulnerable populations from COVID-19.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to bring forward a motion without notice calling on the government to immediately implement mandatory vaccination for a number of groups of Ontario workers. Agreed? I heard a no.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Point of order, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition has another point of order?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thank you so much, Speaker. I appreciate that.

Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to immediately table the stopping anti-public-health harassment act, to protect hospitals, schools, small businesses and members of the public. Nobody should be threatened and harassed for doing the right thing and taking the necessary steps to keep us safe from COVID-19.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to immediately table the stopping anti-public-health harassment act at this time. Agreed? I heard a no.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I understand the member for London West has a point of privilege she wishes to further raise.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I rise today on a point of privilege that I first raised on Monday, June 14 and followed up on in my letter to you, Speaker, of June 18.

As you will recall, Bill 307 was making its way through the legislative process during a special parliamentary session at that time. During that debate, you took the step of seeking the unanimous consent of the House to determine whether or not members should be allowed to rise on points of order to seek the unanimous consent of the House. In our review of past rulings, we could find no precedent for this decision.

I want to begin, Speaker, by stating the obvious: The practice of seeking unanimous consent for items unrelated to the business scheduled for consideration is not new and is commonly exercised by members on all sides of the House for a variety of reasons. In fact, one could argue that this has become a regular tool in the chamber; we just saw it used right now. This is understandable and, in fact, helpful, as it gives the House the flexibility to both address and respond to items that may arise unexpectedly, and it is in keeping with the tradition of using motions instead of legislation to govern much of the day-to-day operation of Parliament.

I will remind members of what we saw this morning. Members gave unanimous consent to rescind a motion and appoint a new Deputy Speaker, and unanimous consent to cancel private members' public business this week.

Speaker, on June 14, our decision to move points of order seeking unanimous consent after that day's question period and prior to the start of deferred votes was intentional, out of respect for the House's unwritten practice of not recognizing points of order during oral questions. Although the period of transition between question period and deferred votes was brief, it is common practice to use that opportunity for members on all sides to raise points of order. This had, in fact, already occurred the very same day when the government House leader rose on his own point of order to seek unanimous consent for second reading of Bill 299, which was agreed to by the House.

While I acknowledge that unanimous consent motions are often denied, since it only takes one member to say no, there are several examples when such requests have been supported. As I mentioned, this happened on June 14 and numerous times before and since then. For example, the government House leader rose on a point of order to request unanimous consent for the immediate passage of motion 155 on April 19, 2021, and the House agreed. On April 29, 2021, the government House leader rose on a point of order to request unanimous consent for the House to revert to introduction of bills in order to table Bill 284; again, the House agreed. In these and similar instances, members on all sides of the House have been able to seek unanimous consent from the Legislative Assembly with or without advanced notice. In those cases, once the Speaker determined that the point of order was valid, it was left up to the House to determine whether or not the matter would be taken up for consideration.

1040

It can be argued that the only real difference between the events of June 14 and previous and subsequent

requests for unanimous consent was with regard to the number of requests brought forward at one time. However, the action itself of seeking a UC was in keeping with the established conventions and customs of the Legislature. At no time was the Speaker or any other member able to identify the violation of a particular standing order or established parliamentary practice, and the action did not in any way differ from behaviour deemed acceptable in the past, or even on that same day.

Your response raised a number of concerns, as it seemed to contradict what is widely understood to be the way the House normally deals with unanimous consent requests made via points of order. It gave rise to the impression that the validity of the point of order, and not the actual UC request itself, required the agreement of the whole House, not just that of the Chair.

This morning I'd like to summarize my concerns by raising two questions that I hope your ruling on this point of privilege will answer. First, at what point did members become obligated to cite a relevant standing order or established parliamentary practice to rise on a point of order to seek unanimous consent? Speaker, while the requirement to provide a rationale makes sense for raising questions about perceived violations of privilege or the standing orders, never in the time that I have served here at Queen's Park have I seen this tied to a request for unanimous consent to bring something forward for the House's consideration. In fact, given the broad activities that have been allowed through the use of unanimous consent via points of order—everything from introduction of bills to consideration of private members' business outside the normally scheduled time to amending a private member's motion on the floor of the Legislature, which happened on March 10, 2021—the only conclusion that can be drawn is that there have been few limitations or requirements placed on the use of the unanimous consent tool.

The second question I would raise is, how does your June 14 decision reflect the parliamentary principle of not presupposing what the House will decide in the future based on previous actions? I am concerned that your approach does not allow due consideration for the potential uniqueness of every unanimous consent request, which conflicts with the principle of not presupposing an outcome based on previous responses of the House, even on similar matters. One need look no further than June 14 itself for validation of this, when, as I said, the debate on Bill 299 was allowed to proceed despite the denial of the unanimous consent request that had come before it.

Speaker, we respect your position of Chair. We understand that your ruling as Speaker is final, but it is our hope that you can shed further light on the rationale for your conclusions so that members have a better understanding of your decision. I thank you again for this opportunity to raise this point of privilege, and look forward to your response.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I wish to thank the member for London West for her further points with respect to her point of privilege, and I will be responding with the ruling in due course, when it's ready.

Mr. Roman Baber: Point of order.

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

Mr. Roman Baber: Speaker, when the House last adjourned—I believe it was on June 14—I had submitted to the Speaker a point of order which arose in the context of my NDP friends, and specifically their parliamentary privilege. I have submitted to the Speaker that, effectively, the ruling of the Speaker had the unintended effect of extinguishing the right of the NDP members to move for unanimous consent. I believe, respectfully, that I have made out a prima facie case of privilege.

Standing order 23(b) provides that, "Once the Speaker finds that a prima facie case of privilege exists, it shall be taken into consideration immediately." I believe that my friend from Don Valley West subsequently made the same point in support of my position, but had not cited the rule.

And so perhaps in your explanation, Speaker, which you will render within a few days, if you would kindly address my point of order, which is that since the prima facie case of privilege was established, pursuant to the standing rule, it should have been dealt with immediately, and no vote or continuation of the Attorney General's submissions should have been permitted.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I appreciate the advice of the member for York Centre. I think he was endeavouring to speak with respect to the point of privilege that was raised. I'll respond in due course.

MEMBER'S PRIVILEGE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): On June 14, 2021, the member for Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston submitted by email notice of his intention to raise a question of privilege. I am now prepared to rule on the matter without further hearing from the member, as standing order 23(d) permits me to do.

In his email, the member alleges that on June 14, 2021, the Sergeant-at-Arms attempted to prevent him from entering the voting lobby during a recorded division because he was wearing a face shield and not a face mask, as is required by an order of the House adopted February 16, 2021. This, the member submits, constitutes a breach of his parliamentary privilege, as it attempted to obstruct and prevented him from taking part in a vote.

The order in question was adopted by the House almost eight months ago. It reads as follows:

"That, notwithstanding any standing order or special order of the House, for the duration of the 42nd Parliament or until such earlier date as indicated by the government House leader, members be permitted to speak and vote from any member's desk in the chamber in order to observe recommended physical distancing; and

"That, in addition to any Speaker's directives for the rest of the legislative precinct, except when recognized by the Speaker to speak, every member shall wear a tightly woven fabric mask that completely covers the mouth and nose and fits snugly against the sides of the face without

gaps while in the chamber or either of the members' lobbies; and

"This House acknowledges that every person seeking to enter the legislative precinct, including members of the assembly, are subject to the Speaker's COVID-19 screening and masking protocols, and further acknowledges that application of these protocols may result in a member of the assembly being refused entry to the legislative precinct, or any part thereof; and

"This House acknowledges that in such instances, the Speaker will personally make this decision, and do so in the interest of the health, safety and well-being of everyone in the legislative precinct, and that in doing so the Speaker is acting on behalf of this House and this House authorizes the Speaker to act on its behalf."

On June 14, during deferred votes, the House divided on a motion for allocation of time on Bill 307. During the course of that division, which occurred in the members' lobbies adjacent to the chamber, the Sergeant-at-Arms reported to me that the member for Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston had entered the lobby to record his vote without wearing a face mask. I was informed that the Sergeant-at-Arms reminded the member of the requirement and offered him a proper face mask. After the division, I reported this incident to the House.

The House divided twice more that same afternoon on the motions for second and third reading of Bill 307. The Sergeant-at-Arms reported to me that during each of those divisions, the member for Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston again disregarded the February 16 order of the House—which by now, he surely understood—by entering the lobby to record his vote without wearing a face mask, which I, in turn, again reported to the House.

I also took the opportunity to inform the House that a similar incident had occurred on May 31, 2021. In total, the member has blatantly and deliberately disobeyed the order of the House four times.

Before I consider the substance of the member's notice, I'd like to speak to the requirement that questions of privilege be raised in a timely manner. As members of this House are well aware, an allegation of a breach of parliamentary privilege, which by definition is at the core of a member's ability, both individually and collectively, to carry out their parliamentary duties, is such a serious matter that it should be brought to the attention of the House at the earliest opportunity.

According to House of Commons Procedure and Practice, third edition, page 135, "The matter of privilege to be raised in the House must have recently occurred and must call for the immediate action of the House. Therefore, the member must satisfy the Speaker that he or she is bringing the matter to the attention of the House as soon as practicable after becoming aware of the situation."

I will draw members' attention to standing order 23(c), which sets out the procedure for raising a question of privilege: "Any member proposing to raise a point of privilege, other than one arising out of proceedings in the chamber during the course of a sessional day, shall give to

the Speaker a written statement of the point at least one hour prior to raising" it "in the House."

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Most questions of privilege that are raised arise from events that take place outside of the proceedings of the House. For this reason, the most common process by which members raise questions of privilege is by providing notice at the first possible opportunity and then subsequently raising the matter in the House. However, where a question of privilege arises out of the proceedings during the course of a meeting of the House, there is an expectation that it will be raised immediately, without notice, and the question of privilege arising from the division process in the lobbies certainly meets this criterion.

Because these circumstances are rare and members are more often required to give notice prior to raising their points in the House, I can understand why the member's instinct in this case was to first provide notice. Even so, if the member believed that he had experienced obstruction in his attempt to vote in a division, he should have raised the matter in the House at the first available opportunity. He did not.

On June 14, the first incident occurred during the division that took place from 12:45 p.m. to 1:15 p.m. The member filed his notice shortly after 2 p.m. The House then continued to meet until it adjourned at 4:24 p.m. After the first incident, the member returned to the voting lobbies twice more before the House adjourned that afternoon, yet he chose not to enter the chamber to raise his question of privilege.

As June 14 was the final day of the recall of the House, the next opportunity for the member to raise his question of privilege was yesterday, and again today, yet he has again declined to do so. However, given the gravity of the issues raised by the member, I am still prepared and willing to address the substance of the question.

In the member's written notice, he claims that the Sergeant-at-Arms "impeded and obstructed" his attempt to vote, which amounted to a violation of his parliamentary privilege. He also noted that the face mask requirement is not included in the standing orders.

In response to these claims, I will remind the member that the February 16 order is a duly adopted special order of the House and, in adopting the order, the House exercised its right to regulate its internal affairs and settle its own code of procedure, a right that is itself protected by parliamentary privilege. Upon its adoption by the House on February 16, 2021, the requirement for members to wear the prescribed face mask in the chamber and lobbies became a rule of the House, carrying the same weight as any other provisional or permanent order of the House, including the standing orders.

The parliamentary authorities offer clear guidance on the individual rights of members as they relate to the rules and procedures of the House. At pages 13 and 14 of Parliamentary Privilege in Canada, Joseph Maingot writes, "While it will be seen that the member enjoys all the immunity necessary to perform his parliamentary work, this privilege or right ... is nevertheless subject to

the practices and procedures of the House. Thus allegations of breach of privilege by a member in the House of Commons that amount to complaints about procedures and practices in the House are by their very nature matters of order.”

The Sergeant-at-Arms, in reminding the member of his obligation to wear a face mask, was acting properly and professionally under the authority of the Chair, pursuant to the order of the House, while the member for Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston repeatedly, knowingly and, I would submit, carelessly disregarded that order. His conduct was reprehensible and should not be repeated. If it is, further corrective measures may have to be taken as considered necessary and appropriate by the House.

It is for these reasons that I find that no prima facie case of privilege has been established.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question this morning is for the Premier. The government finally came back to Queen’s Park, but, based on their nothing-burger budget, seemed to not be prepared to get to work. We know that we have folks in Ontario that are working very hard. I want to particularly point out nurses, who are working their backs off to try to protect us throughout this fourth wave, and yet they’re doing so facing significant shortages caused by this government and the previous Liberal government. Speaker, they’re exhausted; they are overworked; they are underpaid.

My question to the Premier is: Where is the government plan? Where is the funding necessary to shore up our health care system by making sure that we keep our nurses and that we retain them for the future of our province?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply for the government, the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the leader of the official opposition for the question. We value greatly the work that has been done by nurses. We certainly recognize that they have gone through tremendous stress and considerable overwork in the last 18 months, and they are the ones, with other front-line health professionals, who really are the heroes in this entire system.

We recognize the concerns that they have. We did provide pandemic pay for a period of time to assist them financially with many of their concerns. But we also know that they are subject to significant stress loads, anxiety, in some cases PTSD because of some of the things that they have witnessed and had to deal with. So we have expanded to provide specific mental health supports for nurses to provide them with the counselling that they need in four locations that are major mental health centres.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Nurses are leaving in droves, and the government hasn’t shown any plan whatsoever—

similar to the problems that we have in education: The government is not making the necessary investments in our education system. In fact, it’s shocking that a full one third of COVID-19 cases currently are in our public school system. The government could have hired more teachers, they could have reduced class sizes, they could have supported our students when they needed that support the most, and instead they chose to cut \$800 million from our public education system in the throes of a global pandemic.

Speaker, students, parents, teachers and education workers have had nothing but silence from the government. They weren’t even talked about, they weren’t even referenced in yesterday’s throne speech. Where is the plan for safer schools, including the hiring of new teachers and education workers and mental health supports for our students? Where is that plan, Speaker?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. I’m proud to be part of a government that is investing more in public education than any government in the history of this province.

Mr. Speaker, the plan has been fully endorsed by the Chief Medical Officer of Health. The head of the Ontario science table has suggested the plan cautiously aligns with that best medical advice. We have put in place investments that have enabled massive air ventilation improvements in every single school in this province, without exception. We have ensured \$600 million in mechanical ventilation improvements through the summer and the fall. We have deployed 70,000 HEPA units. We have provided take-home testing options to make life easier for those parents, for those high school asymptomatic parents, to reduce the time they’re out of class. And today, with the support of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, we have gone further, Speaker—another tool in the tool kit to keep our schools safe, to keep them open—by deploying, on a risk basis, a rapid antigen testing program that will help ensure we keep students in this province learning every single day.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, that doesn’t answer the issue around \$800 million being cut from the education budget.

But look, sadly—in fact, tragically—the same thing is happening in long-term care. There is no plan to fix our long-term-care system. In fact, this government is content in continuing the same failed system of for-profit-led long-term care in our province—the same system that the Liberals upheld for 15 years. There’s no plan to hire or retain workers, just like in our broader health care system. And the wage top-up for PSWs in fact expires at the end of this month. Just this morning, the minister responsible for long-term care three times on CBC Radio dodged the question and refused to commit to making permanent the PSW pay raise.

My question is: Why won’t the government make the commitment to increase wages of PSWs permanent?

Because every single expert in every single report—and they know it—says that that’s exactly what they should be doing.

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

Hon. Rod Phillips: Mr. Speaker, our Premier has made clear both his respect for our PSWs and through the wage increases we provided, and the wage increases that we have committed to have ensured that they will get fair pay for the great work they do.

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But Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition talking about not having a plan—this is a government that’s here to fix long-term care: 30,000 net new beds. The previous government built 611 net new beds in 11 years, including the years when the Leader of the Opposition was in partnership with them. Do you know how many beds were built in Hamilton Centre at that time? Zero, Mr. Speaker. Six hundred beds are being built in Hamilton now; that’s a change.

Moving to four hours of care, a commitment that was talked about by the previous government but never followed through on: New funding will start to flow this year to move us to the highest levels of care.

We’ll also introduce legislation to make sure that accountability, transparency and enforcement are what they should be. We have a plan to fix long-term care, and I look forward to the support of the opposition as we debate that.

GOVERNMENT FISCAL POLICIES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It’s pretty tragic that the minister doesn’t realize that beds are not going to do anything without the staffing that we need to support the people who use those beds.

My next question is also for the Premier. It’s clear that this government is not going to make any changes. They’re going to go back down the same wrong path and penny-pinch all the way to the campaign. Education: as I’ve already mentioned, \$800 million in cuts. They’re going ahead with it. Students, education workers, teachers, parents—everybody in the education system—know we need more resources, not less, in order to get through this pandemic, but also to rebuild our education system, which this government appears to be bent on tearing down.

My question is, why is this Premier, why is this government, in the context that we now face, continuing with an \$800-million cut to our education system?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: First off, this Premier and government have increased investments for school boards this year, compared to last year, by \$561 million.

What the member opposite’s question actually means: The \$800 million forecasted by the Parliamentary Budget Officer speaks about compensation hikes, which obviously the NDP would give to the teacher unions and there

would not be a government standing up for the interests of taxpayers and parents.

This government went through the negotiation in the last pandemic with one focus: investing more in the classroom. Over the summer we invested \$600 million more in air ventilation because of the dereliction of duty by the former government that did nothing to improve schools, that closed 600, no less. Our government is investing in building new schools—over half a billion dollars. Many new schools are being built and refurbished in Ontario.

With respect to COVID-19, \$1.6 billion more and \$85-million learning and recovery plan—because we appreciate how important it is to keep kids safe, keep them in school, and improve the learning quality in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: News for the minister: Parents are actually taxpayers as well and they want to protect their kids’ education. He should have learned that more than a year ago. Parents care about their kids’ quality of education.

But you know what? It’s not only education cuts, Speaker. Our local health units have been doing yeoman’s work when it comes to the COVID-19 fight. They have been working miracles in communities on the front lines as this Premier has basically gone missing—complete lack of leadership, complete dithering, complete delay. The Premier’s priority remains cutting our public health units from 35 down to 10. The government is literally restructuring our public health care system in the midst of a global pandemic. What is wrong with that picture?

These folks are on the front lines of COVID-19 day in and day out. Of all the things to keep plowing ahead with, why is the Premier continuing to make cuts to health care?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: It probably won’t surprise you, Mr. Speaker, that I disagree entirely with the comments made by the leader of the official opposition. In fact, we’ve put an extra \$5 billion into our health care system since the beginning of this pandemic.

Far from restructuring public health during the pandemic, we’ve actually paused in the consideration, and Mr. Jim Pine, who is doing the discussions and consultations with municipalities, has stopped because of the extra work that the public health units need to do. We have paused that until we move through this pandemic, hopefully sooner than later.

But we know that the public health units need some assistance. That’s why we’ve provided \$47 million in mitigation funding so that they don’t have any lack of income. We’ve provided them with that mitigation funding as well as several hundred million dollars in order to allow them to continue to do the excellent work that they’re doing in testing and case and contact management.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I would agree that the public health units are doing a heck of a lot of extra work, and the last thing they need is a spit in the eye from this

government with the threat of reducing them down to 10 from 35.

Look, the Premier also has the tools to do the right thing to help the front-line, minimum wage workers in our province—the essential workers who were there, day in and day out, risking their own health, literally risking possible death, while the rest of us were able stay safe. Meanwhile, as they continue to toil away, the cost of living keeps going up, and the Premier's first action when he became Premier was to roll back their wages. The 10-cent increase is nothing more than an insult to the workers we relied on during this pandemic.

My question to the Premier is, why is he okay with that? Why is he okay with workers, working full time, sometimes at two and three jobs, not earning enough to pay the bills and put a roof over their heads?

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

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of a grateful province, I want to thank every single worker out there who's been working every day throughout this pandemic to support our families and our communities.

We laid out a plan to continue to increase the minimum wage in Ontario, but let me be clear: We want people to be getting better jobs. We don't want to build an economy on minimum wage jobs. That's why, for example, we're encouraging people to pick up a career in the skilled trades. These are good jobs that pay six figures, that have defined pensions and benefits.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to work every single day to spread opportunity widely and fairly as we rebuild back a better province.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. This question is for the Premier. September came and September went, with nary a peep from this government. So with no concrete plan in place for rapid school testing from this government, parents took matters into their own hands. They acquired and distributed rapid tests themselves as cases among kids continued to steadily climb in this province. It was a crushing blow to those parents when the Premier suddenly blocked access to those rapid tests last week and then, today, reversed that position.

Speaker, why did parents have to crowdsource a vital tool that experts say will help keep schools safely open, and why didn't the Premier do his job and have real testing in place in September?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. I will confirm that the Ontario science table, pediatric hospitals in this province, the testing strategy expert panel and the Chief Medical Officer of Health do not support asymptomatic rapid testing province-wide. That is the position of medical authorities right across the province, including the medical officer of health in the member opposite's community.

Having said that, we have followed the Ontario science table recommendation and adopted the updated advice by the chief medical officer who confirmed today we are launching a risk-based, targeted rapid testing program to public health units for them to deploy with the local indicators required, so that yes, we can ensure schools remain safe and open. It builds upon our take-home PCR test strategy we've launched for asymptomatic high school students.

Why? Because we want to increase presenteeism. We want to reduce absenteeism from the classroom for mental health, to learning loss—it's so critical that we mitigate going forward.

We're working closely with the Chief Medical Officer of Health. We've adopted this new strategy as another tool in the tool kit to keep schools open in this province.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Mr. Speaker, the abdication of responsibility by this minister is appalling. They have downloaded decisions, they have downloaded costs and they never take responsibility for a single thing. In that vacuum of provincial leadership to make schools as safe as possible, schools now account for one third of the active COVID-19 cases in this province. There were 250 more cases today and six more schools are closed. The Chief Medical Officer of Health himself said today that targeted rapid testing could help prevent painful closures in areas of high risk.

Every day, we are hearing about class sizes that are larger than pre-pandemic levels, cohorts mixing as classes are collapsed. Recognizing that increased risk to children in crowded classrooms, will these schools be included in the rapid testing program?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: In the midst of the Delta-driven fourth wave, five in six elementary schools in Ontario do not have an active case, and four out of five high schools in our province do not have active cases.

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The Chief Medical Officer of Health confirmed this morning that the cautious protocol is working to keep transmission low and schools safe. We appreciate the partnership of everyone. I should acknowledge, on World Teachers' Day, our gratitude to our educators for working so hard with our government and public health units to keep schools open and safe, and to ensure children remain engaged in learning.

Today, the chief medical officer adopted another tool in the tool kit by launching a program designed and targeted for those schools at risk, based on a balance of metrics, including schools that will have high case rates and may have low vaccine rates.

Mr. Speaker, we are relying on the expert advice of public health units to deploy those tests. We've launched a take-home test across schools in this province for high school students to make life easier. We've expanded testing options. We've worked with the Ministry of Health to reduce wait times. We're going to continue to stand

ready to do whatever it takes to keep schools safe and open in Ontario.

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is to the Minister of Education. This past year, we have seen a renewed focus on the horrors of residential schools and the treatment of Indigenous peoples. Last week's inaugural day of truth and reconciliation was an important step in acknowledging parts of Canada's past, but as we can all agree, more needs to be done.

Minister, last week, ahead of the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, you made an important announcement to enhance Indigenous learning with the curriculum. Awareness of the past but also the histories, cultures and contributions of First Nation, Métis and Inuit individuals, communities and nations in Canada is an important step in taking action towards reconciliation. Minister, can you share further information on these important changes?

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

The Minister of Education to respond.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to thank the member for Flamborough–Glanbrook for her leadership and her commitment to ensuring children continue to learn about our Indigenous history.

Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the voices of Indigenous leaders in this province—First Nation, Inuit and Métis—who have spoken clearly that a generation of students, including myself, have not learned and did not learn about the painful past of the residential schools within our publicly funded school system. That is unacceptable, I think, to all members of the Legislature, which is why we have built upon actions over the past years to expand, to enhance and to mandate compulsory learning in this respect, to strengthen learning and understanding of Indigenous contributions to Canada, their vast, rich history and their culture and language.

In addition, most especially this year, there's a recognition we must do more to expand mandatory learning on residential schools. That's why I was proud to stand with the Minister of Indigenous Affairs, chiefs and elders in the First Nations community, to expand learning from grades 1 to 3 in this province to ensure no generation of students, that no student in this province, graduates—

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

The supplementary question.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Minister, we recognize that with greater awareness comes greater understanding. This is a substantial step in the right direction. This government is utilizing education to empower our Indigenous youth to reach their full potential, just like we do with every other student across the province.

In addition to the curriculum announced, our government also shared that we are increasing investments to support Indigenous student success right across Ontario.

Minister, can you please share with this Legislature what other meaningful supports our government is providing to Indigenous students, now and through the future?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: To support our journey in reconciliation, we have announced additional funding to support First Nation, Métis and Inuit student success in Ontario. We take this seriously. The Minister of Indigenous Affairs and I have met with the Chiefs of Ontario, where we have made clear that the funding will increase—and not just that it will increase, but that it will be sustainable. One of the big asks of many stakeholders within this community was clear: They need long-term funding agreements. We have accepted that recommendation to move to three-year funding to provide sustainable outlooks. A \$23-million investment was announced, partially to support student mental health within the Indigenous student mental health community, and partially to support the expansion of Indigenous graduation coaches to help young people within the community graduate, access higher learning and get access to good-paying jobs.

We want to ensure they succeed, which is why we're investing over \$96 million in an education grant—

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

The next question?

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Premier. Mon Sheong is a long-term-care home in my riding. It's one of the few homes in Ontario that provides services to Chinese communities in their language. The pandemic hit Mon Sheong particularly hard. A third of the residents died of COVID-19. It was a tragedy, because it was a preventable tragedy.

It is over a year later and problems still exist. Recently, I met Agnes. Agnes is the chair of the family council at Mon Sheong, and her mother has been living in Mon Sheong for many years. She told me about the chronic staff shortage and how it has made it very difficult for the PSWs at Mon Sheong to provide her mother with the care she expects. Agnes is particularly concerned about the length of time her mom goes between being cleaned and other kinds of essential care. The reason is this: During the day, there is only one PSW for 10 residents; and at night, there is only one PSW for 23 residents. It is simply impossible for one PSW to provide good care with these kinds of staff ratios.

My question is to the Premier: When will you allocate more funding to recruit and retain more PSWs to work in Ontario's long-term-care homes?

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

Hon. Rod Phillips: I thank the member for that question. Last night, as it was, I was with Stephanie Wong and Andre Barros, who are the CEO and chair, respectively, of Mon Sheong—which is a very high-quality provider of services, for many years. They were sharing, obviously, the challenges but also the opportunities of what we're doing as a government.

Mr. Speaker, the member asks a very important question about staffing. As I've had the opportunity now to tour many of the homes across the province, the number one issue—people care about new state-of-the-art facilities; they certainly care that we put in place the accountability and the enforcement required. But the number one issue they talk about are people: caring, compassionate staff. That's why, Mr. Speaker, this government committed to four hours of care, moving from 2.75 hours of care.

When you talk about hours of care, that all sounds kind of a bit airy-fairy, but when it comes down to people, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Response.

Hon. Rod Phillips: The answer to the member's question is: Next month, we will start our move towards the funding of those additional hours of care. The first of those—

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

Supplementary question.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Back to the Premier: This government has made a lot of promises to fix long-term care. And I'm already hearing some more promises there: new beds, more staff, tougher regulation to ensure operators provide adequate care, better protection from COVID. But here's the problem: Ontarians have heard these promises before. And they don't trust this government anymore, because when we talk to staff and family members, it becomes very clear that very little has changed in the homes. The quality of care that residents receive is still not adequate.

Family members with loved ones at Mon Sheong and in homes all across Ontario want to know what exactly is your plan to guarantee four hours of staffing care for every single long-term-home resident.

Hon. Rod Phillips: I thank the member for her thoughtful question. You're right. Ontarians have heard about fixing long-term care for a very long time. Mr. Speaker, it was 2011 when the previous government first talked about moving to four hours of care, but it was a tough problem to solve.

We need the people. That's why we've invested over \$207 million in training more PSWs. For the first time in a very long time, 2,000 new nurses—because we need the staff. But we also need the commitment to the funding, and that's what we have made, Mr. Speaker. As I said, starting next month, homes will start to see that funding. They will start to see the clarity of how they can start to hire. And we're not done helping, Mr. Speaker. We need to continue to work with my colleague the Minister of Colleges and Universities, my colleague the Minister of Education, educating more PSWs, making sure that more nurses are available.

Mr. Speaker, this is a government that's going to fix long-term care after decades of neglect.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Roman Baber: Good morning, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Labour. Over the last few months,

I've heard from thousands of Ontario workers that they're facing termination because of their vaccination status. Thousands have already lost their jobs. Anita Davis is a nurse with the London Health Sciences Centre. She was in the studio with me this morning. She will be terminated at the end of the month.

Now, the minister prides himself for standing up for workers' rights. But does he agree that we shouldn't force Ontarians to decide between their health care and their ability to feed their family? Because we have a catastrophe on our hands; because hundreds of thousands of families are about to suffer.

So, my question to the Minister of Labour: Will he join me this afternoon and support the passing of my PMB, the jobs and jabs bill, which, if passed, would prevent the termination of potentially hundreds of thousands of workers, or will he join the NDP, block my bill and sentence hundreds of Ontario families to unemployment?

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Hon. Monte McNaughton: We're going to continue to take a balanced and measured approach when it comes to dealing with COVID-19. Mr. Speaker, the health and well-being of all of the people is our government's top priority. I'm proud to say that today, as we encourage everyone in Ontario who is able to get vaccinated, more than 87% of individuals have received one dose and more than 82% have received both doses.

Mr. Speaker, this is how we're going to defeat COVID-19. It's by getting vaccinated. It's by working together. It's employers and employees working together every single day to get through this pandemic, and all members of this House, of this Legislature, have a responsibility to also set good examples for the people of this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Roman Baber: Back to the minister: No one is working together. People are being let go right and left. I don't think the minister appreciates the gravity of the catastrophe Ontarians are faced with.

My petition "Choice Shouldn't Lead to Unemployment," in support of my jobs and jabs bill, is at 146,000 signatures. Nurses, teachers, police officers, fire and paramedics, retail, dining, professionals from all disciplines who made a lawful choice—and for the record, we all agree that it is still a choice. Hundreds of thousands of them are about to lose employment. It's not the people; it's the vaccines that are supposed to protect us from COVID-19, which is why most of us made the decision that we did. But we shouldn't force Ontarians to do anything against their will.

If the minister wants to hide behind the NDP, who don't care for workers' rights anymore, or if he doesn't want to pass my bill, that's fine; he can introduce and pass his own legislation to accomplish the same goal.

But would the Minister of Labour please tell the House: Will he stand up and protect hundreds of thousands of Ontarians who are about to lose their jobs, or will he sentence countless Ontario families to unemployment?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Mr. Speaker, we've been working as a government with 15.5 million people every single day since this global pandemic hit the province to protect the lives of more than 15 million people in this province.

That's why we brought in the most comprehensive paid sick days plan in the country: 23 days for workers in this province to get vaccinated, to recuperate from vaccinations. It's why we've invested to hire 100 more health and safety inspectors to go into workplaces, to keep workers and customers safe. It brings the inspectorate to the highest level in provincial history. It's why we've dedicated millions of dollars to building hundreds and hundreds of resources for every single business, to bring in protocols, to keep their workers and the public safe.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue every single day, encouraging people to work together, to get vaccinated; to lead the country, like we are right now; to defeat COVID-19 once and for all.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mrs. Daisy Wai: My question is for the Minister of Long-Term Care. The number of people touched by the long-term-care system is incredible. There are about 70,000 residents, 100,000 who care for and support those in long-term care and over 600 long-term-care homes, in every corner of the province. That includes the 392 people living in the three long-term-care homes in my community in Richmond Hill.

Over the summer, I heard members of the opposition claim that our government wasn't doing enough to support our seniors in long-term care. Minister, can you please update the House on the status of the long-term-care investments?

Hon. Rod Phillips: I know the member from Richmond Hill dedicates herself fully to her constituents, and I am happy to say that after decades of neglect, this is a government that has a plan to fix long-term care. As I mentioned, between 2011 and 2018, the previous government built 611 net new beds; none, unfortunately, were in the member's constituency of Richmond Hill. That's why our government committed to fill that gap—30,000 net new beds; \$2.6 billion already allocated. I'm happy to say that a part of those is 120 new beds at the Carefirst campus of care that's scheduled for construction in 2022 in Richmond Hill.

I had a chance last night again, within a round table with Helen Leung and Sheila Neysmith from Carefirst seniors care, to thank them, and through them their staff, for the work that they're doing.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to support people like Helen, people like Sheila, people who are working in long-term care, to make sure that state-of-the-art facilities are there for our residents.

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

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I'd like to thank the minister for that response and for his and this government's commitment to

fixing long-term care. Those new beds will go a long way to supporting our most vulnerable citizens in my community and across the province.

But Minister, while building new beds is a vital step in fixing long-term care, ensuring the well-being of our seniors goes beyond simply building a bed for them. It is important to ensure that the cultural and spiritual needs of our residents in long-term care are met as well.

Minister, can you please tell the House what our government is doing to ensure that the cultural needs of our seniors are met?

Hon. Rod Phillips: I thank the member for her question.

Mr. Speaker, I couldn't agree more; one size doesn't fit all when it comes to long-term care. With our additional funding, with our development program, with our focus on accountability and transparency, we will make sure that homes fit the residents. That's why there are 18 different projects representing over 2,900 beds, targeted specifically at cultural communities where that cultural and faith community that has been so important to people during their lives can also be important during their elder years.

That includes the Mon Sheong Stouffville long-term-care home—320 safe, new beds, modern beds, in Whitchurch-Stouffville that I was pleased to be with the Premier as well as the House leader and others to be at the opening of months ago.

Mr. Speaker, we will stay focused on long-term care. We will make sure that the solution fits the changing nature of the residents and the population of Ontario.

INDIGENOUS RELATIONS AND RECONCILIATION

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: My question is to the Premier.

Remarks in Oji-Cree.

Since this government took office, their message on reconciliation with Indigenous people, when we get one, is inconsistent. The legacy of Indian residential schools belongs to everyone, and the people need space and time to learn. We had a chance to do more, to properly commemorate this day, and this government did nothing.

Will this government do the right thing and make September 30 a public day of healing and reconciliation?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I must admit, I'm somewhat surprised to have that question from the member. He did call me in advance of the day to let me know that that was not a day that the community had decided upon and that he was actually working on a bill that he would be bringing forward at some point in this session. I told him at that time that I would continue to work with him on that bill, as would the minister.

I continue to be open, as I know the minister does, and the Premier, to working with you, but again, I understood on the day when we had that discussion that you had consulted with the community and that there was a different desire at the time.

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

Supplementary question.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Total misunderstanding.

Mr. Speaker, genocide is a big deal. If 20,000 non-Indigenous children died after being stolen forcibly from their parents and communities, we would not be having this debate.

The horrific legacy of Indian residential schools belongs to everyone now. Canada and Ontario can no longer hide or turn away from the truth.

Again, Ontario had its chance to do the right thing and properly commemorate this day. But as usual, when it comes to Indigenous peoples, this government let us down. This government did nothing.

Speaker, will Ontario acknowledge the past and do what it should: make September 30 a provincial holiday of truth and reconciliation?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I don't think anybody would suggest that—continuing to work towards a reconciliation with First Nations has to remain a priority, not only of this government, but of all members of this Legislative Assembly.

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But I want to be very clear, Mr. Speaker; I don't want there to be any confusion. The member will recall that prior to the House adjourning in June, I promised that we would work together on this file and that we would work with the minister on this file. The member called me in advance of the day to suggest that there had not been unanimous support within First Nations communities to recognize that as the day, but that it would be important that there be a day, and that the member was working on a bill which he would later work with me to present to this House. I remain committed to working with the member to make that happen, Mr. Speaker, as does this government and hopefully all parliamentarians.

HOSPITAL AND SCHOOL SAFETY

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier. Speaker, I think we can all agree—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Government House leader, come to order.

Leader of the Opposition, come to order.

Interjection.

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

I apologize. The member for Ottawa South has the floor.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Premier.

I think we can all agree that the anti-vax and anti-public-health protests that we've seen in recent weeks at Ontario's hospitals and schools are very concerning. They're demoralizing to front-line workers and disruptive and distressing to those people and those families trying to access those services. Ontarians' access to publicly funded

health care and education is something that we all hold sacred.

For almost a month now, Ontario's nurses, Ontario's doctors, Ontario's hospitals and Ontario's families have been calling on this government to create safe zones around hospitals and schools. Speaker, the Premier's tough tweets are not going to cut it.

Speaker, through you: Will the government move to immediately pass legislation that ensures safe access to our hospitals and schools and protect the people who work in them?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much to the member for this question. It is really important because we greatly value the work that all of our front-line workers in our hospitals and in our clinics have performed. It's very, very disappointing to see protestors coming forward. It's very demoralizing for the staff, I know, to see this happening outside their windows.

No one should be prevented from going to work. No one should be prevented from entering or exiting a hospital, whether it's a staff member or someone going to see someone in a hospital or someone going in for treatment themselves.

However, it is against the law for anyone to be prevented from doing that. We know that our law enforcement officers have been out there to do that. And while we can't comment on any legislation that we haven't seen yet—of course, we would look at it, but we also are relying on our police support and others to make sure that no one can be prevented from entering or exiting a hospital.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, other provinces like Quebec and Alberta have already moved to protect access to hospitals and schools. BC has signalled to do the same. I think they basically have the same laws out there. I know the Leader of the Opposition will put forward a bill today; I will as well. Once again, Ontario is behind.

What we're asking you is just simply to take action. No one's access to a hospital or school should be impeded nor should anyone who works in them or is trying to access it be harassed. That's what we've seen.

Today, I will be putting forward a bill that would establish safe zones against anti-vax and anti-public-health protests within 150 metres of hospitals and schools. And with the pending approval of vaccines for kids five to 11 who may be vaccinated in school, it's reasonable to expect that we could have a problem. I think that's reasonable. So the government needs to act.

Speaker, through you: Will the government move to pass my bill this afternoon—or pass any bill or pass the Leader of the Opposition's bill—to actually protect workers and access to these vital services in Ontario?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Speaker, through you: I wish to assure the member opposite that Ontario is certainly not behind. Ontario is not behind. We have one of the highest

vaccination rates in the world right now with 87% of people with one vaccine and 82% with both vaccines.

However, we expect people to obey the law. We expect that people are going to follow the law. It's extremely disappointing that they're not, but that's why we have law enforcement officers who are doing their job, who are understanding that there is a potential there. They are doing their job. We have been in touch with them to let them know of our concerns. It's up to them to deal with them, as they have dealt with them in the past. We will ensure that that is going to continue to happen, to make sure that people are protected and to make sure that no one is prevented from entering or exiting a hospital, including staff, visitors and people going for treatment themselves.

BREAST CANCER

Ms. Christine Hogarth: My question is for the new Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues, my friend. I'm pleased to ask my friend a question today.

This month, October, is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. I'm sure everyone in this chamber knows at least one woman who has been on the receiving end of a breast cancer diagnosis—in my family alone, three of my family members.

Last year, an estimated 75 women each day heard the words, “You have breast cancer.” Many incredible advancements have been made, with more people surviving a breast cancer diagnosis than ever before. Despite this, it's still the most common cancer and, sadly, the second leading cause of cancer death amongst Canadian women, my cousin being one of them, at the early age of 42.

Can the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues tell us what supports are available for women who receive this devastating diagnosis?

Hon. Jane McKenna: Thank you to the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for the question. My condolences go out to your family members.

I know the devastating impact of breast cancer. I watched my grandmother battle from the beginning. She bravely fought through surgery, treatment, remission and, sadly, in her case, the return of the disease. Despite her courage as she fought back against the cancer, it ultimately caused her death.

I know it's been said many times before, but the fact of the matter is that cancer caught early is often easier to treat and can lead to beating its outcome. I encourage everyone to remind the women in our lives—our daughters, sisters, wives, aunts, mothers and grandmothers—to be aware of changes that could be indicative of breast cancer. If you notice something and you're not sure, speak to your doctor as soon as possible, because an early diagnosis can make a world of difference.

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

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Thank you, Minister. I've seen through the experiences of women in my family and my friends how devastating it is to receive a breast cancer diagnosis. For many women, in addition to facing the fact

that they now have breast cancer, they also worry about the impacts of their diagnosis on their partners, their families, their children, their finances and, of course, their future.

Minister, I recognize that early diagnosis plays a big part in positive outcomes for women fighting breast cancer. Can the associate minister please tell the House and women across Ontario where they can find support and the supports they need to reduce the additional stresses they face as a result of their diagnosis?

Hon. Jane McKenna: Thank you again to the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for the question. Here in Ontario, there are a number of supports for anyone facing a cancer diagnosis. Through Cancer Care Ontario and your health care provider, cancer patients can find services and treatments, information about drug funding if it's needed, and a variety of supports for both patients and their families that are available locally.

Supporting women and their families as they take on the fight against breast cancer benefits all of us. During this Breast Cancer Awareness Month, we encourage all women to do a self-examination and seek medical advice if you notice any changes, because early intervention is key to winning the fight against breast cancer.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question is for the Premier. During yesterday's throne speech, this government offered nothing new whatsoever to help local businesses get back on their feet. While half of Hamilton's BIAs are in my riding, we know first-hand how vital small businesses are to thriving, vibrant communities.

This summer, I visited businesses in Dundas, Ancaster and Westdale BIAs. What I heard loud and clear is that their struggle to pay the bills and keep staff employed is not over. A small business owner in Dundas shared that she's drowning in debt and losing hope, saying that big box stores have been continually put ahead of small businesses in this government's priorities.

1140

When will this government show up for local small businesses and not just the big box stores?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction.

Hon. Nina Tangri: It is my privilege to stand today for the first time as the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction. I really do want to thank the member opposite for the question.

I think we all here in the House can agree that our small businesses have faced incredible hardship throughout the pandemic. That's why, since day one, our government has worked hard to support our small businesses and help them get through this pandemic, namely, through the Ontario Small Business Support Grant. We've provided nearly \$3 billion in urgent and unprecedented supports to over 110,000 small businesses right across the province. Our main street recovery plan was built on more than \$10 billion of urgent relief and supported through the COVID-

19 action plan. And, of course, we expanded our Digital Main Street program to allow more businesses to create and increase their digital presence.

Just last week, Mr. Speaker, I was in London and I met a young man at Richard's, a clothing store for men, who put his digital presence online. It not only saved his business, he's been able to grow from that—

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Unfortunately, your government's response has been too little, too late. I've heard from businesses that have been turned away, deemed ineligible for the province's small business support grants for reasons that seem arbitrary.

Small businesses are trying to rebuild, and now they're taking on extra public health responsibilities without any extra resources from this government. What's worse, some businesses are facing harassment for following and enforcing these important public health measures, without, yet again, protections—such as the safety zone legislation we proposed—from this government.

It's clear that the government's approach has been failing. Is the government finally willing to listen to small businesses and the opposition, and implement a third round of small business support grant payments to ensure local small businesses get the support they deserve?

Hon. Nina Tangri: I want to thank the member opposite for her question. As we know, throughout the pandemic, our businesses have gone through such tremendous efforts to keep their customers and their employees safe. So as we entered this fourth wave of the pandemic, we implemented additional measures in public settings to help keep our province open.

We need to stop the spread of COVID-19 and protect the health and well-being of all Ontarians. Proof of vaccination is required only in settings that are at the highest risk of COVID-19 transmission due to these gatherings in close contact, such as enclosed indoor spaces.

Now, as the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction, I've had the opportunity to meet with many businesses in the restaurant industry, for example. Vaccine certificates and proof of vaccination are a temporary measure to address health and safety in the COVID-19 pandemic. Businesses have been asking for this. This allows us to not have to close our businesses again.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Roman Baber: My question is to the government House leader. Close to 600,000 Ontarians have been diagnosed with COVID. Add to that an infection rate estimated at three to five times and you have millions of Ontarians who already had COVID. But despite ample evidence, the medical establishment is scared to acknowledge natural immunity and instead subjects everyone to draconian passports and mandates.

But on August 18, the government whip issued notice to government MPPs that they're required to vaccinate

unless they can provide a medical exemption or a physician's note that vaccination is "unnecessary by reason of past infection or laboratory evidence of immunity."

My question to the government House leader is, why the double standard? Why does the government say that evidence of prior immunity is good enough to excuse its members, but not good enough to excuse 600,000 or possibly a few million Ontarians when their jobs are on the line?

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

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Mr. Speaker, again, I want to congratulate the people of Ontario: 87% of individuals 12 and over have received one dose; more than 82% have been double-vaccinated.

Mr. Speaker, 15.5 million people have been working together every single day to battle this global pandemic, and as the Minister of Health said earlier today, we should be damn proud of our province, our businesses, our families, our communities. We are much better off than any other place in this country, and it's because of the people.

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

Mr. Roman Baber: Speaker, the double standard that this government holds itself to is astonishing. What's good for the goose is not good for the government.

I support the member from Durham's right to choose, just like I've always supported choice—just like the choice of tens of thousands of young women who made the same choice as the member from Durham, but they're about to lose their job. If the government is going to allow the taking away of choice by costing them their jobs, then everyone should be held to the same standard. I don't care to know the member's medical exemption, but I do care that it's not political rules but college of physicians and Ontario public service rules that apply equally to the member, as they do to everyone else.

My question to the government House leader: Did he subject the member from Durham to the same standard articulated by the college of physicians, which is wreaking havoc on Ontarians, and if so, will he instruct the member from Durham to submit her medical exemption for acceptance by the Ontario public service?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue as a government, hopefully supported by every member of this Legislature, to protect the health and well-being of all of the people of this province.

We can be proud, as a province, of how we're leading the world when it comes to vaccinations. We can be proud, as a province, of how employers and employees have been working together to battle this global pandemic. We can be proud, as a province, of the business community, working to support families in need.

We're going to continue to prioritize the health and well-being of the people of this province every single day, just like we've done for the past year and a half.

I have to reiterate again, we've spared no expense to help the people through this pandemic, whether it's

business supports, whether it's the record investments in health and safety programs for businesses—more than a hundred new health and safety inspectors, for example.

Again, we need to continue working together and send that message out there to people: Get—

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

Next question.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Jeff Burch: Speaker, through you to the Minister of Health: Families in my riding and across the province no longer have access to OHIP-insured eye exams. Despite months of advanced notice, this government is absent from negotiations and refusing to bargain in good faith, leaving the eye care of Ontario families in the lurch.

I heard from Laurel in Welland. In September, her one-year-old son was stung by a bee. His eye was swollen, and their pediatrician said he needed an eye exam to determine if he had vision impairment. Because of this government's inaction, her son still has not been able to see an optometrist. Laurel emailed me, asking why her baby is "collateral damage in a dispute between devalued professionals, and this government's misuse of taxpayer funds."

Will the minister make a commitment today to get back to the table and adequately fund eye care so that families like Laurel's receive the care they deserve?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much to the member for the question. I know this is an important issue for many Ontarians right now.

We greatly value the work that is done by our optometrists in providing quality eye care services to children, youth, adults and seniors—and that any withdrawal of services has been by choice, by optometrists, not by the government. We continue to fund OHIP services for children and seniors; we always will.

We are ready to return to the mediation table. We have signalled that and said that publicly. We agreed to the conditions that were set by the mediator, who was actually chosen by the optometrists, not by the government. We agreed to their conditions to go back to the mediation table; however, the optometrists have chosen not to do so.

If you have any influence on them, I would encourage you to ask them to come back to the table, because we want to address their issues. We want to provide a resolution to their concerns.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Burch: It's the minister's job to do her job, not mine.

This government is ignoring both taxpayers and health care professionals. I have seniors calling me, worrying that they cannot receive eye exams after crucial eye surgeries, putting their recovery under threat. We're heard from diabetics, gravely concerned that they're going to lose their eyesight.

Eye care is health care. Presently, in Ontario, no one under 20 or over 65 can receive an eye exam. Optometrists have been telling the government for months they would

be forced to withdraw service if the government continued to pay only 55% of the cost of the OHIP-insured visits, the lowest rate in the entire country. The Ontario Association of Optometrists have indicated that they have not heard from the government since early September. In May, I brought this issue to the Legislature; we're now in October.

1150

Speaker, will this government get back to the table with optometrists and put proper funding in place to ensure that children and seniors receive the eye care they need?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I will certainly reiterate that we are ready. The government is ready to go back to the mediation table. However, the Ontario Association of Optometrists is not, and so any decision to withdraw OHIP services is being done by the optometrists, not by the government. We will continue to pay for those services, and we have also offered a resolution to this concern.

We are already going to pay \$39 million into their account. The optometrists will see the amount that they will be receiving today. They will be receiving this amount in mid-October. This is to compensate them, as they requested, for the same rate of increase that physicians would have received between 2011 when their agreement expired to the present.

We have also proposed a resolution going forward of an increase of 8.48%, plus we've indicated to the optometrists that we want to discuss their overhead concerns, to make sure that we can come to a resolution that is fair for optometrists, but also fair to the taxpayers of Ontario.

We want to also establish a special working relationship with them whereby we will meet monthly with them. We do not do that for every group, but we know that optometrists were not fairly dealt with by the previous government. We want to rectify that situation and provide a resolution of their concerns, and we're ready—

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

The next question.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Nice to be back. My question is for the Minister of Education: 816 schools are reporting COVID cases—that's almost 17% of all our schools—and now six schools have had to close. This spread could be addressed if more parents were given the ability to administer rapid tests to their children.

The government of Ontario had several months to plan for a safe return to school, and yet the plan to distribute rapid tests is only coming up now. To stop the spread, we should be detecting COVID before it causes outbreaks, not playing catch-up. What is the minister's plan to prevent further outbreaks and school closures given the constant rate of cases in our schools?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We agree: It's so critical that we need schools open and safe. That's why we've introduced a layered approach, following the expert advice of the Ontario science table, who confirmed this summer a preventive approach that includes strict screening before

children enter a school; the enhancement of cleaning within our school facilities; and a significant improvement in the air quality and ventilation standards, which our government has undertaken both for mechanically ventilated schools and those without mechanical ventilation by investing \$600 million in HVAC system improvement, in addition to the deployment of 70,000 HEPA units that are already in our schools, in every learning space in a school without mechanical ventilation and in every kindergarten space in this province.

In addition, we've announced today another step forward, another tool in the tool kit, to ensure that we minimize disruption and maximize safety with the deployment of targeted, risk-based rapid testing to public health units for schools and child care settings, where they deem fit. We're going to continue to follow that advice, to do everything possible, as the member opposite has rightfully noted, to keep our kids safe and to keep our schools open.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I'm concerned with the government's plan to distribute rapid testing only in hot spots or in certain schools, based on risk. When the government made the determination of hot spots for access to testing at the beginning of the crisis, many vulnerable areas in my riding were left out of the equation and didn't get access to testing for a long time.

Will the government ensure that this time it consults with the public health units and school boards, to get the relevant information to identify vulnerable areas where rapid testing would be most helpful?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I would agree with the member opposite. In fact, we've already consulted the Chief Medical Officer of Health, as recently as yesterday, and spoken to medical officers of health in Ontario to get their buy-in for this program, deferring to the local public health indicators and the local expertise of our medical officers of health. We have confidence in them to deploy this rapid testing on a targeted basis where the risk requires it.

We are absolutely committed to doing whatever it takes to keep schools safe and open. It's why in September we launched a take-home test program phase 1 for asymptomatic, vaccinated high school students in Ontario. It's why we intend to scale that program up. Also, Speaker, we have worked with the Ministry of Health to ensure that there are low-barrier access points for testing within our communities, reducing the time lost, to get those kids back into school, to get our staff back into school working as well. And when it comes to air ventilation, something that cannot be decoupled from the discussion of school safety, we have really made this a major priority, with \$600 million of investment, 70,000 HEPA units and ongoing work to ensure schools remain as safe as possible.

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 Mr. Sabawy assumes ballot item number 18, Ms. Scott assumes ballot number 85, Ms. Hogarth assumes ballot item number 9 and Ms. Triantafilopoulos assumes ballot item number 57.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Ottawa South has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Health concerning safe zones. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

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

The House recessed from 1156 to 1500.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I beg leave to present the 11th interim report of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Hogarth presents the committee's report. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Not at this time.

Report presented.

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I beg leave to present the 12th interim report of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Not at this time.

Report presented.

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I beg leave to present the 13th interim report of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Not at this time.

Report presented.

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I beg leave to present the 14th interim report of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Does the member wish to make a brief statement at this time?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Yes, I do, Speaker. As a member of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight, I am pleased to table the committee's 11th, 12th, 13th and 14th interim reports.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank our membership of the committee for their work: Daryl Kramp, Chair; Tom Rakocevic, Vice-Chair; Bob Bailey; Gilles Bisson; John Fraser; Robin Martin; Sam Oosterhoff; Lindsey Park; Sara Singh; and Effie J. Triantafilopoulos; as well as the substitute members, France Gélinas, Michael Parsa, Amarjot Sandhu and Marit Stiles.

The committee extends its appreciation to the Solicitor General for appearing before the committee.

The committee also acknowledges the assistance provided during the hearings and report-writing deliberations by the Clerk of the Committee and the staff of legislative research.

Report presented.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

CREATING SAFE ZONES
AROUND HOSPITALS, OTHER
HEALTH FACILITIES, SCHOOLS
AND CHILD CARE CENTRES
ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021
CRÉANT DES ZONES SÉCURITAIRES
AUTOUR DES HÔPITAUX, DES AUTRES
ÉTABLISSEMENTS DE SANTÉ,
DES ÉCOLES ET DES CENTRES DE GARDE

Mr. Fraser moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 2, An Act with respect to safe zones for hospitals, other health facilities, schools and child care centres /
Projet de loi 2, Loi portant sur les zones sécuritaires des hôpitaux, des autres établissements de santé, des écoles et des centres de garde.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Does the member wish to make a statement about his bill?

Mr. John Fraser: Yes, Speaker. The bill enacts the Creating Safe Zones around Hospitals, Other Health Facilities, Schools and Child Care Centres Act. The act creates a safe zone around hospitals, other health facilities, schools and child care centres. Protests against COVID-19

vaccinations or against public health measures and related actions are prohibited in these safe zones. The harassment of protected service providers who administer or assist in the administration of COVID-19 vaccines is also prohibited.

A contravention of the provisions proscribed in the preceding paragraph is an offence. In addition, a person who suffers a loss as a result of such a contravention has a right of action for damages. Any person may apply to the Superior Court of Justice for an injunction to restrain a person from contravening these provisions.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thanks very much, Speaker. I really appreciate the opportunity to introduce this bill, so I rise to do so. It's a bill that everybody knows I've been looking to table for some time now. It has been prepared for a while.

STOPPING ANTI-PUBLIC HEALTH
HARASSMENT ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 VISANT
À METTRE FIN AU HARCÈLEMENT
FACE À LA PRISE DE MESURES
DE SANTÉ PUBLIQUE

Ms. Horwath moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 3, An Act to prohibit harassment based on enforcement or adoption of public health measures related to COVID-19 /
Projet de loi 3, Loi visant à interdire le harcèlement fondé sur l'application ou l'adoption de mesures de santé publique liées à la COVID-19.

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 like to explain her bill?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Certainly, Speaker. Thank you so much. I appreciate that.

As folks know, this has become an issue that has been significantly problematic in our province, and several weeks ago I made a commitment to bring legislation forward.

This act stops people from engaging in harassing behaviours in safety zones. I'm happy to see that the Liberals decided to jump on the bandwagon, but the safety zones in our bill include places such as a school or a daycare centre, a hospital or a health care centre, a local business. Harassing behaviours outlined in this bill include trying to dissuade a person from following public health guidelines relating to COVID-19, hounding people who do not follow public health guidelines, or performing or attempting to perform an act of disapproval concerning public health guidelines relating to COVID-19 by any means. That means shouting, yelling, signs or any other means of demonstration, Speaker. And we do attach fines up to \$25,000 for being convicted of that kind of breach.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I need to remind members that our traditional practice for introduction of bills does not include extensive statements in association with the explanation of the bill. I appreciate the information nonetheless. Thank you.

LONG-TERM CARE COMMISSION'S
RECOMMENDATIONS REPORTING
ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021
SUR LA COMMUNICATION
DES RECOMMANDATIONS
DE LA COMMISSION D'ENQUÊTE
SUR LES FOYERS DE SOINS
DE LONGUE DURÉE

Mr. Fraser moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 4, An Act to amend the Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007 to require reporting on the implementation of the recommendations of Ontario's Long-Term Care COVID-19 Commission / Projet de loi 4, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les foyers de soins de longue durée pour exiger la communication de renseignements sur la mise en oeuvre des recommandations de la Commission ontarienne d'enquête sur la COVID-19 dans les foyers de soins de longue durée.

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 care to briefly explain his bill?

Mr. John Fraser: Yes. Thanks, Speaker. It's a bill that I introduced in the last session. It requires the government to implement recommendation 85 of their own long-term-care commission, which is to report back on their progress in one and three years.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Introduction of bills? I recognize the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you, Speaker. I'm honoured to rise for the first time as environment minister in the House.

YORK REGION
WASTEWATER ACT, 2021
LOI DE 2021 SUR LES EAUX USÉES
DANS LA RÉGION DE YORK

Mr. Piccini moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 5, An Act respecting York Region Wastewater / Projet de loi 5, Loi concernant les eaux usées dans la région de York.

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 minister care to briefly explain his bill?

1510

Hon. David Piccini: I would. Thank you, Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce legislation that will enable the regional municipality of York to find the right evidence-based solution to meet its waste water servicing needs. We know that York region is Ontario's third-largest municipality and growing rapidly, with the population expected to reach 1.5 million in the next decade. We want to make sure, as a government, that we have the best environmental, social and financial input on potential waste water service options for York region. This is why I am pleased to introduce the York Region Wastewater Act, 2021. I will have more to say during second reading.

JOBS AND JABS ACT, 2021
LOI DE 2021 SUR L'INCIDENCE
DU STATUT VACCINAL SUR L'EMPLOI

Mr. Baber moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 6, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to reprisals respecting the vaccination status of employees / Projet de loi 6, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne l'interdiction d'exercer des représailles en raison du statut vaccinal des employés.

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 care to explain his bill briefly?

Mr. Roman Baber: Yes, Speaker. Thank you. The bill amends the Employment Standards Act, 2000, to prohibit employers and persons acting on behalf of an employer from intimidating, dismissing, placing on leave or otherwise penalizing an employee or threatening to do so because of the employee's vaccination status or because the employee refuses to disclose their vaccination status to the employer. The amendments are deemed effective to have come into force on September 1, 2021.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Introduction of bills?

Mr. Roman Baber: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for York Centre.

Mr. Roman Baber: I seek unanimous consent that notwithstanding any standing order or special order of the House, the order for second reading of Bill 6, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to reprisals respecting the vaccination status of employees, be immediately called, and that the Speaker shall immediately put the question on the motion for second reading of this bill, and that the bill shall be ordered for third reading, which order shall immediately be called, and that the Speaker shall immediately put the question on the motion for third reading, and that the votes on second and third reading of the bill shall not be deferred.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for York Centre is seeking the unanimous consent of the

House to consider Bill 6, second and third reading, with respect to private members' public business. Agreed? I heard a no.

10 PAID SICK DAYS
FOR ONTARIO WORKERS ACT, 2021
LOI DE 2021 VISANT À ACCORDER
10 JOURS DE CONGÉ DE MALADIE PAYÉ
AUX TRAVAILLEURS DE L'ONTARIO

Mr. Fraser moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 7, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to personal emergency leave and the establishment of an employer support program for such leave / Projet de loi 7, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne le congé d'urgence personnelle et la mise en oeuvre d'un programme d'appui des employeurs relatif à ce congé.

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 Ottawa South care to explain his bill briefly?

Mr. John Fraser: Yes. Thank you, Speaker. The bill makes the following amendments to the Employment Standards Act, 2000. Sections 50, 50.0.1 and 50.0.2 of the act, which provide for sick leave, family responsibility leave and bereavement leave, respectively, are repealed. Section 50 is re-enacted to provide up to 10 paid days for a personal emergency leave in the case of personal illness, injury or medical emergency; the illness, injury or medical emergency of a specified family member; or an urgent matter concerning a specified family member.

Number two, the act is also amended to require that the ministry implement an employer support program to provide resources and supports to assist employers in providing personal emergency leave as required by the new section 50. And section 50.1 of the act, which currently provides for three days of paid infectious disease emergency leave, is amended to increase this number to 10 days of paid leave.

PETITIONS

COVID-19 TESTING

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: I want to thank the parents of children in Earl Beatty and R.H. McGregor schools for putting this petition together.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we are parents, guardians and community members concerned about children in Ontario who are not yet eligible for vaccination against COVID-19;

"Whereas we are in the midst of the fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the highly transmissible Delta variant circulating in the community and threatening the

health of our children and the viability of maintaining open classes and schools;

"Whereas it has been widely acknowledged that keeping Ontario schools open is critical for our children's mental health, safety and well-being;

"Whereas rapid antigen testing is a safe and low-cost tool that can be deployed to detect pre-symptomatic and asymptomatic carriers of the virus and limit the spread of the virus;

"Whereas the Ontario government has made rapid antigen tests freely available to "businesses" and their "employees" staffed by vaccine-eligible and vaccinated adults;

"Whereas this government has stated that maintaining open schools is a priority, but has not made those tests available for the purpose of testing unvaccinated children;

"Whereas schools and child care centres in Ontario in areas of high COVID-19 transmission like Toronto should have the ability to access rapid tests for children not yet eligible for vaccination;

"Whereas businesses and economy have been continually prioritized during this pandemic, while children have been deprived of their right to a proper education, with constant school closures and disruptions to learning;

"Whereas this government has downloaded procurement of rapid antigen tests to parents and guardians, thereby increasing inequality of access to health and safety measures for communities that disproportionately bear the burden of impacts of COVID-19;

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

"Provide immediate access to free rapid antigen tests for children born after 2009 in Ontario in areas with high community spread of COVID-19; and work with partners in education and health to help distribute them."

I agree with this petition, will be affixing my signature, and getting it to the table.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's interesting: It doesn't matter where you are in this Legislature, the view is always different.

Speaker, this petition that I have is—I've received several thousands names on petitions, especially from some of the optometrists down in my area. It's 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;"

Therefore “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 wholeheartedly support this petition. I will sign my name and give it to the appropriate personnel.

ASSISTIVE DEVICES

Mr. Joel Harden: I’d like to present a petition on behalf of many disabled Ontarians. It reads:

“Reform Assistive Devices Program (DJNO) Campaign.”

Whereas “the Assistive Devices Program (ADP) is mandated to help people in Ontario with long-term physical disabilities pay for customized equipment, like wheelchairs, walkers, communication devices, hearing aids, and more. The ADP is also supposed to help cover the costs of specialized supplies, such as those used with ostomies;”

Whereas “there are many problems with the ADP program. Though it is supposed to take six to eight weeks to be able to have a file processed, people with disabilities can often wait for many more months to hear back about an application, and receive the required assistive device. This is due to a chronic underfunding and understaffing of the program;

“We, the undersigned, are concerned residents in Ontario with disabilities or who are allies of” those with “disabilities. We urge the government of Ontario to take the following actions as it pertains to the Assistive Devices Program (ADP) in Ontario:”

(1) “license all vendors that sell and/or repair assistive devices in Ontario;”

(2) “have all vendors that sell and/or repair assistive devices be subjected to annual reviews by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services;”

(3) “mandate and enforce timely access to assistive devices funded partially or in full by the province of Ontario, including addressing the backlogged files as it relates to” the “Assistive Devices Program;”

(4) “mandate and enforce timely access to repairs as it relates to assistive devices funded partially or in full by the province of Ontario, including addressing the backlogged files as it relates to” the “Assistive Devices Program;”

(5) “mandate and enforce clearer supports as it relates to the transition between pediatric and adult services;”

And, finally, (6) “mandate and enforce adequate staffing for the Assistive Devices Program, in order to address the backlog.”

I want to thank my friends from the Disability Justice Network of Ontario for making this very timely and important petition. I will sign it and send it to the Clerks’ table.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I rise to present a petition on behalf of children and seniors in Ontario who desperately need eye care. It reads as follows:

“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.”

Speaker, I affix my name to this petition. I agree with it, and I will send it to the Clerks’ table via one of our underpaid ushers.

PLACES OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I present this petition on behalf of all places of worship throughout the province of Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas places of worship provide essential spiritual, emotional, and mental health services to help combat depression, anxiety, fear, and other mental health disorders;

“Whereas gatherings at places of worship is essential, spiritual nourishment for the faithful;

“Whereas places of worship are important for good health and well-being for those in search of the truth;

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

“(1) Designate places of worship as essential during any COVID-19 or variant health crisis causing lockdowns and/or stay-at-home orders provided places of worship follow Ontario guidelines to ensure the health and safety of staff and those attending worship services;

“(2) Expand places of worship capacity as soon as it is safe to do so.”

I wholeheartedly support this petition making places of worship essential. I will sign my name to it and give it to the appropriate personnel.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Marit Stiles: I am very pleased to present this petition on behalf of Alejandro Vera, one of my constituents, as well as many families and local optometrists. It reads as follows:

“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’m very pleased to affix my signature to this petition. I fully support it, and I’ll be tabling it with the Clerks.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I’d like to thank the family members and the members of the communities of eight long-term-care homes within the Niagara region as well as my home riding, St. Catharines, and I’d like to thank the hundreds of names that are on this petition.

“A Better Place to Live, a Better Place to Work.

“Ontario’s staffing plan 2021-2025 was released December 2020. The plan commits to increase staffing levels in long-term-care homes in Ontario to four hours of care per resident per day. This staffing increase is very much needed and, as well, welcomed.

“The 2025 target is too late. We recommend that the four hours of care target in Ontario’s staffing plan be implemented sooner to support the needs of residents living in our long-term-care homes today.”

I fully support this petition. I’m affixing my name to it and sending it down to the table.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am very pleased to have this opportunity to present this petition on behalf of so many across my community. I haven’t seen, in my seven years, such an enthusiastic petition campaign. I’m very glad to bring their voices here with me in this 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” results “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 wholeheartedly support this. I will affix my signature and happily send it to the table.

1530

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I’d like to thank the many London West families, children and seniors who rely on local optometrists for high-quality eye care. In particular, I want to recognize Byron Optometry, Westmount optometry and Old South Optometry for their participation in this petition campaign to save eye care in Ontario. The petition reads:

“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 support this petition. I affix my signature and will send it to the table.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Petitions? The member for St. Catharines just got one in.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just snuck in under the bell, eh?

I want to thank the residents of St. Catharines for bringing this petition forward:

“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 full-heartedly support this petition and will be affixing my name to it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The time for petitions has expired.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 5, 2021, on the motion to reappoint the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I believe earlier today we had to interrupt the member from Brampton Centre, and we return to the member now to continue her debate.

Ms. Sara Singh: It’s an honour to rise again this afternoon to continue to contribute to the debate on motion number 1 here in the Legislature, to have the select committee on emergency oversight reinstated here in the province of Ontario, because the government prorogued the House.

As I mentioned earlier, this is something that obviously had to take place, because the government of the day made the decision to prorogue the Legislature here in Ontario, effectively wiping clear all of the bills and order paper items, as well as committees like this that were so important. As my colleague from Humber River–Black Creek discussed earlier, it was actually something that he foreshadowed in committee that could be a potential situation that we might need to deal with here in the Legislature of Ontario, where the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight, should the House be prorogued, would no longer sit to hear important testimony from folks who were coming to committee.

As we’ve seen in committee and as we experienced, despite the committee being set up to provide accountability and transparency to people here in Ontario, we only heard from a very small group of people.

We heard from the Solicitor General, and we thank her for her time. As I said earlier, although she did appear at committee on numerous occasions to act as the Premier’s

designate, the Premier not once—not once, Speaker—showed up to committee to provide answers and clarity to the people of Ontario. All summer long, the Premier has been playing a hide-and-seek game, not only with the people of Ontario but the media. Again, here is a committee that was created to help provide accountability and transparency. The Premier could have showed up and provided some assurances to people in Ontario, but instead he sent his designates to do that work. As I said earlier, we often would hear quite lengthy responses from the minister, despite some very well-pointed questions—not only from the opposition. Members of the public sent us questions that they needed answers to. We really didn’t get the clarity and transparency that we needed.

As I mentioned earlier, we asked the Solicitor General on several occasions to help justify the vaccine rollout here in the province of Ontario, one that was slow, sloppy, chaotic, confusing and left out hot spot communities like the one in Peel—and Brampton, the riding that I represent. In our community of Brampton, we actually experienced some of the highest positivity rates not only in the province, Speaker, but across the country. So when we asked the Solicitor General, who was tasked, along with General Hillier, to provide vaccines to this province in a way that was going to be fair and that they would be accountable for, they could not justify why a community like Peel was excluded from the pharmacy pilot program when it was first announced. So in March 2021, while the third wave was raging on in communities like Peel, expert after expert—their own science table—was recommending an increase in allocation of vaccines to our community, the government did not do that. They did not do that. And when we asked at a committee that was set up for accountability and answers to the people, families that were literally dying because they could not get access to the supports they needed—the Solicitor General and this government failed to provide any rationale for why a community like Peel and cities like Brampton were excluded from the pharmacy rollout.

As Dr. Amit Arya points out, as COVID-19 cases reached all-time highs across the province, he and many other experts were questioning why communities like Kingston were given the green light to test the pharmacy vaccine distribution program while communities like Brampton were completely neglected and left out of the conversation. As he points out, on the week of April 21, Brampton’s coronavirus positivity rate was almost double the provincial rate. The provincial rate was 10.4%. In Brampton, we were experiencing positivity rates of 22.4% per 100,000 people.

Speaker, I think the people in Brampton deserve an answer and deserve some justification for why our community did not get our fair share of vaccines to help our essential workers get vaccinated, to help protect their families—families where we know some as young as 13 lost their lives because their parents were essential workers going in to our warehouses and manufacturing hubs to keep the rest of this province moving. But this government didn’t think that the people of Brampton were worth the increased vaccine allocation.

They also didn't think that our community deserved paid sick days. That's why at committee we asked time and time again why this government was making a decision that was costing us lives when they had the resources, they had the power and they had the ability to implement paid sick days. Again, their own science table and experts like Dr. Loh, the Chief Medical Officer of Health of the Peel region, clearly stated that paid sick days would have saved lives. The government chose not to implement that. They chose not to provide policy measures that would have protected people in our community, and again, at a committee that was set up to provide accountability and transparency, we didn't get a single justification for why. People in the province of Ontario and the people of Brampton Centre and the people in Brampton had to continue waiting for this government to take any action at all. In fact, what we heard the Premier say was that it just simply wasn't worth the investment. They were waiting for others to step up to the plate, when they had the resources to do it themselves. And at a committee, again, that should have at least provided some clarity around the decisions and the processes that were being put in place here in Ontario, the Solicitor General could not provide a justification for why the government refused to implement paid sick days.

1540

Speaker, it breaks my heart to think that the strategy here in the province of Ontario was not one that used an equity approach at all. There was no equity strategy here. That's why communities like mine were left behind. A one-size-fits-all approach was used, even though experts made it clear that you need to target the hot spot communities. As Dr. Loh says, "I think the Ontario science table made it very clear—if you target by age and hot spot status, then you actually save more lives and you get this thing under control sooner. If you look at where the cases are typically right now in Ontario [and] you get this thing under control in the hot spots of Toronto, Peel and York, you solve most of the province's problem right there."

When we asked at the committee why the government did not use an approach that would have targeted those hot spot communities like Peel, the government felt that their strategy was working, even though we know it was not. The government felt that what they were doing was safe enough to continue moving forward. That meant that people continued to lose their lives and families were filling up the ICUs. To save a buck, what they actually did was strain our health care system resources. In a community like Brampton, where we still only have one hospital, that meant that our essential workers were being shipped out of our community because the government—the government—failed to take action. It's a shame.

It's a shame to also learn that they had billions of dollars on the table—not just millions; billions of dollars—that could have saved lives, that could have made sure that essential workers got the supports that they needed. But their decision-making process left that money on the table, and it meant that people paid the ultimate price with their lives, because this government chose to pinch pennies rather than save lives.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Come on.

Ms. Sara Singh: Listen. This is the minister of tourism, culture and sport here.

I'm pretty sure that your industries are also—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We'll have no—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Excuse me, I'm standing. That means you're sitting. That means there will be no cross-aisle dialogue this afternoon during debate, from either side. Thank you very much.

We'll return to the member from Brampton Centre.

Ms. Sara Singh: Thank you, Speaker.

I don't think that it's a bit of a stretch to claim that the government had resources and chose not to support essential workers. It chose not to support small businesses. To this day, I'm sure every single one of the constituencies that are represented in this Legislature are still receiving calls from small business owners who have not received the supports that they need—the supports that this government promised would be there. And when we asked questions at committee, they failed to provide answers. Folks can get upset about that, and they can claim that what we're saying is a misrepresentation of the truth. However, it is very clear—and I'm sure that if they go through their own inboxes, they will continue to see inquiries from folks in their communities who are wondering where that money has gone and why it hasn't flowed to help provide the support to Ontarians who desperately needed it.

At the height of this pandemic, this government waited to see what modelling numbers would suggest before taking any action. This, in fact, did cost us lives in the province of Ontario.

As a committee that had the power to call expert witnesses to provide testimony, the government chose to only bring its own members in. The Solicitor General, the Minister of Health and Dr. Williams—who, at the time, was our Chief Medical Officer of Health—testified. What would have been helpful was giving the power to committee members to call other expert witnesses who could have helped us maybe answer questions that the Solicitor General was unable to, or unwilling to. But the committee was never granted these powers. We were never given the ability to bring people there who could help shed light on the government's response here in the province of Ontario and their handling of the pandemic—exactly what this committee was set up to do.

One issue, on top of all the other issues we're dealing with in Brampton, is the rising cost of auto insurance. It might seem a little off-topic, but it's actually very much connected to what we've just gone through here in the province of Ontario and is a part of this committee's responsibilities. So we asked the minister. There are regulations around price gouging that have been implemented, but it did nothing to help protect people who were being gouged, frankly, by insurance companies through this pandemic. In fact, New Democrats proposed that the government cap auto insurance rates for drivers by

50% and reduce those premiums for folks who were not driving because they had been mandated to stay home. Reduce their premiums—the government had the power to do that throughout the pandemic; they chose not to. So when we asked questions about that—again, no answers. The government felt it wasn't their responsibility to help Ontarians get through this pandemic by doing things like lowering their auto insurance rates.

Interjection.

Ms. Sara Singh: Well, some are still trying to navigate the process of getting a refund; many did not.

Speaker, I understand that I should be making my comments directly through you, but it is really distracting to have members heckling on the other side because they feel that they have done their job, when in fact they have not. Community members continue to send us their bills—and I'm sure they get them in their office as well—that clearly demonstrate that they have had an increase in their auto insurance premiums throughout the pandemic. There are very few people in the province of Ontario who received a rebate, and if they did, it was not comparable to what they were actually paying for the auto insurance rates in their community. It's very clear in Brampton that we have a serious problem with postal code discrimination. The government has chosen to do nothing about that. Three years later into their mandate, there's nothing about auto insurance rates. In fact, the opposite has been happening for most folks. Rates have been going up.

Speaker, while we'll continue to ask questions at committee, I think that if there is a committee that is set up to provide accountability and transparency to the people of the province, the government needs to do its part. It needs to answer questions, and it needs to also start listening to the suggestions that are being made by opposition members to help Ontarians get through COVID-19 and what we're experiencing now: a fourth wave.

I understand that my time is up, Speaker. Thank you very much.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: As always, it's a pleasure to rise in the House on behalf of my constituents in the great riding of Davenport.

I want to start by thanking the staff here in the Legislature and the hard-working civil servants across Ontario for their work in keeping Ontario safe. And, of course, my thanks to all of the front-line, essential workers.

But today especially, I want to shout out to teachers across this province, on World Teachers' Day. I want to thank you for all that you have given and you continue to give.

Interjections.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yes. I know it has been a very difficult time, and it continues to be. I hear from many of you almost every night, and I've heard your words, I've listened to your tears and frustration, particularly around hybrid learning and the size of classes. I want you to know we are listening and that we, the parents of this province

and we in the official opposition, have your back and continue to fight for you.

The motion we're debating today, though, is nothing that's going to particularly help to improve public education or any number of important priorities in Ontario, but it is an important motion to reappoint the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight. What is that committee? My constituents have asked. This committee was appointed to receive oral reports from the Premier or his designate—that's an important caveat—on any extensions of emergency orders under the so-called reopening Ontario act. Ontarians will recall that on July 21, 2020, the Ontario Legislature passed that act, and under that act, emergency orders related to the pandemic could be extended by up to 30 days at a time. So this committee has an important role to play, because the government, in passing that legislation, granted themselves truly extraordinary powers. There is no question that those powers cannot be granted lightly, because in the wrong hands, we have good reason to fear what could happen without proper checks and balances.

1550

Ontarians have a right to fully understand the rationale of the government and the Premier in extending any order. We in the NDP official opposition have supported that need for greater transparency, for greater accountability around these emergency orders and the role of the committee. Since we have this opportunity to debate this motion, it's important to point out that several crucial factors have been missing.

A committee like this needs to be able to do the work, needs to be able to have access to the folks making decisions. It's crucial to that transparency, to that accountability that we talk about. For example, despite the efforts of the official opposition, the Premier has never once appeared at the committee to explain or defend his expansion of those sweeping powers.

In January, the NDP called on the former Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Williams, to explain if and why he had recommended delay after delay in taking action at a time when we were living through longer, deeper and broader lockdowns, with more agony, more loss. We know that Doug Ford chose not to invest in urgent and effective protections. But appearances by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, appearances by the Minister of Health were infrequent, to say the least, and with no notice to the committee. Furthermore, the opposition has not been granted the power to call witnesses, which very much limits the effectiveness of the committee.

We have called again and again for more oversight over the government's unilateral behind-closed-doors decision-making during this pandemic. We've tried to make this committee more effective, but this government has refused to listen, and they have not taken that action.

I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, I saw this first-hand when I subbed into this committee last time, in August. We were rapidly approaching the start of the school year. It was just three weeks away, and Ontarians had heard nothing about preparations for a safe return to school. I

asked the Solicitor General sitting in, once again, for the Premier why this government refused to require mandatory vaccination of education workers and why they were instead moving forward with this disclosure policy, which, I want to tell you, boards have struggled to administer, especially since they were given such a late warning about this and little guidance.

I asked the Solicitor General about standards for ventilation and to confirm some of the promises that her own cabinet colleague the Minister of Education had made just that week about filters.

I asked why they were refusing to act on vaccine certificates, which were being called for by nearly every expert in the country.

Did we get answers? No, we did not get answers. We got more of the same. We got the government listing once again all the things they were always so proud of, but not actually answering the questions that Ontarians have and actually listening to the opposition and engaging in coming up with important solutions to really complex issues. So we got no answers, and as usual, the decision on the vaccine certificate would then not come until weeks later. “Too little, too late” seems to be the usual refrain of this government’s actions.

Now today, here we are being asked to revive a committee that already existed and was functioning, however lacking. Why? Because the Premier felt the need to prorogue this place. And why? To add a few more weeks to the summer recess. So we did not come back to this place until this week, until yesterday, until October. While Ontario was struggling under a fourth wave that was made worse by this government’s inaction, they chose more inaction. While case numbers went up, while school outbreaks grew, this Premier and this cabinet were nowhere to be seen.

Now they’re back, and instead of getting to business, helping people get through this ongoing wave, they have us here debating this motion, which is basically cleaning up their own poor decisions. That’s not what the people I represent thought we would be focused on these first few days. They were looking for action from a government that hit the snooze button weeks ago while those folks are just trying to get by.

I’ll tell you some of the things they wanted action on, Mr. Speaker. They wanted more than empty words. They wanted action on hiring thousands of nurses and PSWs. They wanted to shorten the painfully long waiting lists for backlogged surgeries. They wanted a safe schools plan. They wanted more grants for small businesses.

This morning, they would love to have seen this government taken the opportunity to pass, in one go, through unanimous consent, the leader of the official opposition’s bill on safety zones, to protect those essential workers this government loves to talk about but won’t step up to protect, those health care workers and those educators—because we’re now starting to see protests around our schools.

They would have liked to see more support for health care. They would have liked to see more support for those schools and those small businesses.

They would have liked to see a throne speech—which, by the way, is this government’s signal of their priorities—that mentioned paid sick days or even mentioned schools and education just once, or maybe child care. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that if we are going to get on a path to recovery in this province, that recovery is going to depend on our public education system, on child care, on paid sick days and supports for working people in this province, and it’s going to depend on women getting back into the workforce. We’re going to need that she-covery. There was not one mention of that in that throne speech and in this government’s priorities. That’s what we should be talking about here today. Those are the kinds of priorities that we should be discussing.

Instead, we’re cleaning up this little mess again. I feel like we spend 80% of our time in here cleaning up these little messes that this government creates because they decide to prorogue, because they don’t want to come back from summer recess before October. What was that about? We have important work to do here.

I will say again, just to wrap up, this government’s approach to this committee needs to change.

I want to tell you that there has been a call from—and again, I speak about education a fair amount because I am the education critic for the official opposition—from education experts and from front-line workers across this province to have a committee meet regularly to come up with the plans that are needed not just for dealing with the pandemic but for recovery in our education system. How are we going to deal with that learning disruption? How are we going to support those students and those education workers who have lost so much?

But this government doesn’t want to talk about anything like that, that’s substantial. They want to have their Solicitor General come to this committee and ramble off the various regulations. They don’t want to actually have anybody have real, deep conversations. The time, really, when we should be able to work together more closely for the good of the people of this province, the government has chosen a totally different path, and I think they’ve done a great disservice to Ontarians in doing that.

I’ve got to say, we all were out there during the federal election recently. One thing I certainly picked up at the doorstep—and I don’t know if others did; I hear this all the time anyway—is that people are really tired of opposition and government not being able to work together, especially in this moment. That’s why they like minority governments.

I would love to see the kind of committee work that happened in this place 20 or 30 years ago, when I used to work here. I would love to see that again, because work got done. People stopped and they listened. We rolled up our sleeves. We actually attacked these challenges across party lines, and it was important. If there was ever a time when Ontarians deserve us to take those steps, it’s now.

1600

So I think a committee like this has an opportunity, Mr. Speaker, and I hope that this committee will continue to work to do better, that there will be consideration given to

calling forward witnesses that the opposition would like to call, that we will see the Premier actually appear at the committee to be answerable to the members of the committee and to the people of this province. I don't think it's too much to ask that we give that time and that attention to this committee and to these important issues that are being debated.

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

Mr. John Fraser: It's good to have an opportunity to rise in debates. It's the first opportunity since we're back in the Legislature here. I didn't use time in my question—but it's really great to see all of you again, and it's nice to be here in the afternoon, having a chance to debate and listen to each other.

We're talking about the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight. It's a bit of a misnomer. It's really the select committee on oversight of some regulations we made way back when at the beginning of the pandemic. We can only amend those, we can only talk about those, and we don't vote. We don't actually get the information that you would expect to get in emergency management oversight.

Last December, I put forward a motion that this Legislature passed. Here's how it read: "I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government needs to ensure a clear and transparent COVID-19 vaccination rollout plan that includes prioritizing high-risk Ontarians, biweekly reporting of key statistics and monthly appearances before the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight."

That last piece didn't happen. The member from Davenport is right: The Premier has never appeared. It has been his designate. I have a lot of respect for the Solicitor General, and she did the job that she was sent there to do. That job was very limiting.

You didn't address the issue with the vaccine rollout. It's really great now that such a large percentage of Ontario's eligible population has been vaccinated, but it was a really bumpy road up until about mid-April. There was delay and confusion and not a lot of clarity or transparency, which we asked for in this motion.

I'm going to support this motion, and I've got some other things to say about it.

We ended the state of emergency in Ontario to go to this because the government didn't want to come back here every month and extend the state of emergency. What that did was, it tied us to this really tight frame in which we could only amend the things that we'd already put on the paper and not something new.

The Leader of the Opposition and I have both put forward bills today about creating safe zones around schools and hospitals. We've seen those protests. We're all upset by them. We all know they're wrong, but the government is not doing anything. If we were in an emergency situation, we could do it like they did in Alberta—it's critical infrastructure. We could make a law, a regulation. We could move quickly, and we need to move quickly.

We know what has happened before with these protests. The next thing that's going to happen is that we're going to start to vaccinate five- to 11-year-olds and other kids in school. And where do you think that's going to happen? It's going to happen in schools. And what does that mean? That means there's going to be a greater probability that we're going to see the same kinds of things that we saw outside schools and hospitals in September and across this province. We know it's a problem. No one should be impeded or blocked or harassed when trying to access a school or a hospital or a health service. It's not that complicated, but the government hamstrung us in our ability to do this quickly. That's a problem. We couldn't deal with this in oversight because there's no regulation with it. Committee members on the opposition side—we tried to raise issues that were outside the scope of the committee, because that's what we needed for oversight. We needed to talk about the vaccine rollout. We needed to talk about mandated vaccines. We needed to talk about the things we would have talked about if we were in here debating the extension of emergency orders.

In the legislation—and I'm not totally familiar with it—I know that after the declaration of the emergency, a Premier needs to report. That hasn't happened yet. We've gone through 14 meetings of what I would call the Premier's select committee, and not one appearance, not one cameo—we did have the Chief Medical Officer of Health and the Deputy Premier and health minister in a cameo that we didn't know about until they actually were in the room, which is not a great way to have oversight—not one committee.

I'm going to support this motion because I think it's important that we have this venue. But I think we need to add something to it. So, Speaker, I would like to move an amendment to this motion.

I move that this motion be amended by adding the following to the end of the motion: "And that the Premier commit to attending, at minimum, one select committee meeting and answer questions before the committee before the end of the 2021 calendar year."

It's a simple request. I'm not asking for a lot.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Mr. Fraser has moved an amendment to the government notice of motion. It says: "I move that the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight be reappointed with the same mandate and membership that existed prior to the prorogation of the first session of the 42nd Parliament, and that it resume its business at the same stage of progress as at prorogation."

"I move that the motion be amended by adding the following to the end of the motion: 'And that the Premier commit to attending, at minimum, one select committee meeting and answer questions before the end of the 2021 calendar year.'"

Mr. Fraser, would you care to comment on your amendment?

Mr. John Fraser: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

As I said, I'm going to support the motion. I'd ask my colleagues to support this simple request. I think it's

reasonable for the committee and for the people of Ontario for the Premier to appear for an hour about something that's so important to them: what's happening in this pandemic.

I'm not going to belabour the point. I've spoken my piece. I've put forward a motion, and I encourage my colleagues to support it. I think it's reasonable. I think it's simple. It's kind of a bare minimum, Speaker. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate? To be clear, at this stage we are debating the amendment. I turn to the member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Joel Harden: I think what I have to say will help my friends in government and also my Liberal colleague from Ottawa in understanding something I feel is important we keep in mind as we debate the emergency measures of this province and the work of this committee.

I'm honoured to be the critic for persons with disabilities in this province. I'm in constant contact with an amazing team, with families and people all over Ontario, and I want to bring to light a story that helps at least focus my mind, and I hope it helps focus our minds, about why it's so important that this committee, in the scope of its work, as amended, proposed by my colleague, keep in mind the unique needs of persons with disabilities.

1610

I want to talk about David O'Brien from Kitchener, Ontario. Sadly, David passed away on September 26, 2018, before COVID-19 even happened. But his death tells us a lot about why we need to make sure persons with disabilities have access to the critical services they need, particularly in the pandemic.

Before I talk about his death, I want to talk about who David was as a person. David had a degenerative condition. He had many health conditions, but one in particular was called Friedreich's ataxia. What it actually gave him was an enlarged heart, which his family often talked about. That was appropriate, if you met David, because his favourite thing he liked to do, despite being confined to a wheelchair since age 13, was fix cars. He liked to do it with his dad, and then when he got more skilled at it later, he liked to do it himself. He even modified his power chair, Speaker. If you were to see him—and I have seen pictures of this power chair—he had a ghetto blaster on the back, he had various decals all over the thing. It looked fantastic. The neighbours loved David.

But his degenerative condition became more challenging for him to live with as he aged, and by the time he was in his thirties, it was clear to the family that his chair needed modifications to be able to ensure David was safe and comfortable in that chair. David was a big man—a big man. Speaker, if I'm standing 6 foot 2, think about David as even bigger than me, and a strapping mechanic. David needed straps to be able to stay safely in his chair.

For people who aren't aware of what life is like with a power chair, there is a monopoly on the provision of these services by one company, Motion, in the province of Ontario. I can't tell you how much casework our office has done locally and across the province of Ontario around complaints with this particular company.

In this case, David's mom, Laurie, was constantly asking Motion to help train her, family members and the PSWs who worked with David on how to safely attach these straps. Motion was happy to grab the wheelchair, throw the straps on and dump it back off at the O'Brien's home, but they weren't going to show them how to safely use these straps. If you talk to occupational therapists, this is critical. It's absolutely critical to make sure that you not only get the device fixed, but you use it safely. So the device got dropped back off. They made two separate appointments with occupational therapists from Motion. Both times, those appointments were cancelled—both times. They had to line up with the family's needs, with the PSWs' needs—both times cancelled at the last minute. Meanwhile, the family was feeling things were getting more and more unsafe. They would see David slumping forward. As I said earlier, David was a big guy. And his mom and dad and brother and sister can't be there for every single second of every single moment of the day. But that's essentially what the province of Ontario is asking them to do, because they weren't getting the training they needed.

David is not someone who just likes to hang around the house. David wants to use his assistive device and get out and go work on some cars, meet his buddies, check in with the neighbours. Persons with disabilities I've been privileged to meet—that is what folks want. Assistive devices are not just a frill when you're someone with a disability; they're your ticket to live a full and meaningful life.

But twice the appointment was cancelled. And on September 26, David was found by his father, slumped against a wall, asphyxiated. He'd fallen forward. Can you imagine? His dad did his best to resuscitate his heart. The ambulance was called. Because of the meds he was on for his heart, his heart actually, apparently, soldiered on. David died that day.

Laurie O'Brien has written to the Minister of Health about this matter, Laurie O'Brien has worked with the Ombudsman's office of the province of Ontario on this matter, and she has not had any justice.

Do you know what lawyers have told her, Speaker? Lawyers have told her that, unfortunately, she's unlikely to get legal justice because, in the heart of that awful day—if you can imagine what September 26 was like for the O'Brien family—she didn't ask for an autopsy. Everything they have been through—she didn't ask for an autopsy, so it was difficult, according to legal advice Laurie and the family have received, to think about making sure that those who refused to offer prompt services for David were held accountable for what they had done.

Let's go back to the concept of a pandemic for a second. Let's think about all of our neighbours who are stir-crazy, or have been stir-crazy, from living in lockdowns. I'm sorry, Speaker; I don't want to sound insensitive to those needs. I have felt it myself; I've talked to so many constituents about it. But people have no conception at all of what it's like to lose your liberty, your freedom of

movement, until you have lived a day in David's shoes and the O'Brien family's and thousands of other families' here in the province of Ontario who are poorly served by the Assistive Devices Program, poorly served by Motion. It is an absolute travesty that we have a double standard around the living needs of people like David. David was a barrier-breaker. David wanted to be a mechanic—a certified, skilled trades mechanic. That's what he wanted, but he has been deprived of that.

So when this committee does its work—I wanted to read this story into the record today so it is now a matter of Ontario's history. Laurie and the family can know that she may not get her day in court to get justice for her family, she may not still get help from this government—I plead for you to help this family. We have made appeals, and I hope, even after today, some of those appeals will be heard. I've worked with members from the government on disability rights issues before. I encourage you to contact our office. We will put you in direct contact with this family so you can help them. But behind this family are thousands and thousands of others who need to be looked at closest, frankly. The vulnerable in our communities should be the focal point of any government; I don't care the political stripe.

In the time I have left, I want to talk about another case that leaves disability rights for a moment and points to a critical need we have in our city, and that's protecting the live music venues and the artistic venues that we are losing in this pandemic. I haven't heard enough discussion about this, quite frankly. We've lost six in Ottawa—six venues that artists and artistic creators used to reach the public.

I don't know about you, Speaker—wait a second. I know who you are. I know how much you love poetry, and I know how much you love the arts. I know you're not alone because this entire House supported your poet laureate bill. But think about, in the context of the pandemic, if we've lost six in Ottawa, how many artistic spaces have been lost across the province of Ontario. And do you know what one of the major causes for the loss of those spaces are? My colleague from Brampton Centre spoke about it earlier: insurance gouging.

We have, if you can believe it, Speaker, a highly profitable industry—particularly profitable in this pandemic—which refused to pay business interruption insurance. If you're a small business owner—I come from a small business family—can you imagine a better case for having your business interrupted than this pandemic? If you've been paying those fees year after year after year, making somebody rich, you would want that moment, wouldn't you, to be able to make sure that you could keep your livelihood going when no customers are coming through the door, when, in the case of a live venue, you couldn't host concerts because it wasn't safe. Our public health experts are saying, “No singing, no congregation inside.” That was the moment you would want to make that claim, right? But no—every single business interruption insurance application of which I've been made aware was denied by the insurance industry. And like my colleague MPP Singh, our deputy leader, said,

there has been no compulsion, none from the government, to ask the insurance industry to share the burden of this moment with small business—zilch, zero. We've lost six live music venues.

But guess what? This is the great thing about small business, Speaker: Even in the midst of an awful situation like that, there are people who will come to the community's rescue at a local level because they are fighters and they won't give up.

I want to take a moment right now to shout out to Geoff Cass. Geoff Cass is a community builder back home. He used to be staff at the Dovercourt community centre, putting on kids' programs. But he is a rock-and-roll dad, and he loves his live music. When a business boarded up right around the corner from where I actually live, near Billings Bridge shopping mall, Geoff got in there with a group of people and said, “Let's open up a live music venue in this place. Let's call it Red Bird Live. Let's make sure there's a place where kids can learn a musical instrument at a reasonable cost, where artists can perform, and where we can, in the context of this recovery, start thinking about live music again.” And we've started to see it, Speaker, haven't we? We've started to see more outdoor music and gathering, and it warms my heart. It warms my heart to see people getting together safely—doubly vaccinated, with a mask—to be able to share in that.

1620

But now we're talking about an indoor venue. Geoff is taking a risk, but he has been in constant dialogue with Ottawa Public Health to make sure that it's safe: that there will be contact tracing for people who come in and out of the venue, that there will be absolute social distancing and sanitization of key surfaces. He has been working around the clock. That's what innovators do. But Geoff was just recently told by his insurance company, about four weeks ago, that his insurance fees were going to almost double. Can you imagine? Just as you're about to roll out a creative idea to the local marketplace, bam, here comes some insurance company telling you, “Oh, sorry, we somehow know more than Ottawa Public Health. We somehow believe that the costs of your enterprise have to almost double.” That makes absolutely no sense, Speaker. I would understand, and we all should understand, why an insurance company wants to make sure they can have a viable business, but we're talking about highly profitable organizations.

So this week, a letter is going to go out from myself and many of my colleagues here to Minister Bethlenfalvy, the finance minister of this government, to ask him finally, as someone personally who knows the insurance industry very well, who served as an executive in the industry for many years. He should know the profitability of this industry. He, we hope, can lead the ability for people like Mr. Cass to actually bring Red Bird Live to market and save live music venues in Ottawa, in Kingston, in Toronto, in Sudbury, in Timmins, in Windsor, in London. We need to protect these artistic spaces, because if we don't, we can lose them. Not everybody has connections with the big venues that are going to survive this moment—that I love,

Speaker. I love CityFolk. I love Bluesfest in Ottawa. I love the jazz festival. These are great venues. They're important. But we also need venues at a more local level. People love those sorts of clubs, and they're not going to be viable by accident. They're only going to be viable if we actively intervene.

Speaker, I also want to take a moment now to think for a second about our schools. We've been talking about them today, and I'm glad we've been talking about them today. We heard an announcement from Dr. Kieran Moore, the medical health officer for the province, that the government is going to start rolling out rapid antigen testing to at-risk—deemed at-risk neighbourhoods, I suppose, with high community spread, to keep schools safe. Well, I have to say, it's, I think, often a privilege for folks like my friend from Ottawa South and me, who share the experience of interprovincial knowledge, to compare what we're doing in Ontario to what's happening on the other side of the Ottawa River. Three and a half weeks ago, when Quebec's public school system started up, they started off with the same plan we announced today—the same plan. They said, "Anywhere in the province of Quebec where there is high community spread, we're going to make sure those folks can have access to rapid antigen testing, so in 15 minutes we can know if that student's got an issue there or that staff member's got an issue there." Largely it's not going to be the staff member; we're talking about kids who are unvaccinated because we don't have an approved vaccine ready for them. Quebec announced that three and a half or four weeks ago, but we just announced it this morning. So my question for this government, particularly for the education minister, is: What took you so long?

Don't blame the scientists. Don't say, "Oh, well, today Dr. Moore said that we can do this." Where have you been? Where have you been for months? I can tell you, our office has—I have an information-rich community, Speaker. I've got epidemiologists, I've got physicians, I've got people who work in the health care system constantly calling me, saying, "Joel, we have millions of these rapid antigen tests sitting in warehouses in the province of Ontario." I had one father call me up and point me to the hyperlink, saying, "Here's the inventory." The government of Canada has shown people how many tests are sitting in warehouses. It makes no sense. We said to the business community, "You want to make sure your asymptomatic employees are safe so you're safe and your customers are safe? Tell us how many testing kits you want and we'll send them to you for free." Okay, good—protecting workplaces. It took you a while, but I'm happy that that has happened. Why didn't we do that for schools?

Why didn't we do that for schools? We had two million kids going back to class, and 1.3 million of them, like my son, who's 10, are not vaccinated. So we're asking the staff in the public school system to put themselves at risk, because there are many instances in which we won't know if a case of COVID-19 is present in the class. It applies not just to the teachers; it applies to the ECEs, it applies to the custodians, it applies to the administrators, clerical staff,

everybody—everybody whom we call heroes, everybody who has been working lights out to make sure the public system is safe.

The federal government, at significant expense, bought these rapid antigen tests to sit in warehouses in the province of Ontario. Parent after parent called me to ask, "Joel, what's going on?" I would direct them. I would say, "Hey, phone the education minister. Parliament is not sitting; I wish that it could be." You have no idea, Speaker—as much as it's only because I love the sight of you, I also love doing my job and also want to be here so these issues can be raised. But here we are, October 5, and we're talking about it now.

So here's my plea to the government on the rapid antigen tests. When you see the results of these rolling out in these high-risk communities, don't forget every other community, because the research that I have seen—member for Davenport, correct me if I'm wrong—suggests that at least one in three positive COVID-19 tests are asymptomatic in the province of Ontario. That's a lot. That's a lot of potential cases flying under the radar. And it isn't fair to just say, "Oh, this is only happening in some communities." We know how opportunistic this virus is; we know how quickly it spreads. We've got a lot of parents in this room—I'm going to make the assumption. You know how kids are opportunistic too, and despite our repeated efforts at social distancing and masking, this is a high-risk situation. Our kids are likely to spread the virus amongst each other.

So my plea to the government is this: For the O'Brien family, for small businesses suffering because of insurance gouging, for our public schools, please, you have to make sure that the mandate of this committee is going to be very vigilant and present for them. And it's not good enough to say, "Oh, we're not Saskatchewan and Alberta. Our cases are relatively low, Joel."

The fact of the matter is, Speaker, we know how quickly this takes off, and what's scaring me the most, to be honest—when I get home at night after being in this building for a very long day and I look at the evidence about where cases are growing, they're growing rapidly amongst the unvaccinated kids.

We should take action. This committee must take action, and I would love the Premier to be present to comment on his thought process. He has been watching this for 18 or 19 months. He must have an opinion on why we haven't moved as quickly as Quebec did. They didn't mention Nova Scotia. Nova Scotia has made tests free for kids aged five to 11. What's taking us so long? It's not as if you have to procure these things. They're sitting in a warehouse. Get them to the schools. Get them to the school boards. You've committed to get them to workplaces. There shouldn't be a double standard for our schools.

This committee should take seriously its obligation to protect particularly those who are vulnerable, whether it's people with disabilities, young kids who can't be vaccinated, or even small businesses that are struggling to survive and eke out an existence in the context of insurance

gouging. Somebody needs to step in and make sure those folks are going to survive this moment. The only way it happens is with a government that cares with more than words but with actions.

Right now, they could pass legislation that makes sure that insurance companies cannot gouge their customers anymore. Give them an across-the-board haircut. Make them take their profits out of their bank accounts and put them into the bank accounts of the small businesses trying to survive. You could do the same for people with disabilities and call into question Motion, which has ritually had complaints made against it. It could stand up for our kids and build upon what was announced this morning to move towards what Quebec and Nova Scotia have done. I hope and pray that they're listening and they'll act.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate on the amendment to the government motion that has been put on the floor by the member for Ottawa South? I turn to the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: It's an honour, of course, to be able to rise and speak not only to the main motion but also to the amendment as brought forward by the member for Ottawa South.

1630

First, I hope the House will indulge me just a moment to wish my daughter, who had a birthday yesterday—I didn't have the opportunity yesterday to wish my daughter Olivia—she turned 13 yesterday, and she is obviously growing up very, very quickly. Happy birthday to her. Whilst I have the floor, happy birthday to my wife. Her birthday is coming up on the 11th. And since I missed my oldest daughter's birthday on June 28, I'm going to take a moment to do that right now as well, because I don't want to leave anybody out. They're all very important and very special to me.

I appreciate the opportunity that we're having. I had hoped, actually, that we would get through this debate relatively quickly, if you want the honest-to-goodness truth, Mr. Speaker. I thought that it was important, and we're hearing from members opposite how important it is, that we get to the select committee, that we return the select committee and have a hearing so that we can do what this House is supposed to be doing and what we all want to be doing: ensuring that there is appropriate oversight, especially of some of the powers that have come through, through the reopening Ontario act.

I know the member for Ottawa South mentioned the emergency powers and the states of emergency that we had before. He will know, of course, and I appreciate that he does know and all the members will know, that part of that was that it was important for us, of course, to ensure that we had a mechanism to speak about why the act was brought in force and why we needed to do it when we did it. Of course, there will be another opportunity soon, in the next little bit, where the government will be issuing a report. I think it's within 120 days of the end of the state of emergency we'll issue another report and we'll debate that here.

It's interesting; the process that we used on that, Speaker, you will know is a new process that we have in

this place. It's called a take-note debate. I don't want to dwell on it too much, but it is another mechanism that we have in this House, another measure that we have brought in to ensure that Parliament and all parliamentarians can hold government accountable. I'm very happy that we've had the opportunity to do that, despite the fact that I think, by and large, the states of emergency were unanimously supported by the members. I think there might have been—if I'm not mistaken, I think they were unanimously supported. There was support from the official opposition, the Liberals, the Greens, and I think most of the independents.

The select committee, though, was brought about because, again, it was another opportunity for us to show-case how important it was that, despite the fact that we were bringing forward an act, which was the reopening Ontario act, we were exiting the state of emergency. I think it was very important that we did exit the state of emergency. Some rules had to be left in place so that we could continue to fight the pandemic. I think we've all heard and we all know that if this is not done—we are still in the midst of a very difficult challenge with respect to COVID-19 across the province of Ontario, across Canada and globally. I know that we have never faced a crisis like this, at least in my 51 years—an economic and health care crisis the likes of which we are facing here. We saw communities and continue to see communities impacted dramatically. The member for Ottawa Centre spoke very eloquently about some of the businesses and some of the art institutions in his riding that were impacted, but I think we've all had those impacts in our communities. It has spared nobody.

Yes, there had been a number of supports for small and medium enterprises, but ultimately, the select committee was brought in place to ensure that there was an accountability measure over the actions that are taken by the government, the authority that was given to the government by all parliamentarians through the reopening Ontario act.

To be clear, it does restrict, it does take away some of the powers individuals would have if there were no reopening Ontario act. That is why, as part of the act, we brought forward and created a new select committee to allow for the oversight of the act whilst the act was in play throughout the province of Ontario.

The member's motion itself, Mr. Speaker—the member will know and I think all members will appreciate it has not been a practice of mine, as government House leader, nor certainly of this Premier to oversee and to tell committees how they should be doing their business. The way the committee is set up right now, it doesn't restrict the Premier to having one visit in front of the committee; the Premier can come as often as he likes.

The interesting thing about all of this, Mr. Speaker, and this is what you have seen throughout this pandemic—and I know how hard it has been. The interesting thing about this is that for weeks, the members opposite stood in this place and were critical that the Premier would go to the people every single day to give them updates of what was happening across the province in terms of our fight against

COVID-19. You will recall the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Scarborough–Guildwood said, “We have to stop this campaign. All the Premier is doing is campaigning when he goes out in front of the people every day at 1 o’clock.” They wanted it stopped; it was campaigning.

So imagine this, colleagues, if you will: Here is a Premier in the midst of a global pandemic that is hitting the people of Ontario very hard. This Legislature continues to sit because the Premier specifically said the Legislature has to continue to sit, there has to continue to be opposition accountability for the things the government is doing to battle COVID-19. This place continues to sit. It continues to have oversight. It continues to have question periods. The Premier, the Minister of Health and other ministers who are out there fighting the pandemic are out giving daily updates to the people of the province of Ontario. The Chief Medical Officer of Health joins the Premier as often as is needed and has their own briefings. I think today there was another briefing by the Chief Medical Officer of Health. And the opposition’s reaction was that it was a Premier campaigning and that it had to stop. We heard that for weeks.

In fact, the Liberals brought a motion forward too, Mr. Speaker, when they had an opportunity—and you’ve heard me be critical of this on a number of occasions. The Liberals brought a motion forward, when they had an opportunity to debate something in this House, begging us not to call an election. That was the number one priority of the Liberal Party. I was very happy in one sense because it was basically the first motion of confidence in a government that was brought forward by an opposition party. I said at the time I had never seen that. I still haven’t seen it. And, if I’m not mistaken, colleagues, it passed unanimously with the support of all members on both sides, so I thank the official opposition and I thank the Liberals for their support.

What we did, obviously, is that we brought forward a select committee where the Premier can attend that select committee, he can send designates—those who are having responsibility for certain files on our response to the pandemic, on our response to the reopening Ontario act. The members talked about the Deputy Premier being in front of the committee, the Chief Medical Officer of Health being in front of the committee. Obviously, the Solicitor General would be in front of that committee as often as possible. To the best of my knowledge, the Solicitor General has made herself available to that committee at almost every single committee meeting, if I’m not mistaken. I don’t think that the Solicitor General has missed one committee meeting to this point. I don’t know of any other committee in the history of this Parliament where cabinet ministers have been in front of a committee every single time. I encourage the members to go back in time to when the member for Ottawa South was in office, in the brief time that the NDP spent in office—and if they can point out to me at what point, at any time, that a minister of the crown appeared before a committee at every single call of the committee. I think that is a

remarkable testament to how important it is that we ensure that there is accountability for the measures taken under the reopening Ontario act.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier has said it, all of us have said it—and, I believe, members on all sides of the House: We would have preferred not to have a reopening Ontario act. We would have preferred not to have been in a state of emergency. These aren’t things that a Parliament takes lightly. These aren’t measures that we wanted to enact, but they are measures that we had to enact because we are facing a global pandemic, the likes of which we haven’t seen. So we did those and we took those measures, often unanimously as a Parliament, because we wanted to make sure that the people of the province of Ontario were safe and secure. In order to do that, I think the members will agree, there had to be oversight.

1640

So what did we do, Mr. Speaker? We brought the select committee forward. We made it accountable to Parliament. We made their reports—we heard a number of reports, actually, tabled in the House today. We brought in a new measure, the take-note debate, which could be brought forward for further debate, which we’ve used often. We brought in another mechanism and a tool—which the opposition has yet to use, but it’s there—where the members could divide on a committee report and force a debate. On any one of those reports that the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore brought to this House today, the members could have divided and forced a debate on any one of those reports. That is a tool, a standing order change, that we brought in as a government, Mr. Speaker, predominantly, truth be told, because we understood that in a Parliament like this, there are independents. They don’t always get to sit on every committee because they are independents. They don’t get to sit on every committee, and we recognize the fact that they shouldn’t be shut out of debate on important issues. That type of procedure, when a report is tabled in the House, gave even the independents, for the first time ever, the opportunity to debate and talk about something that took place at a committee that they would have not otherwise had the opportunity to do. But it also extended that to any member of this House to do that. Now, again, it has not been utilized yet, but it is a tool that is on the table for the members opposite to use.

On every level, we have made significant changes to ensure that this place is more accountable to the people of the province of Ontario, that the members on all sides of the House have every opportunity to represent the people of their community. The select committee was another example of that. In fact, there is a dual Chair, Mr. Speaker, whereby the Chair of the justice committee also serves as the Chair of the select committee on oversight, to reflect just how important this committee is. I am very proud of it.

Look, I’m not going to support, obviously, the amendment to the motion, because I don’t think saying that the Premier should be in front of a committee once is an effective way of handling a committee. Right now, the

way the rules stand, the Premier can attend in front of that committee as often as he likes. The committee can request that he be there. I think all members have done a very good job at committee of holding the ministers who are making decisions accountable throughout this process. I think this is a very unique select committee, one that we will have the opportunity, I think, to reflect upon after we're done and see if this is a mechanism, this type of select committee, which we can use for other things and other issues that become important for a time. I look forward to doing that.

But when you talk about some of the things, when you talk about the pandemic, Mr. Speaker—we've said it, the throne speech said it quite clearly yesterday: It was a very cautious but optimistic approach. We heard the member for Ottawa Centre talk about that the daily case levels remain low. That is good news, but that is not reason for us to declare victory and to move on, and that's not what we're going to do. That's why we want to bring this select committee back as soon as possible, because we know that we need to have measures in place. We know that the reopening Ontario act will still be in place for some time, Mr. Speaker.

The member opposite, if I can, touched on rapid testing for schools. Well, Speaker, I mean, one of the features and one of the things that we have been doing throughout this pandemic is sitting down, obviously with the Chief Medical Officer of Health not only of the province of Ontario, Speaker, but in each of the different regions across the province of Ontario, and seeking their advice before we are making decisions. Again today, the Minister of Education has extended—we brought in some new rules with respect to rapid testing in high-risk areas by utilizing the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health of the province of Ontario and local regional medical officers of health. And I know, despite the fact that the member for Ottawa Centre says we shouldn't fall upon the science table, we will. The science table has given us advice, and we are going to follow that advice, Mr. Speaker.

I am heartened by the fact that we have the results that we have right now, but that can change at any moment. I am heartened by the fact that I'm starting to see signs that the economy can come back. And one of the reasons why it is so important that we continue our fight against COVID-19, why vaccine certificates have been effective, why, despite the fact that the members of the opposition seem to suggest that our vaccination rollout has not been successful—Speaker, I challenge them again to find me another jurisdiction not just in Canada, but anywhere in the world, that has had a more successful vaccine rollout and had more of its citizens accept a vaccine.

I think today—I stand to be corrected if I get the numbers slightly wrong—we are approaching 87%, if I'm not mistaken, of the province, of those who are eligible, having received a first dose, and I think upwards of 82%, if not a little bit more, who have received both doses. I challenge anybody to find a jurisdiction where its people have done a better job in coming out and making sure that they're vaccinated. It's not a success of the government of

Ontario. Make no mistake about it: This is the people of the province of Ontario who have said they want to put this behind them. They know the best way to put this behind them is to get vaccinated, and we're seeing those results.

But let's be clear, Speaker: We have had a very challenging time with COVID—a very challenging time. This province was brought to its knees by COVID. I've said this yesterday, and I'll say it again, Mr. Speaker: 800 people in an ICU forced the government of Ontario to put in the most restrictive measures against COVID-19 in North America and have them in place longer than any other jurisdiction. That is a direct result of underfunding by previous governments, and in part was why we were elected in the first place: to end hallway health care.

That this province, because of the lack of investments, predominantly by the previous Liberal government over 15 years, to increase ICU capacity, to increase health care capacity, has forced us into a situation where we have to put in the harshest restrictions of any other jurisdiction—the economic giant of Canada and one of the most important economies in North America was forced into prolonged lockdowns because of the inability of the previous government to make the right decisions in terms of ICU capacity, in terms of health care capacity in this province.

And to make matters worse, the previous government, often supported by the NDP, made no investments in long-term care—very few; I shouldn't say “no.” They made very few investments in long-term care: about 600 beds. I have more than that being built in my riding right now—in my own riding—so we are making tremendous progress. We're tackling long-term care to make sure that it is better for the people of the province of Ontario. We're making home care better for the people of the province of Ontario. We've increased ICU capacity, Mr. Speaker. We're building more hospitals across the province of Ontario. But at the same time, we understand how important it is that if we're to pay for these investments, we have to have a strong and vibrant economy.

That's why we brought in certificates: to ensure that we can keep our businesses open and we don't find ourselves in lockdowns in the future. That's why we're constantly encouraging people to go out and get vaccinated. That's why we're bringing vaccines to more places in the province of Ontario, using a GO bus to get to communities that we've not been to before, going into shopping malls so that we can get to that 90% number that is the envy of the rest of the world.

But the job is not done, and the job of this Legislature is still not done, Mr. Speaker. As long as there is an act in place through the reopening Ontario act that does put in place restrictions against some of the rights of the people of the province of Ontario, there has to be effective oversight. There has to be effective oversight. Now, we didn't have to bring in that oversight, but the Premier insisted, I agreed and this Parliament agreed, so I hope members will do the right thing, and let's get this committee up and running as soon as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate on the amendment? I turn to the member for Oakville North–Burlington.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you, Speaker. It's great to be back in the Legislature.

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I'm pleased to join this debate on the motion to continue the work of the select committee on emergency management. I want to begin by thanking this House for doing me the honour of electing me to serve on the committee.

Over the last year and more, the committee has done a lot of good work in holding ministers and the government accountable. It's ensured that ministers, particularly the Solicitor General, have had to justify the emergency orders that continued after the declaration of emergency ended last year.

To understand the importance of this work, we need to look back at why the select committee was originally established last year. A year ago last July, this House debated a motion to establish the committee, and the reasons for its establishment then are still valid now. I believe we need to be clear that the select committee and its reporting requirements were and are one of the government's accountability measures contained in Bill 195, the Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020.

Bill 195 contained four main reporting requirements, each of which hold the government accountable to this Legislature and to the public. The first is the requirement that the Premier or a delegated minister regularly reports to the public about any orders continued under section 2 of Bill 195. The second provision is the one that led to the select committee. It requires that at least once every 30 days, the Premier or a delegated minister shall appear before and report to a standing or select committee of this Legislature. The Premier or minister must report on any new orders extended during the reporting period and the rationale for any of the extensions. The third and fourth provisions of the bill require the Premier to report to the Legislature after one year about any orders the government did decide to extend and allow the Legislature to, if necessary, extend the bill's powers for a year.

In our debate today, this House is only considering one of the four provisions, but I believe it is important to note all of the reporting requirements the government instituted in Bill 195. Accountability is key here. People expect—and I know this House expects—the Ontario government to be accountable for its actions. This is particularly true in this case, where government has exercised emergency powers and asked this House to authorize a potential extension of emergency orders.

Declaring a state of emergency is not something that any government should ever do lightly. During the early months of the pandemic, we saw governments in Canada and, indeed, around the world declare states of emergency to deal with the COVID-19 crisis. We all know this needed to be done, but let's just remind ourselves of the scope of these powers.

Under the state of emergency, government ordered businesses to close. It ordered churches, mosques, synagogues and temples to close. It froze evictions and altered working conditions for employees. These are tremendous powers for any government to be able to take, and they are one reason that I am glad to see the declaration of emergency replaced by more limited powers under Bill 195, with its reporting requirements.

In the past, most states of emergency have been of short duration, declared by provinces due to floods, storms or forest fires. As an example, Ontario, under Premier Ernie Eves, declared a state of emergency during the 2003 power outage. Many will recall Prime Minister Trudeau declared an emergency under the War Measures Act during the October Crisis in 1970. This is still an act that divides historians and commentators to this day.

Now, I think that the state of emergency declared in Ontario last year was necessary and that the government and ministers handled it well. The select committee added to the accountability the government provided, ensuring that the government is required to justify why it would extend any emergency order.

It was on March 17, 2020, that the government of Ontario announced that it was taking decisive action by making an order declaring an emergency under section 7.0.1(1) of the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act.

Premier Ford commented that, "We are facing an unprecedented time in our history. This is a decision that was not made lightly. COVID-19 constitutes a danger of major proportions. We are taking this extraordinary measure because we must offer our full support and every power possible to help our health care sector fight the spread of COVID-19. The health and well-being of every Ontarian must be our number one priority."

This declaration came after the government announced the closure of schools for two weeks after the March break. It's important to remember here that certain emergency closures do not require the use of emergency powers, such as school closures. The March 17 declaration closed libraries, child care, bars and restaurants, theatres and concert venues, amongst others. At the time, the emergency declaration only continued until March 31. But, as we learned more about COVID-19, we of course saw multiple extensions, both of the length of the emergency and of who is covered. The committee provided members of this House the opportunity to review and oversee the legislation and the orders.

Oversight is important to help ensure we make the correct decisions as we move forward. The government has gathered the best advice, both medical and otherwise, as it makes decisions. But we know that the Premier and ministers have been and will be accountable for their decisions, both in the House and through the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight.

It is right that Ontario's elected leaders are held accountable. It's the best way to run a government, and I know it is what my constituents would expect. Since our government took office three years ago, accountability has

been a priority for the Premier, ministers and our members. This select committee is further proof of our commitment to be accountable to the Legislature and to the people of Ontario.

In 2018, we immediately established a commission of inquiry and a line-by-line audit to bring accountability to Ontario's finances. It helped us properly prepare for a more cost-efficient and modernized government. We also established a Select Committee on Financial Transparency, very much like the one we are debating today, to examine Ontario's fiscal situation. And in the Ministry of Long-Term Care, where I have the privilege of serving as the parliamentary assistant, we brought in a commission of inquiry to study the response to COVID in long-term-care homes. The government made sure that the ministry and the sector were held accountable, so we could improve the protection of seniors in long-term care. From the time our government took office, we have ensured that our government is accountable for its actions, accountable to this House and accountable to the people of Ontario.

It's not just in Ontario that COVID oversight committees were put in place. Australia's Senate has a select committee that reviewed that country's COVID response. In the US, both the Senate and the House of Representatives established oversight committees to review many different facets of the government response in the United States. Neighbouring states to Ontario, such as Michigan and New York, did so as well. And in the UK, as of last year, its powerful committees were conducting 18 inquiries into COVID-19, covering many issues and topics. Establishing a select committee to review extensions and changes to COVID-19 orders put Ontario in very good company.

Both our government's actions and our willingness to be accountable for them have helped build public trust. This has been vital in ensuring public agreement and consent with what the government had to ask them to do. The Premier's leadership, and this includes his support for accountability through actions such as establishing this select committee, has received strong support across the province.

Rocco Rossi, the president and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, thanked the Premier "for his continued leadership during this crisis and commend him and his government for pursuing re-opening in a thoughtful, careful, and gradual way."

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Halton region chair Gary Carr and the four Halton region mayors said in a letter to the Premier, "We would like to thank you for the leadership role that you and your government have played during these unprecedented times as we work together to stop the spread of COVID-19."

The Ontario Trucking Association cheered on the Premier for "sticking up for hard-working truck drivers who are being mistreated at shipping facilities and rest stops."

During the pandemic, I heard from a number of my constituents happy with how the Premier and the government have been so accountable to the public. My

constituent Gerry wrote the Premier, thanking "your government for helping seniors with the drug charges.

"We also would like to thank Premier Ford and his amazing team for their excellent communications with the public. His concise answers and the assistance of his team is something that he and all of us can be proud of.

"He answers questions promptly and with confidence. This is inspiring to the people of Ontario.

"Keep up the good work, Premier, and thanks again to your great team!"

Constantine wrote about "how impressed I have been with Premier Ford's handling of the crisis in Ontario and his conduct at all levels through this."

Peter commented on the government's consultations about reopening religious institutions, saying, "Your government has been truly remarkable in its leadership and ability to balance the public health considerations vis-à-vis the needs of places of worship to observe their sacraments."

In my own community of Oakville North-Burlington, I conducted two consultations with religious leaders working to safely reopen our houses of worship and hear their concerns. I know that the Premier and other ministers and members did the same.

Another constituent, Cheryl, stated that the Premier "has exhibited thoughtful and sensible leadership during this pandemic."

Speaker, these are just a few of the letters I received. One of the themes that runs through comments people have made to me is the importance of thoughtful, cooperative leadership; leadership that has taken us through the pandemic and leadership that is now taking us, step by step, through the reopening of our businesses and public spaces as our province begins to reopen. Our Premier and his ministers are providing this leadership.

Let's take a look at how the committee has worked over the last 15 months or so. In our first meeting, the Solicitor General spoke to us about how the government was managing the transition from a state of emergency to the new system under Bill 195. She stated, "This decision to extend or amend orders under the act are subject to careful consideration, guided by public health advice and by our resolve to stop the spread of COVID-19, and to ensure the health and safety and well-being of Ontarians. Orders will be revoked or permitted to expire if they are no longer necessary and it is safe to do so."

She also said, "Transparency and accountability to the people of Ontario have been pivotal in our response to this pandemic, and that will not change under this new act. We welcome open and accountable conversations about the measures we are taking to protect Ontarians and slow the spread of COVID-19."

In the first meeting, and in subsequent meetings, the Solicitor General and the government outlined each order that was renewed or amended and explained precisely why the government made the decisions it did. Every member of the committee, representing all sides of the House, got a chance to question the government about why it was making particular decisions about orders.

At our first meeting, I asked a question of the Solicitor General on behalf of my constituents. My very first question was about the need for emergency orders, their oversight and the need for the committee. I thought it was important to hear from the Solicitor General directly why the government took this course of action to ensure democratic accountability.

“Some people continue to voice concerns about the process and accountability for extending these emergency orders. When the declaration of emergency was first made in March, it allowed the government to proclaim an emergency for 14 days and then to extend it once for a further 14 days. Following this, only the Legislature could do so for up to 28 days at a time. Today, we are considering the renewal of emergency orders under the opening Ontario act, and we all agree that this is more narrow in scope and requires that the government report to this committee on any further renewals within 30 days....

“You mentioned today that you had served on three select committees yourself. Can you explain how this review process provides the transparency and accountability we need?”

The minister, our Solicitor General, gave a thoughtful response about the need for the government to be able to respond quickly and how transitioning to a new system after the end of the declaration of emergency would help us move forward and slowly reduce the number of orders as circumstances changed. And that’s exactly what we see has unfolded over the past several months.

Over the past year, I’ve had the opportunity to pose many more question of ministers, and I know colleagues from both sides of the House have had the same opportunities. Some of the questions I wanted answers to included regulations that authorize redeployment orders; limits to social gatherings and fines for those who did not follow the rules; the spread of COVID in congregate care settings and vulnerable seniors; staffing in long-term care; why certain retailers could open and others could not; alcohol delivery rules; vaccinations and the order people were eligible to receive them; help from our government for cultural events and festivals that could not open; the entry of variants into Canada and closing the border; and reopening outdoor activities.

I wanted to list these questions just as a demonstration of what just one member of the committee has been able to ask the government and ministers in the select committee. I am only one of 12 members of the committee, in addition to the Chair, and each of us has had an opportunity to question the Solicitor General, to question the Minister of Health, to question the chief medical officer when they have appeared before the committee about how they are handling emergency orders, why they are necessary and how the government is responding to the COVID emergency.

I’d like to conclude by saying that we’ve been holding the government responsible on behalf of our constituents, and that is why we need this committee to continue to do its work. The emergency powers have seen us through multiple waves of COVID. All of us want to see the back

of COVID-19, but we still have a ways to go. Speaker, I look forward to the day when the last emergency order is indeed revoked.

We don’t know for sure what faces us in the future, but we do know that the government will be ready for whatever comes, and we know that the select committee and this Legislature will be prepared to hold the government accountable. I am proud of the work our committee has accomplished thus far and I urge everyone here to support this motion to continue its important work.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I’m proud to stand here today alongside my colleagues in support of the government action re-establishing a Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight.

Speaker, I want to take a moment to thank Ontario’s front-line workers in essential services for all the work they’ve done, working beyond what is normal, for many, many months. I think they deserve the utmost respect for what they have done during this COVID-19 crisis. Whether at your local grocery store, your community pharmacy or hospital, these unwavering individuals have been dedicated to ensuring our province gets the health care, food and supplies we all need to survive during these difficult times.

I think it’s quite clear that the vast majority of people in the province of Ontario are satisfied with the work of this Legislature and the members in order to protect the well-being of Ontarians and, by extension, the health and well-being of Canadians, because obviously, the decisions that we make here also impact our fellow Canadians in other provinces.

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One thing that we consistently heard, whether it was from small, medium or large enterprises or whether it was from individual Ontarians, was that they both accept the fact that government—and this Legislature, quite frankly—had to make very challenging decisions with respect to how we protect them in the face of COVID-19. These are decisions that have obviously been extremely challenging, and as we look around the world, there were many different strategies employed by the various countries and territories. The results, of course, depended on their health care facilities, environmental conditions, their economic capability and the co-operation of their citizens.

Overall, Canada to date has weathered the pandemic relatively well when we compare ourselves with other countries. In Canada itself, Ontario is second to none of the provinces in its success in navigating through this pandemic, but there is much more to do.

That’s the good news, and it’s good news for small, medium and large enterprises, and it’s good news for students. It’s good news for seniors, and ultimately, I think, it’s a testament to the hard work that the members of this Legislature have done getting us to this spot today.

But as we’ve listened to the people of the province of Ontario, they have also said that it’s time that this government move away from a state of emergency and the

powers that come with a state of emergency, and move to a new direction that allows us to deal with issues with respect to COVID-19 in a quick and effective manner, utilizing what we have learned not only as a government but as a Legislature since the outbreak back in March 2020, when we started to take aggressive measures as a Legislature.

We have said that this Legislature reigns supreme, and it should continue to reign supreme. This is the body that should authorize and should continue to determine the work of the government in terms of the pandemic. That's why we have brought this committee forward, and I am unaware of any committee—I'm sure some of you will correct me if I'm wrong—that is proactively seeking the oversight of the members of all sides of this House.

When we first started to face the pandemic challenge, I don't think any of us contemplated the differences that would occur from region to region and the ongoing challenges that we would see from region to region. It's a very fine balancing act that we find ourselves in, so we have chosen to land on the side of protecting the people of the province of Ontario through legislation, through the emergency orders that we have issued and through the lessons we have learned, while at the same time respecting the fact that this Legislature and the members of it are the ultimate authority.

I think this committee will allow us the opportunity to provide that oversight. Appointing a Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight will provide an additional mechanism of transparency and accountability. The select committee is another step out of the many countless steps that this government has taken since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ontario. When we are talking about this select committee, this is just another step that we as a government are taking to make sure that we are able to provide the information to the people of this province as to what exactly we are doing when we're talking about emergencies.

I also think the people of this province deserve to get information from us. I cannot forget, because I have the privilege of representing the riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, a riding that shares a border with our friends in the United States and Quebec, the stresses that people had to endure when the borders were starting to close. I'm sure that we've all had similar calls to our constituency offices about family and friends who are asking, "What should we do?" or "How should we get them out?" or "How can we help get people out?" I remember that in the early stages, I had a sister on a cruise, leaving from the Middle East and travelling to South Africa, with a large group of people from Cornwall through a travel agency. They were lucky enough not to have had any of the cases on board, but it meant that for the three-week-long cruise, they were unable to get off at any port.

Of course, we go back to that same time, that first month of the pandemic, where many of the cruises were locked up and unable to land, unable to get supplies, and people were confined to their cabins, something that

anybody who's been on a cruise—these cabins are very small. Of course, being locked in there for a month or weeks at a time is certainly not something that is indicative of a vacation, where you're out there to enjoy yourself. It was a sign of the early times of this pandemic, before these venues were closed.

It's relevant to echo the Premier, as he recently stated: "I never anticipated the lockdowns, restrictions, and strain that Ontarians would have to endure. Yet through so much sacrifice, and your unrelenting strength, we've made it through these last two years, and are now looking to emerge on the other side."

Over the past several weeks, we have trended towards the best-case scenario projected by the Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table. The latest modelling confirms Ontario has flattened the fourth wave of this pandemic. It's because of you, the people, that our province is in the position that we are in today. They have continued to wear masks, sacrificed seeing loved ones, postponed celebrating special occasions and rolled up their sleeves to get a COVID-19 vaccination.

I recount a story of the Macdonald family around home that are going out to Alberta in the next couple of weeks to celebrate a wedding that actually took place last year—never able, at that time, to get together as a family to celebrate. It took a full year for them to get together. It just speaks to many of the delays—funerals around home that happened this summer for people who passed away the previous year. It's very hard on the families and very hard on people and friends who knew them. Even this year, in their gatherings—much smaller numbers. In rural areas, where neighbours get to know neighbours, churches were often full to capacity during these times. It's so sad to see people pass away by themselves, putting families by themselves, in small numbers.

With more and more Ontarians stepping up to get vaccinated, we can begin to turn our attention to the future. No one can tell for certain what the recovery will look like over the short to medium term. What we do know is the threat of COVID-19 is still very real. The incredible progress that Ontarians have made to stop the spread of COVID-19 and support our economic recovery could soon disappear.

All 14.5 million Ontarians have pulled together to contain this virus. We have done an exceptionally good job of guiding our way through the COVID-19 pandemic. When compared to other jurisdictions in North America, I think Ontarians have a lot to be proud of. A lot of that is because of the exceptional job that the people of the province of Ontario have done. In fact, it is all because of the work that the people of this province have pulled together to do.

It's so easy just to disassociate yourself from that and look at the numbers and figures, but ultimately, these are real people who have lives, who have loved ones and who have families. So we, as leaders, have to make sure that we are protecting them to the best of our ability. That's our job. People put their faith and trust in us to be here to lead them and to guide them. None of us ever thought that we

would be here in this type of situation. But Mr. Speaker, we're almost at the finish line—certainly not as close as we would like to be, but I believe it's in sight.

It's so important that we make sure that we don't lose track of what it took to get here and that we remain vigilant, because it's only through remaining vigilant and only through being very serious about evaluating the ever-changing data being collected on this virus that we will make the decisions required to get past this pandemic.

It's encouraging that every single day, we continue to see thousands more Ontarians getting their first shot and their second shot. In fact, more than 86% of all eligible Ontarians have received at least one dose, with over 81% now being fully vaccinated.

We were elected on the promise of ending hallway health care and rebuilding a long-neglected long-term-care system. And while that work had begun before COVID-19, the pandemic exposed and exacerbated the cracks that had been building over decades of inaction by successive governments.

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To that end, our government has invested billions of dollars to add over 3,100 hospital beds, as well as build and redevelop hospitals across the province, and we're making good on our commitment to build 30,000 new and modern long-term-care beds over 10 years, as thousands more are brought up to 21st-century standards.

We're also adding 27,000 more front-line workers to long-term care homes as we meet our commitment to improve the quality of care seniors receive so that they can live and age in dignity. I know in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, St. Lawrence College has added additional courses, looking for additional PSWs to come through, and we have made a number of announcements on long-term-care-home redevelopments: Dundas Manor, Maxville Manor, Parisien Manor in Cornwall. We look forward to increasing those numbers, because we know the senior population is doubling over the next 10 or 15 years. We're starting with 10 or 15 years of inaction, and it's going to take a while to increase those numbers. There are land issues. There are purchases that have to be made and construction. We all know that the price of construction has increased drastically over the last two years, and we know that that will impact just on our resources and what we're able to do.

So I'm encouraged by the Premier that our path to recovery will be fuelled by economic growth rather than painful tax hikes and spending cuts. As soon as this pandemic is firmly behind us, we're going to get our economy firing on all four cylinders. Ontario is the best place in Canada to work, start a business, and raise a family.

Based on current evidence and our experience to combat COVID-19, the province will require some level of public health and workplace safety measures, such as wearing a mask, for the foreseeable future. We have no responsible choice but to remain vigilant and to continue following public health advice to ensure the progress we've made so far in stopping the spread of this deadly virus is not to be undone.

As legislators, we have a duty to deliver a practical and flexible plan that supports the progress Ontarians have made while recognizing the ongoing risks of COVID-19 and its variants. That is why we're carefully and thoughtfully planning every step of our recovery process in our efforts to re-establish Ontario.

As members of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight are aware, as well as other members of this House, orders can only be extended under the ROA for 30 days at a time. The ROA also requires that at least once every 30 days, the Premier or a delegate minister appear before and report to the select committee on orders that were extended during the reporting period and the rationale for the extensions.

The government has been reporting to this committee every month on order extensions, with a comprehensive rationale as to why they're still needed and should remain in place, as well as any orders that have been revoked. With our proposal to extend the powers under the ROA to December 1, 2021, there would be no change to the length of time that orders could be extended. The powers to amend orders would continue to be subject to certain criteria under the ROA, and the requirement to provide a rationale for every extension would still remain.

Throughout this process, the advice of public health experts and front-line workers has been paramount in guiding each of the steps we have taken. We must remain vigilant to stop the spread of COVID-19. Even though we can't know exactly what is ahead over the next few months, we do know that Ontario is better prepared, better equipped, more knowledgeable and ready to respond.

Every decision the Ontario government has made in response to COVID-19 has been informed by medical advice and scientific evidence. Our balanced and measured approach has always put the health and well-being of our most vulnerable citizens first, while supporting the front-line heroes on whom we continue to rely. We continue to act swiftly and nimbly while being accountable and transparent.

Speaker, it has been a tough go over the last year and a half. I know residents of my area and, of course, across the province look back—and if you look at different regions of the world, many different philosophies or strategies have been tried. Some have worked better than others. I think that when we look at Ontario's record and, for the most part, Canada's, we've weathered it very well. We have neighbours to our south who are somewhat considered more economically capable of taking actions, but we've had much greater success. I think we can be proud of that and proud of our citizens for the co-operation they've taken. It's not easy to go from an open society that we've enjoyed for decades and to lock it down like we were forced to do.

I know that there have been many hardships. There have been, of course, businesses that have endured economic hard times they will likely never overcome. And this government will have to look at measures to return as many as possible back, to make them whole again, if possible. But it is a difficult way ahead. There need to be

many more strategies put in place. It won't be easy, and I'm sure that our direction will not be unanimous, but it will be the best we can make it.

I look forward to seeing the work that this select committee can do, and I think it's a great opportunity for all sides of the House to get the answers they need and to provide the residents of their ridings with the answers that they ask for.

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

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, our government understood that nothing is more important than protecting the health and well-being of all Ontarians. That's why, since we first learned of this virus, our government has responded to the situation in a quick and decisive manner, to safeguard the future of Ontarians and place the province on a path to recovery. And this government was only able to do so because of the authority provided through the reopening Ontario act, passed by this House in July 2020.

The reopening Ontario act provided our government additional temporary authority, allowing us to extend and amend critical regulations in a timely manner. You see, Mr. Speaker, the virus was not going to wait for standard proceedings. It spread and endangered the lives of Ontarians. That's why the reopening Ontario act reduced the time to ensure the quick execution of proceedings while ensuring our democratic principles were upheld.

As a result, it was important for there to be oversight mechanisms in place, which include the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight, which was originally established by this Legislature. In that same vein, the government had previously declared a number of states of emergency for the province, allowing for the drastic but necessary lockdowns which have helped in preventing the spread of COVID-19 in its numerous waves.

When our government declared states of emergency, we made sure to consult our science tables and health care professionals. And when the data told us to extend these emergencies, we did so in increments of two weeks, thereby allowing for the safe containment of COVID-19.

It is important to note, Mr. Speaker, that the oversight provided by the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight does not exist under the Emergency Management Act. At the same time, throughout the pandemic, our government made and continues to make historic investments into the province to help keep Ontarians safe and healthy, and ensure that critical services and projects can continue despite the unprecedented nature of the pandemic.

First and foremost, we sought to safeguard the health of Ontarians. That's why, through Ontario's action plan, our government invested a significant total of over \$16 billion to protect the health of Ontarians, by securing vaccinations, constructing and renovating hospitals, and supporting our small businesses by providing PPE equipment where necessary.

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I would like to take the opportunity to thank the health care heroes, the front-line workers and responders, the

caregivers, essential service workers and of course every single Ontarian who, through physical distancing and other public health measures, has saved countless lives.

A little over a year ago, we announced a historic investment of \$3.3 billion to not only increase the capacity of our health care system but also modernize it for the years to come.

In Mississauga alone, we have created over a thousand new long-term-care beds, which are part of the 30,000 being created province-wide. That's only a small part of the historic progress we have made in upgrading our health care infrastructure.

This government has approved multiple hospitals, as well as expansion projects of our existing hospitals.

My own riding of Mississauga—Erin Mills serves as home to the Credit Valley Hospital, a key health care provider for the city. I'm pleased to say that our government invested over \$4.5 million into the hospital to maintain its infrastructure and to help ensure a safe and comfortable environment for patients to receive care. This came as part of the government's investment of \$175 million last year through the Health Infrastructure Renewal Fund.

Speaking of health care infrastructure, we also erected field hospitals in Burlington a while back, which helped reduce the strain on our health care system by adding new beds to directly tackle the shortage.

Our infrastructure commitments did not stop there, Mr. Speaker. This government ensured that they remain unaffected by the pandemic, allowing Ontario to develop, and placing it on a path to recovery.

The light rail transit projects, for example, continue to near-completion. These include the Hurontario LRT, as well as the Finch West LRT among others.

We have recently advanced work on the Yonge North subway extension, which will extend the TTC's Line 1 service north from Finch Station to Vaughan, Markham and Richmond Hill.

Speaking of commuting, Mr. Speaker: I immigrated to Canada in 1995, and in these past 26 years, I haven't seen any major new provincial highways added in the GTA from Mississauga to Oshawa—any of the 400-series highways. How can we expect the people of our province to commute effectively when the number of cars have more than tripled and the highways remain the same? No wonder we have traffic jams and frustrating, long rush hours.

That's why our government is making life easier for Ontarians by investing \$640 million in widening Highway 401, including the Mississauga to Milton connection, which will shorten commuting times and encourage investments and job creation.

Similarly, we also have proposed a new highway, the GTA west corridor, which will help the greater Golden Horseshoe region's rapidly growing population in their day-to-day commute.

Moreover, the government released a list of construction projects deemed essential, and these include construction projects and services that provide new capacity

to educational institutions; for example, technological infrastructure like broadband Internet for northern Ontario, which supports our agriculture and mining sectors through cloud computing and improves remote learning for Ontarian youth.

This brings me to the next point, Mr. Speaker: Ontario youth are the future of this province. This government has done whatever is necessary to help protect these very youth from the pandemic. We have invested over \$650 million to provide these critical infrastructure upgrades. These include the installation of air filtration systems to improve air quality, water refilling stations to improve access to safe drinking water, as well as investing in network and broadband infrastructure to support remote learning and space reconfigurations, such as new walls and doors, to enhance physical distancing.

Let's not forget how our youth had to switch to online learning. I am proud that this government facilitated this change on the fly by providing the necessary infrastructure needed and investing in making loaner tablets available to students. This government worked hard to improve online education, and we are going to maintain it as an option for students going forward. We have therefore prepared our education system for remote learning. We have essentially filled the lack of access to the best education, to specialty courses which were previously not available in rural communities. Mr. Speaker, this is fair access to education without geographical limitation. Our government is happy to give everyone equal opportunity and access to education, to specialized courses and video-on-demand training. This will ultimately allow our students to further their careers no matter where there are in Ontario.

Speaking about vaccination, I am proud to say that the University of Toronto Mississauga campus, which also resides in my riding of Mississauga–Erin Mills, served as a critical mass vaccination clinic, and administered over 335,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses.

We have also heavily invested in mental health by committing \$147 million to immediately expand access to the provincial mental health and addictions system. This funding built upon the \$176 million provided earlier last year as part of the Roadmap to Wellness plan, which seeks to deliver high-quality care and build a modern, connected and comprehensive mental health and addictions system. There were over 1,200 responses to our first three challenges to support the delivery of mental health solutions to vulnerable populations. Tens of thousands of responses have been submitted over time, helping us better address the COVID-19 outbreak.

In addition to what I have just said, our government ensured we were hearing from the people about their need for medical equipment. Our government chose to set up the Ontario Together portal, through which more than 27,000 submissions to help Ontario secure critical emergency supplies, technologies and innovation have been received across the three streams since the launch. More than 18,000 emergency supply leads have been converted into more than \$658 million in purchases of critical supplies and equipment to support staff on the front

lines, including more than 27 million gowns, more than 175 million gloves, 123 million masks and over four million face shields.

Secondly, our government committed another \$23 billion to protect our economy by helping businesses and private ventures, as well as providing economic relief. Mr. Speaker, this brought the total investment under the Ontario action plan alone to \$51 billion.

Speaking of our economy, our government made sure to help more small businesses. We know they form the backbone of our province, of our economy, and they were the hardest hit.

That's why our government provided grants in two rounds to small businesses. We provided \$1.7 billion in two rounds through Ontario Small Business Support Grant payments to help eligible small businesses that have been the most affected by the necessary restrictions to protect the people from COVID-19. These grants allowed eligible recipients to receive a second payment equal to the amount of their first payment, from the minimum support of \$20,000 up to a maximum of \$40,000. Through these two rounds of support, the Ontario Small Business Support Grant delivered an estimated \$3.4 billion in direct support to approximately 120,000 small businesses across Ontario.

Our government also reduced the small business corporate income tax on January 1, 2020. This delivered up to \$1,500 in annual savings to more than 275,000 businesses.

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As a PA to the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, I am proud to say that since the start of the pandemic, support from our government for these very industries now totals \$625 million. As we all know, tourism plays a critical role in the Ontario economy. Prior to the pandemic, the Ministry of Tourism generated more than \$36 billion in economic activity and supported hundreds of thousands of jobs in Ontario. With this historic investment, we aim to further grow Ontario's economy, surpassing even pre-pandemic levels.

As you have seen throughout these examples, Mr. Speaker, our government has taken some extraordinary actions throughout the pandemic to keep people safe. I have just listed at length what we were able to achieve in these difficult times, and the committee has played an important oversight role throughout this. This government continues to serve the people of this great province of Ontario and will do whatever is necessary to place it on a path to recovery.

Our government has had to make challenging decision after challenging decision, whether it's shutting down or opening up the province, or closing and re-opening schools, as well as planning and successfully executing a province-wide vaccination plan and coming up with supports to help sustain small businesses. Thankfully, these tough but necessary measures have paid off, and our province boasts one of the best vaccination rates in the world. And again, Mr. Speaker, we have only been able to do this through the oversight of this special committee.

As members of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight are aware, the government has

been reporting to this committee every month on order extensions, with a comprehensive rationale backed by real data and the latest modelling as to why they are still needed and should remain in place. We are so close for things to be returning back to normal. As we cautiously place Ontario on a path to recovery, it is vital that our government use every tool at our disposal to ensure the well-being of Ontarians. That is precisely why, Mr. Speaker, it is imperative that this committee be re-established. It is an important legislative committee that will continue to have critical oversight over the emergency powers, should this House agree to enact this motion,

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

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I'm looking at the clock; I may not have my full 20 minutes, but I would want to make sure I focus on all of the highlights that I have prepared for my message.

First of all, I'd like to say thank you to the front-line workers who have been working so hard, doing things selflessly, protecting lives and making all of us safe. I am so thankful that my colleague PA Parsa was with me last week as we went to a local Richmond Hill hospital, Mackenzie Health, to bring coffee to the front-line workers, thanking them for all the work they have done.

Today, we are here to re-establish the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight. Before I do that, I just want to say thank you. Thank you to the select committee that has been working so hard. Just now, I was listening to PA Hogarth mentioning three reports that she brought forward: the 12th, 13th and 14th. In fact, yesterday, as I was preparing my message, I went through all the minutes and all the things that you have done. I am so touched. We could not be where we are now if they had not been working so hard.

I would like to take this time to thank the Chair, the Vice-Chair from the opposite side, also our minister, our Solicitor General and a lot of our members from all parties here. It's actually by all of us working together that we have these kinds of results. I am really thrilled with what we have accomplished. I think we should have a big pat on your shoulders for all that you have done, worked so hard for. It really, really means a lot to us.

As I was reading all the reports yesterday, I remembered—and I was looking also at the news from other places. I'm not even talking about our province, our local province in Canada; I am looking at other places internationally. I was looking at places like in Vietnam and in Indonesia, where the government—they are corrupt. They take bribes in order to allow people to have ventilators, to allow them to have the different kinds of doses to help them, to prevent this COVID-19.

Also, when I see the bodies—I mean dead bodies—that they are piling up, some of them can afford to have a coffin to be put in. Others are just rolled up, and they're waiting to be burned. They are stacking up. When I'm comparing those—we should really all be very thankful for what we have here, not only just in Canada, but especially for us in Ontario.

I just want to have a shout-out to the select committee that has been working so hard. Our motion today is to make sure we are re-establishing this select committee. Of course we are going to do that, and I personally fully support this motion.

On July 13, 2020, we had formed this committee. I thought, when I was reading the report yesterday, there were 11 of them, but now I realize there's 14 of them. So you all have been working so hard, and that's why we have the consequences we can have now.

We also made it very clear for ourselves—because things change very, very fast. We have to have new members, as well as new resolutions all the time. That's why we are saying that we are going to review and extend these orders every 30 days at a time. That's why we are doing all these very, very carefully and responsibly. I thank you all for doing this work for us.

Allow me to highlight: When I was reading the report yesterday, I was so thrilled, because I can see members from different parties all working together. I was so thrilled with that unity. That's what we need to have, especially in a time of pandemic, that we are putting aside anything that's partisan. So we put it aside, and that's why we have the accomplishments that we have now. I was so happy—until just now, today, when I heard some of the opposition party members. They were commenting on some of the things which—yes, we are not perfect. There are areas we still need to work on. But when we see all the good things that we have done, let's just focus on the positive side and also focus on the areas that we still need to work on. Let's work on them together, as a team.

Also, I want to say that, because we do have members from different parties, if I have any suggestions, I will make sure I mention it to the members who are representing me and are representing the voices of the people in my riding, and let them know. They can also work on the solution instead of focusing on the negative part that is not going to get us anywhere.

1750

I would also want to say how people in my riding—yes, I have heard all the sad stories as well. But realistically, we are in a pandemic. We'll try to minimize the problem as much as we can, but work on the things that we need to work on, together. I also hear a lot of people saying a lot of good things about what they're so thankful for.

I also want to address one thing that I hear from members of the opposition: that our members have not been doing enough during the summertime. In fact, I heard it differently from my riding, especially from the media. They come to me and say, "Wow, you have your ministers, you have your people going out every day on the road—different announcements. You guys are working really hard." In fact, they are. They touch me, especially all the ministers. They have been going out, reaching different parts of the province, announcing different things, caring for them, and I really thank them from the bottom of my heart. I will do my best because they have encouraged me. I don't think we should even think of a time that we think that we have not been working during the summertime,

and if any members are feeling like that, I don't know where they were—seriously, a lot of things we, as a team, have worked together on and have accomplished.

When I look back at this motion, do we need to re-establish this select committee? Of course we do. I'm just looking at the need, what the needs are and what still has to be done. Yes, we need to inform and engage the community. We need them to know. We also need to hear from them. Each member is responsible to pass on their voices to the committee so that they can find solutions to it, especially now when we say we're reopening.

I'm thankful. We have our members already mentioning the success we've had with vaccinations. We have 82% of us having double doses. That is great. If we did not have this kind of vaccination rate, we might still be in big trouble. But we are not getting lax because of that.

Actually, I was in Calgary attending my son's wedding. At that time in August, when I was in Calgary, I saw they were not wearing masks going around. We wish we could do the same thing, but I'm so thankful because of this committee. They worked so hard, telling us we have to be mindful, wear your mask, wash your hands, do everything you can. That's why we are not facing that challenge. We thank the chief medical officer for telling us if we don't work hard now, what we will be facing in November. So all of us work very hard, and that's why this is important.

We do not want to have any more lockdowns. Our economy cannot afford that, especially the small businesses. I've heard many times from my people in Richmond Hill and also hear from all of you that we have businesses that have been in deep trouble. That's why we all have to work as a team to overcome this.

We also see the challenges with some of the people who do not or cannot have vaccinations. Let's do our best and support them and help them, and if they can, convince them. If for some reason they cannot, then we'll try to see how we can help them so that we can still pull through everything together.

We always understand the 80-20 rule. We have already reached our 80%. We are asking for the rest of the 10%, which makes it a lot more difficult. But yes, we're going to work on them because we want to bring everything back to—well, I should not say that, back to normal, because we have to be realistic. There may be times when we cannot have things back to normal anymore. But we can live through this together. We can still enjoy our family members together.

I have to admit that it really bothers me when I am not able to see my grandchildren. I have my daughter—she is very good. She's keeping all her children at home—four of them, imagine—and home-schooling them as well, because she wouldn't dare to have them be in school because it's still challenging. That's why we have to vaccinate: so that the younger generation is not affected.

Let's work together. Schools are one of them where we have to work together to help our younger generation. And also small businesses or big corporations: We cannot afford to have people not returning to work because of COVID. The economic recovery is one of the most

important things, other than the health and the life we want to protect: our members, our residents in Ontario. The economy is the most important thing that we need to do.

I know that I am running out of time, but I still want to say that with the time that we still have to work, I want to make sure that we continue to have unity. Continue to pass your information, your voices on to the members represented on this Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight, so that all the things that we realize from our local ridings can be reflected and can be addressed. I'm thankful that we have our Solicitor General really reporting all the details to us so that we know how to work on this together.

I would like to also say that—I tried to shorten all my things, so now I don't know which ones I have not covered. I just want to say that with the committee that we have now, let's just work together. That's what our ridings, our people in Ontario elected us for, so that we can get this pandemic under control and we can have this select committee do the best that they can with the work in front of them. I also want to say that, yes, this remaining maybe about 18% is not easy to achieve, but together we can do that. I also heard from the member opposite that she really wants us to see how we can work together, but let's put that in action. I'm sure we can achieve that.

I want to say thank you again to each and every member of this select committee for all your hard work: 14 meetings for all those few months is not easy, which means you have also been working very hard. I thank you for everything from the bottom of my heart.

I would not want to go into the details of the other things that I have prepared, but I think I got my most important message across: Let's continue to work on this. Let's support this motion, because it is important. But most important is that all of us work together, non-partisan, achieving the same goal: helping Ontarians get through this pandemic session.

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

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): From here, I look at the clock and I see it at 6. Pursuant to the order of the House passed earlier today, there will be no private members' public business today. However, pursuant to standing order 36, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

HOSPITAL AND SCHOOL SAFETY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Colleagues, earlier today, the member for Ottawa South gave notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to a question he posed to the Minister of Health. The member will have up to five minutes to state his case, and the minister's

parliamentary assistant will have up to five minutes to respond.

We turn now to the member for Ottawa South.

1800

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to thank my colleague across the way who will be responding for being here.

The reason that I called the late show is that I think there's something before us that's really important in the question that I asked this morning, which is protecting access to our hospitals and schools from the kind of anti-vaccine, anti-public health measures protests that we've seen. Earlier in September, we've seen them at Ontario hospitals, Ontario schools. We've seen them at vaccination clinics.

Here in Ontario, we haven't passed any legislation to create safe zones around our hospitals and schools and other health facilities and child care centres, but in Quebec and Alberta, they have, and BC is proposing that legislation right now. What I hear from the government is, "We don't need it." Well, I think in BC, Alberta and Quebec, they pretty much have the same police powers that we do, but they moved to take these measures because what they're trying to do is create reasonable boundaries, reasonable measures, reasonable ground rules to allow people the right to protest, but to ensure access for families to those much-needed services. No one who's trying to access a hospital or a school should be impeded, blocked or harassed, and no one who works in any of those should have that happen to them either.

Right now, in our schools, children from the ages of five to 11 aren't vaccinated, and we haven't fully vaccinated the other children. We know there's still work to do there; although there has been, I'll have to say, good progress from families in that regard.

We know that vaccines are going to be approved pretty soon for that younger cohort. That's going to be close to a million kids. And most public health units, I imagine, will be using schools to deliver those vaccines. It's how we do it every year. It's an effective way. So what it means is, there are going to be greater risks at schools, the kind of risks that we've seen at hospitals, that we need to be able to address.

So I put forward a private member's bill today that addresses those things. It creates a 150-metre buffer zone. It establishes some very clear things that people can and can't do inside that buffer zone. It's also reasonable in the sense that it sets a time limit on the bill. The bill expires once the reopening Ontario act ends, or two years from the date. It's a limited measure to create boundaries, to create reasonable ground rules. No child going to school or no family going to school with a five- or six-year-old should be harassed, during this pandemic, when there's already heightened anxiety inside families.

It's a very reasonable thing to do, and I can't understand why the government won't do it, while three other provinces are already moving to do this. But here's a challenge—we'll probably end up doing it, but it will be like vaccine mandates: It will come later. We just saw

mandatory vaccines for workers in long-term care come months late.

We just saw rapid tests in school today come. They're going to be executed—a plan for rapid tests in schools—after Thanksgiving. Well, school started in September, and if I remember correctly, the COVID-19 science table said, "We've got some risk going into the fall." Luckily, we got to the best-case scenario, but what if we didn't? Why didn't we have a plan if we weren't going to be in a best-case scenario, and why are we announcing it after Thanksgiving? School started in September.

So I encourage the government to look at safe zones. I know the Leader of the Opposition has put forward a private member's bill as well. Let's just establish some reasonable ground rules. We're all angry about these types of protests and what they've done to health care workers, what they've done to families. The Premier's tough tweets tell us that, but that's not going to cut it. That's not going to stop anything. What we need to do is create reasonable boundaries for people to be able to express themselves, but that families who want to access health care and education will not be impeded or harassed.

Thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): To reply on behalf of the government, the parliamentary assistant from Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I am pleased to rise on behalf of the government for this evening's adjournment debate on the important topic of how our government is keeping communities safe.

As we know, with over 86% of Ontarians having received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, the vast majority of Ontarians are ready to see this pandemic in the rear-view mirror and trust the medical science which demonstrates just how effective vaccines are. And through it all, our people have come together and shown the true nature of the Ontario spirit, demonstrating strength, determination, compassion and generosity. These qualities have defined a shared sense of purpose and unity of cause against our common enemy: COVID-19.

However, unfortunately, there are some people who have decided to disrupt the important work happening in Ontario's hospitals by protesting in front of hospitals, trying to disrupt their operations. I was extremely disappointed to see our hospitals and staff being the target of protests after all the sacrifices they have made during this pandemic. It has already been an incredibly difficult time for both our patients and our health care workers in Ontario, and adding this additional stress by intimidation and obstructing them from accessing or delivering care is shameful and completely unacceptable.

Luckily, in Ontario, we have seen very few instances of these kinds of protests. What few instances we have seen have, frankly, been led and attended by a small minority of Ontarians.

Speaker, I want to make it absolutely clear that it is already a criminal offence to threaten or intimidate people. When police are needed to respond to incidents that might arise from these small protests, they are there. They have

the authority to restore order and ensure safety, whatever the cause may be. Under the Criminal Code, police officers have an extensive number of tools in their authority to do so. Some examples of charges that can be laid include, but are certainly not limited to, mischief, interruption of a lawful use of enjoyment of property, trespass, breach of the peace, assault, criminal negligence and causing a disturbance.

This government supports the police and has never hesitated in giving them the tools they need to keep our communities safe. That is exactly why this government, as one of our earliest acts, repealed the previous Liberal government's anti-policing legislation. Under the leadership of the Solicitor General, we have replaced it with a modern, robust framework to ensure Ontario police continue to have the modern, effective tools they need to do their jobs.

We have been there for those working on the front lines throughout this pandemic, including both Ontario front-line police officers and our health care staff who have been working flat out.

In fact, on behalf of our entire government, I want to extend my thanks to the law enforcement officers who continue to support hospitals in need of assistance.

No one should be made to feel unsafe for following public health guidelines, like wearing a face mask or face coverings in any public spaces or rolling up their sleeves to get a COVID-19 vaccine. Ontarians are better than that,

and as we have from the very start of this pandemic, we expect them to do the right thing and follow the public health advice that has helped each one of us keep our communities safe.

The reality is, our government has been doing our part for the last 18 months to keep Ontarians safe from this pandemic. To borrow a line from the Premier, everyone has been rowing in the same direction, whether it's our front-line care staff, our law enforcement, bylaw officers or the vast majority of Ontario residents.

While these protests are few and far between, Ontario's policing professionals have the tools and resources they need to keep people safe. This is why our government is focusing on taking the actual necessary actions to continue steering the province through this pandemic. An example of this is the success of Ontario's vaccine rollout, which has resulted in one of the highest vaccination rates in the world. It is having an impact and continues to protect Ontarians against this virus.

Mr. Speaker, throughout this pandemic, our government has been steadfast in our commitment to battling this virus, yet instead the opposition wants to try to score cheap political points.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): There being no further matter to debate, I deem the earlier motion to adjourn to be carried.

This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.
The House adjourned at 1810.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Meghan Stenson, William Wong
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergente d'armes: Jacquelyn Gordon

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Anand, Deepak (PC)	Mississauga—Malton	
Andrew, Jill (NDP)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London—Fanshawe	
Arnott, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (PC)	Wellington—Halton Hills	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Arthur, Ian (NDP)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Baber, Roman (IND)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Babikian, Aris (PC)	Scarborough—Agincourt	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia—Lambton	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand—Norfolk	
Begum, Doly (NDP)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bell, Jessica (NDP)	University—Rosedale	
Berns-McGown, Rima (NDP)	Beaches—East York / Beaches—East York	
Bethlenfalvy, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (PC)	Pickering—Uxbridge	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins	
Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)	Markham—Stouffville	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC)	Scarborough North / Scarborough-Nord	Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)	Willowdale	Associate Minister of Transportation (Transit-Oriented Communities) / Ministre associé des Transports (Aménagement axé sur les transports en commun)
Clark, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds— Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby	
Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	
Crawford, Stephen (PC)	Oakville	
Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC)	Mississauga—Lakeshore	
Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Elliott, Hon. / L'hon. Christine (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce
Fee, Amy (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Fullerton, Hon. / L'hon. Merrilee (PC)	Kanata—Carleton	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Hon. / L'hon. Parm (PC)	Milton	Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiles et du Multiculturalisme
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gravelle, Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hassan, Faisal (NDP)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor—Tecumseh	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hillier, Randy (IND)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Solicitor General / Solliciteuse générale
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Karahalios, Belinda C. (NBP)	Cambridge	
Karpoche, Bhutilla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Ke, Vincent (PC)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
Khanjin, Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	
Kramp, Daryl (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	
Kusendova, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre	
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
MacLeod, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa (PC)	Nepean	Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries / ministre des Industries du patrimoine, du sport, du tourisme et de la culture
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
McKenna, Hon. / L'hon. Jane (PC)	Burlington	Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues / Ministre associée déléguée au dossier de l'Enfance et à la Condition féminine
McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Miller, Norman (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Mitas, Christina Maria (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough- Centre	
Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Morrison, Suze (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (IND)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Park, Lindsey (PC)	Durham	
Parsa, Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Rod (PC)	Ajax	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Hon. / L'hon. Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	Associate Minister of Digital Government / Ministre associé délégué de l'Action pour un gouvernement numérique
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-présidente: Donna Skelly
Teresa J. Armstrong, Toby Barrett
Lorne Coe, Rudy Cuzzetto
Randy Hillier, Jane McKenna
Judith Monteith-Farrell, Michael Parsa
Randy Pettapiece, Donna Skelly
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs / Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques

Chair / Président: Amarjot Sandhu
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeremy Roberts
Ian Arthur, Stan Cho
Catherine Fife, Mitzie Hunter
Logan Kanapathi, Sol Mamakwa
David Piccini, Jeremy Roberts
Amarjot Sandhu, Dave Smith
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Julia Douglas

Standing Committee on General Government / Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales

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

Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

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

Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

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

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

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

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

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

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

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

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

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