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of Ontario



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Thursday
11 March 2021

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Jeudi
11 mars 2021

Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott
Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
Greffier : Todd Decker

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Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 11 March 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 11 mars 2021

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers/Prières.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPORTING BROADBAND
AND INFRASTRUCTURE EXPANSION
ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SOUTENANT
L'EXPANSION DE L'INTERNET
ET DES INFRASTRUCTURES

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 10, 2021, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 257, An Act to enact the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021 and to make other amendments in respect of infrastructure and land use planning matters / Projet de loi 257, Loi édictant la Loi de 2021 sur la réalisation accélérée de projets d'Internet à haut débit et apportant d'autres modifications en ce qui concerne les infrastructures et des questions d'aménagement du territoire.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I believe when we last debated this bill, the member for Windsor West had the floor.

I recognize the member for Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. I'm glad to have the opportunity to continue my time on this bill.

When I left off yesterday, I was talking about a provincially significant wetland in my riding, the South Cameron woodlot, where this government has approved development, and how the community is opposed to that. As I was getting into that point—unfortunately, we ran out of time because the clock hit 6—the point that I was going to make prior to sharing that story was the thing that I found most interesting about this government, where they feel like they can pave over naturalized spaces, they can pave over wetlands and they can simply pick those wetlands up and put them somewhere else, and suddenly, we're going to have another naturalized space or we're going to have another wetland, just like that. It's like they think they can fold it up, put it in a suitcase and move it over to another area. But that's not how it works. It takes not just months, not just years, but decades upon decades for these naturalized areas to regenerate the wildlife.

In this case, in the South Cameron woodlot and in many other areas within my riding, we have endangered species.

You don't just pick them up and relocate them and think that they're going to do okay. You can't just pick up a wetland—you can't just say, "You know what? That piece of land over there looks great. I think we're going to say that's a wetland," and then hook up the hose and start running it to see if the land actually does what the previous wetland did, which was to mitigate flooding.

I was sharing about the South Cameron woodlot that there are homes there now, around that protected piece of land—or what was protected until this government okayed building on it—that were flooding. We have seen two once-in-100-year storms happen back to back in my riding where there was mass flooding. There was flooding in my riding; there was flooding in the neighbouring riding of Windsor–Tecumseh; there was flooding in Essex. It's not just these two once-in-100-year storms; it's the frequency and the severity of the weather that we are seeing down in my area. These homes near the South Cameron woodlot in south Windsor had flooding already, and that naturalized space was already there. Now, this government has given permission for builders to go ahead and build homes right on the wetland—not just on the border of the wetland—and it's no secret to the people in my riding or in the whole city of Windsor that I opposed that.

And yesterday, the member from Sarnia–Lambton yelled across the way at me, "Your mayor asked for it." My response was, "Of course he did. He's a Conservative." He's a huge supporter. He's just like them.

The community spoke up—

Interjection.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: He is duly elected; absolutely. But what he failed to do and what this government failed to do was to consult the people in that area.

Speaker, I'm going to read something that came out of that decision.

And I will tell you that ERCA also opposed that position—not that this government at all respects our conservation authorities. We've seen in other bills where they've attacked the conservation authorities and taken away their decision-making in place of the government coming in, heavy-handed, and forcing decisions on communities.

This was the quote from an article in Windsor around the decision to allow development on the South Cameron woodlot:

"The local Citizens Environment Alliance believes developing a wetland within city limits is not something to celebrate.

"The province has redesignated a part of the South Cameron woodlot, bounded by Totten Street, Dominion

Boulevard, Daytona Avenue and Ojibway Street, in the area west of Holy Names High School.

“I know the argument is that it improves the property tax base, improves the ability of people to live in the city but so do the wetlands,” says Alliance coordinator Derek Coronado ...

“This wetland and woodland area is one of the most significant features of its type in the city that is left and it is really unfortunate that the mayor took the time to lobby to redesignate it to open it up for development.”

“Coronado says this is backwards thinking”—and I couldn’t agree with him more.

“In the 21st century, it is really unfortunate that we are doing things now that would be out of the 1950s forgetting the fact that we have a climate crisis, we have a biodiversity conservation crisis and the city needs all the help it can get.”

“He says it is hard for the alliance to look at the municipal government as a defender or protector of natural habitat when these actions are taken.

“More than 100 acres of the property are still protected by the provincial designation.”

That raised concern in my community, because if they can open up a swath of that protected land, what is stopping them from doing it with the rest?

That was part of the debate yesterday. My colleague from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas asked that about an area in her city. The member for Flamborough–Glanbrook got quite upset about that and said, “It’s just ridiculous that you would even think we would develop on that particular piece of land in Hamilton.” But it’s not ridiculous, because they’re doing it—in the debate yesterday, we were talking about the MZOs; we were talking about Duffins Creek and what’s going on there. Why would any of us on this side of the House or any of our constituents believe that if the government is willing to take such heavy-handed measures to develop on wetland for American companies that are making billions—\$22 billion, I believe, was the number they made in profit last year. If they’re willing to do that in one area, why wouldn’t they do it in other areas?

So I am unapologetic in reiterating that concern when it comes to developing our naturalized areas and not recognizing the importance of those areas.

Speaker, areas like the South Cameron woodlot, Ojibway Park in my riding and the Devonwood Conservation Area have been a lifeline for many in my community during this pandemic. There are few areas left in this province—and we know that the Premier was on record talking about opening up the greenbelt for development, so there’s another reason why people don’t trust that they’re going to do the right thing, especially when we see legislation like it come forward. But those three areas in my riding—and there are more; there are so many more.

0910

Madam Speaker, during the pandemic, we saw just how important those areas are to the people in our ridings. Because on a nice day, instead of being stuck inside, they were able to go out and enjoy those naturalized areas. They

were able to go for a walk, take their dogs for a walk, take their kids through the areas.

I put my granddaughter in a sling, tied her to the front of me in a sling and took her for a walk through Ojibway Park, where we saw a deer, we saw owls, we saw numerous different species of birds. You had that fresh air and that sunshine and that access to nature, which is something really, really hard to come by in many urbanized areas. It was good for people’s mental health. It was good for their physical health to be able to get out and enjoy those areas. So, Speaker, it’s really concerning, when you look at it just from the health and well-being of the people who live in these areas, that this government wants to pave them over.

Again, I go back to that you can’t just pick up something like that and move it. You can’t just say, “It’s okay; trust us. We’re going to create that somewhere else for you.” Because it doesn’t work like that. That’s not the way nature works. You don’t just pick up the trees; you don’t just pick up the rivers, the lakes, the streams and move them. You don’t just pick up all of the endangered species and move them somewhere else and think that they’re going to be okay.

I know that the question was raised around why the government would allow this. I’m going to point out that I believe it was the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry who yelled across at me when I was talking about the Duffins Creek project about 10,000 jobs and us not supporting 10,000 jobs. Madam Speaker, that is the narrative of this government: that it has to be either/or. It’s either our environment or it’s jobs. It’s either naturalized spaces or it’s our jobs. That is a false choice. With proper planning, you can have both.

My colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane, when he was up, was talking about farmland. I know the Conservative side of the House likes to talk about farmland. Farmers are concerned that if you’re allowing this to happen in areas like the South Cameron woodlot or in Duffins Creek, what about their land? We talked about the change in the environment and what that means for farmers, because the farmers count on the land. They count on the weather. They count on some form of predictability. Weather is never completely predictable but it’s become more and more unpredictable.

While we do not have farms in my riding, I love taking drives out. It’s a beautiful drive. I would encourage everybody to come down and take the drive out into the county and enjoy everything that it has to offer out there. There are wineries out there. Believe it or not, we do have wineries down in our area.

I like to travel out into the member for Essex’s riding, where you can hit all the fruit and veggie stands out at the roadside. I’m talking mom-and-pop fruit and veggie stands, where they put them out in front of their homes and you drive by and you can pick up freshly grown and picked produce. There is nothing like it.

But those farmers are concerned. They are concerned because too much rain ruins the crops. Not enough rain ruins the crops. If it’s too hot or too cold, it ruins the crops. And if you want to talk about jobs, they employ people. If

their farm is gone, they not only lose their livelihood but so do the people that work for them. Again, this narrative of having to choose the environment over development—you can only pick one or the other, jobs over the environment—is a false option. You can do both. You can do both, and you don't even have to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time.

Speaker, one of the members yesterday was talking about going back to broadband and not wanting to talk about schedule 3 in the bill and the MZO's. That was, again, another false choice. We can have both. We can have broadband in rural areas without paving over naturalized areas, without destroying farmland. It is possible. You just have to have the will to do it, and you just have to listen to the people in this province, because there are many out there that will tell you how it can be done.

One of the members from the government side had talked about broadband and the importance of having Internet for farmers to be able to run their businesses. I don't disagree with that, but what I'm going to say is, when you pave over their land and you destroy the farms, they don't need broadband because they don't have a business anymore. You've taken their livelihood away.

Interjections.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I know the government side thinks it's funny, but I don't think the farmers think it's funny.

Interjection.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I don't think the farmers think it's funny.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order. The Minister of Infrastructure will come to order—actually no, will withdraw.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Not only should she come to order, she should withdraw, because she just called me a liar.

Hon. Laurie Scott: I never said that. I never said that.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Stop the clock. The House will come to order. Sorry to interrupt the member. I will concede that the Minister of Infrastructure should withdraw that—

Mr. Mike Harris: She didn't say anything—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Enough, and the member for Kitchener–Conestoga does not have the opportunity to speak right now. The minister will withdraw. The member from the other side, don't dial it up.

Hon. Laurie Scott: I withdraw, Madam Speaker.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Enough. The Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry and the member—okay, enough. The minister said something that had to do with a deliberate falsehood. That is not appropriate. I asked her to withdraw. I don't need it ratcheted up by the members in this—

Mr. Mike Harris: Speaker, point of order.

Interjection: She didn't use the word at all.

Interjection: She never said that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I'm standing.

Hon. John Yakabuski: We now respond to complaints. Wow.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The minister will come to order.

I will refer to the table right now.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I will take this opportunity to recognize the member from Kitchener–Conestoga on a point of order.

Mr. Mike Harris: I can unequivocally say that the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock did not use the words that the member across the way is alleging.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): It's not your opportunity to correct anyone else's record. I did and maintain that I heard what I heard from the minister. I have made my ruling. We have 46 seconds left on the clock to continue this debate, and then all members will have the opportunity to stand and discuss, during questions and comments, the comments from the member.

I return to the member from Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In the short time that I have left, all I'm going to say is this: We are not opposed to broadband. What we are opposed to is schedule 3, giving this government the ability to push through projects, pave over wetlands and naturalized areas without consulting the people that are affected.

Madam Speaker, my colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane has a bill, Bill 226, which would actually address this issue, and all this government has to do is look to that bill. They could pass the bill. They could incorporate that bill. But on this side of the House, for us it's not about choosing broadband over the environment. Take schedule 3 out.

0920

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

Mr. David Piccini: I thank the member opposite for her comments. Madam Speaker, I did take somewhat of an objection to the comment about the members of government liking to talk about farmers. You're darn right: We do. We like to talk about farmers, because I and many of the people on this side of the House proudly represent rural ridings—ridings that have been ignored by previous governments—farmers, who depend on broadband to get their goods to market. So I have a simple question for the member opposite: Will she support broadband for farmers in rural Ontario, yes or no?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: The simple answer to that is take schedule 3 out of this bill, and absolutely, we would support broadband. But we will not support giving the government the opportunity to destroy our environment and to ruin farmland. If you truly support farmers, you can do both: You can bring in broadband, and you can take schedule 3 out in order to protect our wetlands and protect farmlands. Again, it's a false choice. It doesn't have to be, schedule 3 in this bill; it doesn't have to be. Take it out.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thanks to my colleague from Windsor West for her comments and analysis of this bill.

It has recently come to light that the use of MZO—*and primarily, now we know, as of yesterday, that one of the uses of the MZO is for a project that will house an Amazon warehouse on significantly protected wetlands. I wonder if the proclivity of the government's use of these MZO for those specific industrial reasons—and that is their rationale, to entice big box Walmarts and Amazons into the province. I wonder if what they're sending is a message to small business that they're no longer important at all in this province, because we know what the Amazons and the Walmarts do to small businesses in the main streets of our province. Are they giving up on the small businesses in the province of Ontario, as the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has said that this government is the worst anti-small-business province jurisdiction in confederacy? Is that what they're saying? Are they locking on to that ideology?*

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you to the member from Essex for that question. I think you just have to look at what they did, leaving Walmart and Costco open because they lobbied to be left open, when small businesses in our communities, in Conservative communities, in independent communities across this province, were shut down. And the Premier's response was, "Well, it's too difficult for Costco or Walmart to section off the non-essentials, so we're just going to let them stay open and sell whatever they want." Meanwhile, businesses in my riding and other ridings who were forced to close, who would sell some of those same things, have closed permanently. Not only did they lose their businesses, in some cases, they've lost their homes. They've lost their place to live. It will be very difficult for them to come back from that. So, yes, Speaker, I would say to the member of Essex, this government certainly is on this bent to support these large corporations like Amazon, an American company making \$22 billion, rather than our small mom-and-pop—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Stop the clock. Pursuant to standing order 50(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader directs the debate to continue.

I recognize the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. John Yakabuski: It is the desire of the government for debate to continue.

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

Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Harris: I find it very ironic that members of the opposition are standing up here today, talking about how small business and business owners here in the province think that our government isn't doing a good job. The NDP had one shot at government here in the province of Ontario, and they blew it—the worst jobless numbers

they have ever had, under Premier Bob Rae; the social contract where they actually were doing so poorly that they had to lay people off from public positions—never been done before, and it has never been done again here in the province.

I want to know why the member from Windsor West and her government that has perpetrated such things over the years, in the four years that they were in government, think that the people of Ontario want them to come back when they are going to be back in third party status in the next election.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Oh, the irony in that member asking that question, Madam Speaker. I will remind the member from Kitchener–Conestoga that when his father was Premier, we saw thousands of people on the lawns of Queen's Park and protests across the province because of the numbers of workers who were losing their jobs. Nurses, teachers—

Interjections.

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

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I struck a nerve. If the member didn't want to hear the answer, then he shouldn't have asked the question. The truth hurts, I know. If I was on that side of the House, I would have told that member specifically that maybe he wasn't the right one to ask that question.

So, Madam Speaker, I go back to the fact that this does not have to be about one choice, and one choice only: broadband or our environment. The government can take schedule 3 out of this bill and we can support broadband across this province.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate having the opportunity to rise. Something that's concerning to me is schedule 3. If you take schedule 3 out, we could probably work together and get a bill done, using Bill 226 that my colleague put forward.

We're talking about a warehouse that's going to go on protected lands—a warehouse. I would think that warehouse could probably go on a brownfield somewhere in the province of Ontario, on some industrial field. I'm just guessing.

It's an American company that made \$22 billion last year. It doesn't treat their workers very well, by the way; we all know that. There's a union vote in the States on Amazon going on right now.

My question is, why do you think this government put schedule 3 in the bill when we know—and I want to be clear on this—when we know broadband is so important, not only in Ontario but right across the country? Why would you put this in the bill? It makes absolutely no sense.

On the farmer issue, we lose five farms a day in the province of Ontario.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The House will come to order.

Response?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'm going to read directly from Hansard. I'm quoting what was already in Hansard from my colleague from Waterloo, which I think answers that question:

"When you look at the Duffins Creek situation that Ontario is currently facing, and you relate it to Bill 257 and you look at the timeline—on October 30, the MZO was issued. On February 24, the Triple Properties owners"—Amazon—"made some donations. On March 4, the Ministry of Natural Resources made regulations forcing the warehouse to be built on top of a wetland. On March 4, the same day, this piece of legislation was tabled in this House, which would likely stop a lawsuit against this whole thing, and allows the minister to ignore the previous planning laws by applying it retroactively to this one and all previous ministerial zoning orders. The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority issued on March 5 a late-afternoon release calling the new law 'unheralded' and says that their decision-making is being done 'under duress.'"

So Madam Speaker, I think that lays out fairly clearly to the people of this province why this government is allowing that project to go forward on wetlands.

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

Mr. David Piccini: I've listened intently to the members' opposite very patronizing and, quite frankly, negative comments towards Amazon and other large businesses. I can only surmise—Ontario is a proud province, under a Premier that is attracting investment for small and medium-sized businesses alike. Players like Amazon take products from small businesses and transport them worldwide.

So my question is simple: Do you think Amazon should exist and have a part to play in Ontario's economy: yes or no?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: What I can tell you is I don't believe that Amazon or any other company should be building on top of a provincially significant wetland, and this government should not be allowing it to happen. As my colleague pointed out, there's other land. There's brownfield that you could be building on. It doesn't have to be on a wetland. It doesn't have to be.

Again, Madam Speaker, I go back to what I said earlier: This government is trying to bill this as broadband or destroying the environment. But that's a false choice. It doesn't have to be that way. Take schedule 3 out of the bill, and then put the warehouse somewhere else where you're not building on provincially significant wetland.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): We do not have time for another question or comment. Before we continue the debate, I am going to point out the fact—
Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I'm not going to be interrupted when I'm standing, member from Carleton, please.

It is 9:30 in the morning. We have a full day ahead of us, and already I'm feeling the need to tell the room to raise the level of debate.

0930

The earlier ruling stands; the discussion around it is finished. Members are reminded that if they have questions about the standing orders, they are welcome to review them. No member may charge another member of uttering a falsehood, regardless of the wording. That is the earlier ruling. Enough.

The side chatter and the discussions—I have got a list of names and we will move to warnings. If people find themselves removed before question period, that would be disappointing.

Further—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I find it difficult to identify voices, so if I name or if I miss—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): So the member from Kitchener–Conestoga, if that last one wasn't you, my apologies.

We will continue the debate. Further debate?

Hon. John Yakubuski: It is a pleasure this morning to speak on Bill 257, the Building Broadband Faster Act, which is a real game changer here in the province of Ontario.

From the time that humans walked the face of the Earth, communication has been one of the most important things that they possessed: the ability to communicate. Without communication, if you can't communicate, you can't compete. They needed to communicate to be hunters and gatherers. They needed to communicate to survive.

Let's move the clock ahead many, many millennia. We'll talk about things in my time. That's not that long ago.

Interjection.

Hon. John Yakubuski: They were talking by that time, John, yes.

I'm old enough to remember when, in little old Barry's Bay, as my colleagues always tease me about, we didn't have dial telephones. You had to pick up the receiver and the little crank on the side, you cranked it up and that rang the operator in the Bell telephone shop up the street. The operator would then ask you the number you wanted to speak to. Our number at home was 126. If you wanted to speak to somebody else, you gave them their number. The operator would then take the cords and plug into that. The operator would then stay on the line to ensure that the calls were connected, and then, presumably, they would leave the call, but we all know that the people who knew most in every little town were the telephone operators. In fact, I put it to you, Speaker, that that may have been the earliest form of hacking that I'm aware of in the early telephone services in small towns. Of course, we still had party lines and stuff like that.

Then I think it was in about 1967 that we actually got dial tones in Barry's Bay and our number was 756-2138; of course, you never forget that number. And it went from there. Then you started to get different services that Bell could provide.

Then I remember being a RadioShack dealer. When we were a Home Hardware in Barry's Bay, we also had a

RadioShack franchise. I remember the early cellphones. We didn't actually bring them into stock, but I do recall actually selling one, ordering it in. Do you know that early cellphone, that it was just about \$5,000 for that cellphone? Somebody was willing to pay that, and you think about what you could actually get out of that phone back then. All you could do was make a call—that's it—if you were somewhere where there actually was a tower. But some people were willing to pay that. And if there weren't those people who were willing to take that chance and believe in the technology and believe in the future—I don't know. If you can't sell it, it probably doesn't work, right? If people won't buy it, progress stops. But people did buy them.

Today, of course, we've got these phones—these aren't cellphones anymore. There's more power in this device than was in the computers that put man on the moon—umpteen times more power. That's how technology has changed. That's how society has changed.

Today, if somebody wants a new phone and they're not getting it for free, they're about ready to send a letter to the editor, because they think, "How can these telecommunication giants not give me a telephone for free if I'm willing to buy their service?" That's how times have changed. So it's time to get with the times.

We've had Internet service here for many, many years. I remember the first people in Barry's Bay were mvigs.net. If you had to send a little bit of a document, it took forever to download it or upload it. We have come a long way, but we have so far to go. With Bill 257, the Building Broadband Faster Act absolutely builds—I want to say, by the way, Speaker, if I may, that I'll be sharing my time with the member from Kitchener—Conestoga.

The Building Broadband Faster Act is the game-changer I'm talking about. I want to thank Laurie Scott, the Minister of Infrastructure, for bringing forward this bill. I remember back in 2018, when then-candidate for Premier Doug Ford came to my riding and made an announcement about our commitment to the Internet and broadband and cellphone gap. That was in my riding on the first day of the campaign. That signified to me just how committed this Premier would be to bringing broadband to the people all across Ontario, particularly rural Ontario.

I heard the members from the other side talking about rural Ontario. That's what this is about: This is about expanding to those places that don't currently have broadband. What the minister has done—which is unprecedented—working with our Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines, is to allow the use of utility poles to help drive this change, to help bring that service to more people faster. That is what it's all about. This is a billion-dollar commitment on the part of our government to broadband services here in the province of Ontario.

I hope that the folks on the other side have some questions for me today about broadband. I'm really looking forward to it, because I want to see from them that they care about broadband and what it means to people as much as I do.

This is a playing-field leveller. This is so that those rural businesses that the member opposite was talking

about can have the same access to the markets that the big boys have—that is what it is about—so that you can establish a business in rural Ontario, when today your only hope is to establish it within some urban boundary. If we're giving that to those people of rural Ontario, we're actually saying to those people that rural Ontario is a great place to live, and run a business, raise your family, enjoy the outdoors, but I did say "live," and you can't live without building, either. That's what this government is all about: giving people opportunities all across the province to live, work and play in the place that suits them and their family. That's what this is about, Speaker.

In an unprecedented way, something that we've never seen before, the development in this bill will ensure that those people across rural Ontario have that opportunity, and the people who are there now don't feel like—maybe not people my age. I'm not going anywhere. Hell, they're going to take me out in a bag some day. But what about our children and our grandchildren? Some of them would like to stay. Some of them would like to stay back and raise their families where I was raised, in the beautiful Madawaska and Ottawa Valley. Some of them would like to stay, but they need opportunities, and we, as a government, are doing exactly that: giving them the kinds of opportunities they've been asking for, to stay home in the place in this great province that they love so much.

Now, there's a partner here that is wanting—or we're wanting that partner. Let's talk about the federal government for a moment. Our government has already made—and I am confident that we haven't heard the last of Minister Scott. Her commitment and Premier Ford's commitment—this is so strong. As he has said, this is the most important infrastructure project that we have in the province of Ontario—not "one of the most," "the most." With that kind of commitment, I am absolutely certain that we have not heard the last from Minister Scott. We have not heard the last on broadband in this province. But you know where we'd like to hear something from? We'd like to hear something from the federal government. Broadband and communications through the CRTC are the responsibility of the federal government. The federal government is bringing \$1.7 billion to the table. Minister Scott has already pledged \$1 billion for the province of Ontario. They're talking about \$1.7 billion for the entire country.

0940

I have a message for the Prime Minister: Canada is really, really big. Ontario is really big, but Canada is really, really big.

So if you're going to tell me that the federal government has a commitment to broadband and to servicing rural Ontario and they're only putting up \$1.7 billion, I say, "Come on, folks, let's talk turkey." Let's get the federal government to talk seriously about bringing broadband here to the rural people of Ontario.

This government is absolutely committed. This bill is just the first step. This kind of commitment that we have made to make everybody's life better in this province—this is a first step. You can count on this government to help everybody in Ontario improve the quality of their life.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The minister indicated that he was sharing his time.

I recognize the member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: It's an honour and a privilege to rise here this morning to speak in support of this legislation put forward by, as we've said here already today, the great Minister of Infrastructure.

Before I begin, I want to thank the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry for his remarks about the benefit that this will bring to Renfrew county.

Like Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, the majority of my riding is farmland and small, rural communities. Some of my constituents are on the fringe of Kitchener and Waterloo, but they still are vastly underserved compared to those in the city. For years, before our government took office, they have been begging for access to fast, reliable, high-speed Internet.

There are 700,000 households across the province that lack reliable broadband. They are still using things like satellite Internet and dial-up Internet and, if you can imagine, in 2021 are still relying on the same infrastructure for Internet that we were using in the early 2000s. Well, this is the reality for my constituents and many others across the province.

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, or CRTC, set the standard for adequate broadband as 50 megabits per second for download speeds—as high as 10 megabits per second.

By contrast, I'm going to tell you about some people from my riding. Paul and Marg from Winterbourne, in Woolwich township, have an upload speed of—get this—0.93 megabits per second. I don't know how you can do anything on the Internet with speeds like that. That's barely even a fraction of what's considered adequate by our national standards.

Earlier this week, I shared an email that Keith, a Conestoga College student from Elmira, wrote to me about his “lousy” Internet.

My office receives countless emails, phone calls and even good old-fashioned posted letters from all over the townships in my riding.

Kim sent me an email earlier this year on behalf of his family and neighbours in St. Clements. I want to share a bit of his email with those in the House today because it really sums up the frustrations that are coming from a lot of my constituents: “My wife and I and the above mentioned names struggle to have any kind of Internet service let alone high speed.

“In our personal home, we have had Bell, Xplornet and others come to assess our location and they have all left without offering a solution.

“In fact we'd given up owning a computer and before COVID went to the library to access the Internet.

“Can you imagine if we were younger and the main caregivers to adolescents who needed to do online schooling?”

I think that's a very poignant quote. Unfortunately, some of Kim's neighbours are trying to do exactly that.

I spoke with Jason, who lives in St. Clements with his wife and kids, who are both in high school. He told me he actually jogs by where the fibre optic cables that are running into that area end. It's only a quick two- to three-kilometre run, but his family are unable to connect to that line. Instead, they've been trying their best to make their inadequate and slow connection work, which was particularly difficult this winter when their children were home and participating in online learning during the pandemic.

I could bring a huge stack of emails and letters into this House and they'd all tell you the exact same story, which is why it's so frustrating to me that all the members of this House are not on the same page with this bill. The opposition are the first ones to say that we're not moving fast enough on broadband expansion, despite our nearly \$1-billion commitment just for the province of Ontario alone.

I don't disagree that these investments should have been made years ago and that shovels should already be in the ground to bring high-speed Internet into my riding and other areas of this province, so why don't we ask the former Liberal government why they sat silently by and put red tape and barriers in the way of broadband expansion, instead of taking action like our Premier and our Minister of Infrastructure have since day one of us being elected? Maybe if they had seen rural Ontario as a priority, Madam Speaker, we would see those cables extended those two to three kilometres into St. Clements so that numerous families and businesses could get online. Instead, we are just seeing the urban-rural digital divide widen even further.

I know that our Minister of Infrastructure understands this. She experiences it first-hand back home in her riding. Thanks to her advocacy and the work to put this at the forefront of our government, we have been able to deliver good news to Ontarians, including many communities in my riding.

At the end of this year, I had the pleasure of virtually joining my friend and neighbour the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs—the member for Perth–Wellington, sitting beside me here—for an announcement on broadband expansion. It was a great announcement, and I thank him for inviting me to that. Over \$11 million is being invested to expand broadband infrastructure in five communities in Waterloo region, getting 1,300—that's 1,300—households and businesses online. This was a great announcement, and I want to thank my colleague and the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs for their work with SWIFT, which is the Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology board, for moving those RFPs forward.

But as great as this announcement was for those communities, it is only a small part of my riding, which is why we need the measures in this bill, Madam Speaker. I mentioned Paul and Marg from Winterbourne earlier in my remarks. I come back to them for a second so I can speak about a project in Winterbourne that could have benefited from the legislation that we have before us today.

Avetria Networks entered into an agreement in 2018 to bring broadband connectivity to 125 homes and a school in Winterbourne. This project was planned in two phases. The first was all underground fibre. However, the second was to be completed using existing hydro poles, and the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry talked a little bit about this before. Avetria had to work with Waterloo North Hydro to get access to that infrastructure, so the measures in the Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act that reduce the barriers and costs to using utility poles could have sped up the process and reduced costs in bringing Internet to those 125 homes and also a school.

These measures include the regulation of hydro pole attachment charges, prescribing the allocation methodology for hydro pole make-ready costs, and setting required standards for performance and timing when it comes to broadband expansion projects. I think that is very, very important, because we have heard time and time again how underserved communities, where they aren't able to put fibre through, say, bedrock and different things like that, want to be able to string it along the hydro poles, but the companies just will not give them access.

If the previous government had made the expansion of broadband a priority and taken action like we have, many families in my riding, like I said, would already have this very important connection, so I ask the members opposite, who stood by and propped up the Liberals time and time again, what they have against Paul and Marg, Jason, Kim and Keith getting access to broadband service for all these years.

Despite having a provincial government that stands at the ready with a \$1-billion commitment to improving connectivity, we are still waiting for the federal government to step up. Well, the families and businesses in my riding simply cannot wait any longer. I am proud to stand alongside my government colleagues who have stepped up while the federal government is still absent from this issue, because even when the days of Zoom meetings and working from home are over, families and businesses in my riding will still need access to fast, reliable broadband service to stay competitive through our economic recovery.

As I wrap it up, Madam Speaker, I'm looking across the floor to see whether my fellow members from Toronto, whose constituents already have the ability to answer emails or do video calls with their loved ones, are going to support this piece of legislation so that my community has the opportunity to do the same, without having to wait on utility companies or regional governments to make those changes.

0950

We're ready to take steps forward. The funding commitment is there. Now, let's pass this bill, cut through red tape and unlock broadband for rural communities across this province, so that they have a chance to compete with urban centres and we can reduce the digital divide between those urban centres and rural communities.

Thank you very much for the opportunity today, Madam Speaker. I'm looking forward to the questions and comments.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: History repeats itself. The Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry spoke about how, under the last Liberal government, well-connected, super-rich people were dumping money on the Liberals, and that he himself would invite the same people, but he couldn't get the money. But now, developers across this country have stained ties and T-shirts from spaghetti sauce from spaghetti dinners.

It is so patently obvious what's happening here—

Mr. Mike Harris: Point of order, Speaker.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: We're going to do this again. I believe the member opposite is imputing motive.

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

I will caution the member to ensure that he is in no way suggesting motive in his question. Please continue the clock.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Speaker, I believe in the possibilities of coincidence; I certainly do.

I have a couple of questions. Developers are giving thousands of dollars just before they get MZOs approved. We are seeing time and time again legislation to help the most rich developers across the province and in turn developers—

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Okay. The question is, why did you add schedule 3 to this bill? Will you remove it?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Response? I recognize the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the member for Humber River–Black Creek for the question. Based on the first part of his question, which you almost ruled out of order, Speaker, I would have to ask: Does the NDP—do their donations fall down like manna from heaven, or do people actually make them to their party as well? We're not here to have that discussion today. This is a free democracy. People choose to donate, and some donate to all political parties.

But I do want to talk about that the member never mentioned broadband. This is the bill that is going to equalize service across the province of Ontario so those families that my friend from Kitchener–Conestoga was talking about—I think of my family, too—have access to the online learning that we found through COVID-19, without that Internet across the province being equal, we have challenges—

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

Further questions?

Mr. Lorne Coe: What's clear when you read the legislation is that the broadband access is a vital piece of modern infrastructure. We've heard discussion about that. We've also heard discussion—on this side, at least—about the importance of broadband access to economic competitiveness across the province of Ontario.

Could the members who just spoke talk more about how this legislation builds on the Ontario Rebuilding and Recovery Act, creating jobs and enhancing the overall economic competitiveness in the province of Ontario?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you to the member from Whitby for the question. I know he has a lot of very important rural communities that are centred just outside of his riding in Durham—not unlike yourself, Madam Speaker.

Listen, when we look at what modern farming and especially modern agriculture look like, I can tell you there is a massive opportunity here for farmers in my riding who I've spoken to, to be able to take advantage of broadband and getting their goods to market. They need to be able to compete on a level playing field with folks who are in urban areas.

This is certainly a huge issue in my riding. We hear time and time again how—I believe the member from Carleton yesterday was talking about how tractors and farming equipment use GPS, where they need to be able to have cellular service in their tractors. So getting this bill forward is absolutely going to help those small, medium and large farmers in agriculture businesses compete on a global level.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to listen to the members and particularly the Minister of Natural Resources. We really enjoy sparring with each other.

As the critic for agriculture and rural affairs, I can safely say we fully support the first two sections of the bill. I know how important broadband is to rural Ontario. But as a farmer and as a representative of agriculture, the third part of the bill, which includes MZOs and jumping over the provincial policy framework, directly threatens agriculture, and farmers know that. The bad planning and minimum distance separations hurt agriculture.

Why are you pitting the agriculture community against each other, those who need broadband and those who know that their businesses are threatened by bad planning? Why? Are you also lobbying to take the third schedule out of that bill?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. John Yakubuski: I thank the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane for his comments and his compliments, and I share those and pass them back to him. We've had a long history here.

I want to ask him—look it, this Bill 257—if you don't like it, just pretend it isn't there, because this is about the people of Ontario and their future. This is about rural

Ontario and people in your riding, too, who have been begging and crying and screaming for equal access to Internet for years, ignored by the previous government but not being ignored by this government.

Let's be clear: We've all been invigorated in this direction by the challenges of COVID-19. We can wait no longer. This has to happen. Stand up and support broadband.

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

Mr. Parm Gill: I want to thank both of my honourable colleagues for their very passionate remarks. A lot of members may not know that I represent a significant part—part of my riding in Milton is a rural community, and also a northern part of Burlington falls in my riding of Milton where broadband continues to be a serious issue, especially during COVID-19. We all know that students are having to study from home, parents have to work from home, farmers, small businesses—you name it.

Especially knowing that Milton is actually part of the GTA and broadband is an issue within the GTA in certain communities, I'm wondering if the members can highlight how this bill will help my constituents in my riding of Milton with the concerns about broadband.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: To the member for Milton: I have personal experience. I used to commute to Burlington almost on a daily basis in a previous life before politics, and there is on Appleby Line an area where you actually cannot get cell service. We're talking about being theoretically in the greater Toronto area—one of the most densely populated or highly populated areas in North America—where you actually cannot get a cell signal. It's almost disgraceful to think that there are people who don't have an opportunity to be able to connect with loved ones, don't have an opportunity to be able to take part in online learning, don't have an opportunity to be able to grow their business.

This bill will help move that process of getting service to some of those areas in the member's riding along much, much faster, and I'm looking forward to seeing this bill hopefully pass with all-party support here in the House.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): There's time for one more question.

Mr. John Vanthof: In my previous question to the Minister of Natural Resources, where I identified section 3 of this bill, which would be damaging to agriculture, his response, a minister of crown, was, "Well, just rip it out. Pretend it isn't there." I was wondering, is that also his attitude or the policy of his ministry when it comes to issues like paving over wetlands? "You know what? It's not really right, but we'll just do this: just pretend it isn't there."

Sir, is that how you plan to protect agriculture from bad planning, from the MZOs that will hurt, will damage, will crush some agriculture sectors in this province? Is that your response: just pretend that isn't there?

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The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Response? I recognize the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. John Yakabuski: The member can feign his anger if he wants, but he knows what we're talking about. Schedule 3 is there for a reason. MZOs are a vital tool in the toolbox of government when they must act in the provincial interest, and let me tell you, Speaker, and I say to the member there, our commitment to protecting land has never changed. It will always be there first and foremost.

But I will say this: If this government is going to use an MZO as one of those tools, as a vehicle, it will only be done so at the express consent of the municipality concerned. If you have a concern, talk to your municipalities. They want to grow. They want to see their people—they want jobs in their communities. They want to be able to have economic prosperity for their people as well.

Stand with us. Support this bill. Bring broadband to the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate? I recognize the member from Kitchener Centre.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I don't even know where to start. I had all sorts of notes about how I was going to organize my debate, and then I just got told that I need to pretend that a schedule in a piece of legislation isn't present so that we're able to vote for a bill about broadband. I can't believe that that just happened.

To be honest, it's like I need to do some healing work in this space, because schedule 3 has been raised repeatedly—repeatedly—by environmentalists because of the damage that it can do to the environment. And we're now being asked to pretend? It doesn't make any kind of sense to me.

So here's where I'm going to start. While the minister would like us to pretend that schedule 3 isn't there, I need to speak on behalf of the people of Waterloo region. I'm going to go back to November 13, 2020. There was an editorial in the Waterloo Region Record. The title is "Don't Give Free Rein to Ontario's Developers," and the very first line says the Premier "is moving quickly but quietly to give Ontario's developers the upper hand over Ontario's environment."

I'm starting there because I'm not allowed to pretend that schedule 3 isn't there. I was elected by the people, who are saying to me, "Your job, MPP Lindo, is to actually be present, to pay attention to what's in the legislation and to make sure that you protect the environment."

The article goes on, but I'm not going to read more from that one; instead, I'm going to jump ahead to February 26 of this year. From the Waterloo Region Record, it's an editorial: "Beware Premier When He's Bearing Greenbelt Gifts." I'm going to spend a bit of time here, because again, I'm literally being asked by all of the constituents in Kitchener Centre who are writing to my office, by folks across Waterloo region who are c.c.-ing me on letters that

they are sending to other members of the government—they're telling me that I have to speak to schedule 3. While they on the other side want to believe that it is not appropriate for me to speak to schedule 3, then I ask, why is it in the bill? Because if it's in the bill, I have to speak to it.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry will come to order.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: And I quote: "So, when we hear the region of Waterloo asking tough questions about" the Premier's "Greenbelt expansion, we say keep talking. And when we hear regional officials warn that the municipality might actively oppose the plan if it turns out to threaten the local environment, we say do what is necessary."

The people of Waterloo region actually want us to challenge the government when they put legislation forward that can potentially hurt the environment, because the signals from the government have already been made. The signals were already there. This is not new.

So again, I quote: "To anyone who suggests these greenbelt worries are off-base, we'd say look at" the Premier's "own dubious environmental track record."

"He's the Premier who cut money and power out of the province's conservation authorities—including the Grand River Conservation Authority. On his watch, the province increasingly uses ministerial zoning orders to fast-track environmentally unsound developments."

Part of my role as an elected official is to actually bring the voice of my constituents into this chamber. And as much as the folks on the other side would like to heckle and complain that I'm doing my job, I have been elected to do this, and I take this duty very, very seriously.

When a bill gets tabled that talks about MZOs, that talks about retroactively allowing the damage to the environment to continue, I go back to this line, and I read it again, "The province increasingly uses ministerial zoning orders to fast-track environmentally unsound developments."

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I'm sorry to interrupt the member. Stop the clock.

Could I ask, please, that the side conversations not be louder than the member who has the floor. I'm having difficulty hearing the member who does have the right to speak right now. Thank you.

Please continue.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think it's really important for us to recognize that when legislation gets tabled in this House, every single schedule of the legislation needs to be examined. We can't pretend that things aren't there. That does a disservice to the people of Ontario, especially at a time where we are having this debate in the midst of a pandemic—in a pandemic where we've had moments where schools have been closed and people have had to rely on the Internet and the lack of broadband to try and figure out ways to navigate so their kids can stay online or they can get to work—which brings me to the rest of my debate.

The MPP for Timiskaming–Cochrane tabled Bill 226, the Broadband is an Essential Service Act. Within that bill, it talked about declaring broadband to be an essential service. It had targets; it asked for targets and timelines to make sure that the work gets done, especially in rural areas. The bill passed. To my knowledge, it passed unanimously, and yet here we are looking at Bill 257, where none of that information is in the bill and Bill 226 is sitting in committee, just waiting. There's no accountability embedded within this piece of legislation.

In theory, it's wonderful that we want everybody in rural Ontario to have access. It's wonderful that we're sitting in this House and we're saying that it's really important; it's essential. Why isn't that language in the bill? It would be wonderful if that was there.

Just this week, I believe, the MPP for Algoma–Manitoulin had a motion, motion 142. It would enable Internet rate relief, HST exemption for rural and northern Ontarians and a ban on Internet disconnections for all Ontarians during the pandemic. The motion did not pass and the opportunity for us to say that we are going to work collaboratively to ensure that nobody is left out of this expansion for broadband has now been put into question in this House. Because if we don't ensure that we have language and an opportunity to ensure equitable distribution of broadband, then some people will, in effect, be left behind.

We can't pretend that that's not going to happen. We have to be honest in these roles. That's part of our job. We have to be forward-thinking in this job. We have to understand that if we don't use words in legislation, things won't happen. How do we have legislation that the government has said is to increase broadband access in rural Ontario if the word "rural" isn't in the bill? How do we ensure that it's accessible to everybody if we don't actually make sure that everybody can afford it or that there aren't these kinds of weird tensions between wanting to ensure the expansion happens and destroying our environment? Because if we don't keep the planet safe, we won't be here to get online anyway. It's really, really important for us to recognize what those priorities are.

So in this last minute or so of the debate, I just want to put something into the universe in this chamber. It doesn't have to be fighting all the time. The government could actually allow us to help them help themselves. They could take some of the information, the bills, the motions, the ideas, the words that are coming from our own constituents, and they could embed that language into the bill. They could remove schedule 3 so that we could start doing the important work. They could decide that we can, in fact, do better so that people have access to broadband—not just words about broadband, but actual access so they can get online—small businesses, parents who are trying to ensure that their kids are online for school.

1010

We could look at rural areas far, far north; we could make sure that they have access to what they need. We could develop an equitable plan that doesn't leave anybody behind, and we could do it at the same time that we

protect the environment. No matter how hard it is, that's literally why we were elected to be here. We were elected to be here to do this hard work. We were elected to be here to find ways to ensure that we protect the planet, the environment, and that we also do what is necessary to keep things moving—and I have faith in us; I think that we can. But we can't do it if we've decided that the starting point is to pretend. We can only do it if we decide to look directly in the face of the challenges and work collaboratively for everybody in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): We have time for a few quick questions and comments.

Hon. John Yakabuski: I thank the member for Kitchener Centre for her address this morning.

I just want to point something out. They were going to have a little fun, but let's be clear: Whether you want to pretend something is in it or not, you're getting one vote. I need the folks over on that other side to stop pretending that they oppose this bill because of schedule 3. The people across Ontario know that they're going to get one up or down question on this bill—and the question is going to be not on one page, but on 12 pages: Do you support the expansion of broadband in the province of Ontario or not?

Stop pretending this fake anger about schedule 3, about something that the government needs to do in the best interests of the people of Ontario, and answer the question: Do you or do you not support Bill 257 and broadband expansion in the province of Ontario?

Interjections.

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

Response?

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: I support really solid legislation; not legislation that includes things that I'm supposed to pretend aren't there.

I support working collaboratively with my colleagues on all sides of this House to ensure that the access to broadband is equitable and that the language and legislation is clear. I support timelines and deadlines and actually doing the work.

I do not support pretending.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: To the Minister of Natural Resources, a member—I was elected here in 2011—I have a lot of respect for: You are masterful, my friend.

I have stood many times in my place in support of broadband. I've even put in a motion. Just this week, I spoke on the need for broadband in my riding. I am not pretending.

The thing that I cannot pretend, my friend—I cannot pretend schedule 3 is not in this bill, because it is.

To the member: Can you pretend that schedule 3 is not in this bill?

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you very much for that question.

On record: No, I am not able to pretend that schedule 3 is not in this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): We do not have time for any further questions or comments.
Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

QUEEN'S CAREER APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Ian Arthur: Today I want to highlight the Queen's Career Apprenticeship program. Piloted in 2018, the program consists of a one-year paid apprenticeship for new grads from Queen's. Candidates commit to a full-year term, and employers are reimbursed for four months of salary. This initiative helps graduates in the arts and humanities transition from academia into the workforce.

The program was made possible due to the generous financial support from business leader and philanthropist Mr. Alan Rottenberg and thanks to a partnership between Queen's and Kingston Economic Development.

The program is both successful and growing. In the original year, eight jobs were created, with seven of those turning into permanent employment. The program now has 32 positions in Kingston, is launching in London and Guelph, and similar initiatives are beginning in Hamilton and Kelowna.

The Queen's Career Apprenticeship program has broad appeal for municipalities like Kingston, where talent retention can be a struggle. A 2018 survey of eastern Ontario businesses identified the shortage of skilled workers in the region as one of the top three challenges to growth. This hurts small and medium-sized businesses, which can't compete with larger corporations in recruitment.

Unique initiatives such as these are especially important for those graduating in such fraught times as we currently face. So I want to thank Queen's University, Mr. Alan Rottenberg and all involved for their success and wish the program all the best in the future.

DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: This Sunday, Ontarians will take part in yet another outdated biannual tradition: the spring forward time change. What this will mean is that Ontarians will lose an hour of sleep. We will gain an extra hour of sunlight in the afternoon, but at the cost of great disruption to our sleep schedules.

Thankfully, this Legislature passed the Time Amendment Act back in November, a bill that I brought forward to end the biannual time change. But of course, we want to do this responsibly. We want to make sure that this change doesn't come into force until we get Quebec and the state of New York on board.

I would like to take a moment to update this House and all Ontarians on how that work is progressing. Speaker, I have sent a letter requesting a meeting with both Premier Legault and Governor Cuomo to discuss this very

important initiative. While we haven't yet heard back from either the Premier or the Governor, there have been some positive signs. Premier Legault was asked about this in a media interview and indicated that he was open to the idea. Meanwhile, in New York state, a state senator has introduced legislation to bring about permanent daylight saving time in the state of New York, and at the national level in the United States, a senator from Florida has brought forward legislation to bring permanent daylight saving time across the United States.

I look forward to us working together to make this a reality.

ROLAND McLEAN FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Michael Mantha: It is with sincere regret that I inform the Legislature today of the passing of one of the township of Nairn Centre's brave volunteer firefighters, Roland McLean.

Roland served as a volunteer firefighter for the town of Spanish and then the township of Nairn Centre for a combined total of 50 years. He was a retired captain from the Nairn Centre fire department. We extend our sympathies to his family, friends and fellow firefighters. We offer our thanks for his many years of dedicated service in protecting lives and keeping our communities safe.

Speaker, at this time, I wish to acknowledge the contributions of the hundreds of volunteer firefighters across Algoma-Manitoulin and this province. They stand, shoulder to shoulder, on guard, day in and day out, to protect us all from the destructive forces of fire. They are among the first ones on the scene when all forms of danger arise and when there is no one else to come. They work proactively in the community and remind us how to be safe in our daily lives.

These men and women we call heroes are ordinary individuals in our communities who find the strength to overcome their fears because of their deep compassion and love for people. Thank you to all of them, and we pray for your continued strength and safety.

SICKLE CELL DISEASE AND THALASSEMIA

Mr. Rod Phillips: Following the debate on Bill 255, the Sickle Cell Disease Awareness Day and Thalassemia Awareness Day Act, 2021, I was fortunate to be able to continue to work with those impacted by the disease in both Ajax and Durham region. I was fortunate to be able to continue to listen to the effect that these two horrible diseases have on their daily lives.

As such, I have since had the opportunity to write a letter to the federal Ministry of Health, which oversees Health Canada. The letter is a request as to when we will see Endari and other medicines currently available in the United States available to help those living with this dis-

ease approved in Canada. I've asked for more transparency from Health Canada and the federal government to ensure that this community is informed of potential decisions about upcoming medical trials and the approval of these important life-changing drugs.

1020

Mr. Speaker, the heartbreaking stories of marginalization and the suffering of those living with these diseases is unacceptable. We, as Ontarians and Canadians, have work to do to enable access and support for those suffering from sickle cell and thalassemia.

As a result of the great work done by the MPPs for Barrie–Innisfil and Mississauga–Lakeshore, we will continue to work with local communities, Ajax residents and advocates to ensure those suffering from sickle cell and thalassemia are heard clearly in Ottawa and in this chamber.

I believe that we must collectively act together to ensure that the marginalization suffered by those with the disease comes to an end, and I'm hoping that all politicians and health care professionals will join those in this Legislature to do that in the future.

LAND USE PLANNING

Ms. Jessica Bell: My office has received many emails and calls from residents of University–Rosedale who are concerned about the Ontario government's decision to ignore communities and planning rules and issue municipal zoning orders to developers.

Now, the Premier says he's proud of these controversial MZOs to fast-track development. Well, I'll tell you what I'm not proud of: I wouldn't be proud of issuing a zoning order in Stratford to impose a glass-manufacturing plant that would put the water supply at risk. I wouldn't be proud of approving an MZO so Amazon could build a warehouse on wetlands in Duffins Creek. I wouldn't be proud of the MZO that was filed to secretly demolish the Foundry buildings in Toronto Centre, and I wouldn't be proud of the fact that Ecojustice is taking the Ontario government to court over this very issue.

Now, rapid construction of projects that are in the public interest, like expanding Sunnybrook hospital—I get that. That's not what I have issue with, but what I have issue with is the government's decision to ignore planning rules and environmental needs and genuine community concerns to issue MZOs to fast-track development for developers who give the PC government money, like PC donor Mitchell Goldhar, chair of SmartCentres, who got an MZO to build big in Vaughan; or Carmine Nigro, a donor for Vic Fedeli and former president of the PC Ontario Fund, who is connected to the MZO in Kawartha Lakes to build a Walmart. The list goes on.

This is not how development should proceed. Development should not be about building for personal political gain; it should be about building for the public good.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnett): I'm going to remind members that it is inappropriate to impute motive. I just lay that out as a general reminder before we begin question

period and remind members that we refer to each other by our ministerial title or our riding name when talking about another member.

The next statement?

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. John Fraser: Today marks one year since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. COVID-19 has changed the way we look at things. Tragically, more than 7,000 Ontarians have died, many more have suffered and many, many more families have suffered as well. Later on this morning, we'll honour them when we join for a moment of silence.

We've learned a lot from COVID-19. We've learned that the front lines are literally everywhere and just how important we are to each other. We all owe a debt to all workers in health care settings who've put themselves and their families at risk to care for us and our families in this pandemic. We owe a debt of gratitude to people who stock shelves, run cash registers, deliver goods, operate public transit—literally everything people do that helps us meet our families' daily needs. Again, we just see how interconnected we all are. COVID has made that so clear.

Vaccines are coming, and along with that, hope. We still have a ways to go. I know that we'll get through this together, and when we get through it, things have to change. Whether it's how we care for our elderly or how we make sure people have a living wage or paid sick days, we have to take the opportunity to change things, and change things for the better.

VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARDS

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Last night, I had the opportunity to attend the 2020 Ontario Volunteer Service Awards. Throughout Ontario, over 6,000 volunteers have been recognized.

Volunteers are so vital to communities like mine in Barrie and Innisfil. Even throughout an incredibly challenging year, our communities had the loyal support of volunteers. They all demonstrated the very best of the Ontario spirit.

The 2020 Ontario Volunteer Service Awards highlighted the volunteers who tirelessly and selflessly risked and continue to risk their lives to support their communities. It is so important that we take the time to celebrate those volunteers. The awards recognized individuals for continuous years of volunteer service at single organizations, such as hospitals, like Royal Victoria hospital; seniors' centres, like Hospice Simcoe; and community associations.

Organizations from Barrie–Innisfil had recipients win awards for the five, 10, 15, 20, 25, 40 and 60 years of service awards categories. They included our Furry Friends Animal Shelter, MS Society, the Aga Khan Council for Ontario, Epilepsy Ontario, Barrie Art Club, Canadian Red Cross, Georgian Bay Volunteer Search and

Rescue, Barrie Integrated Baseball Association and the Barrie Public Library.

I could go on, Speaker, but I wanted to thank all these volunteers who have touched our lives in so many ways. Whether it's providing comfort to the sick, companionship for older Ontarians or coaching children and youth soccer teams, they're the backbone of our community.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Two weeks ago, Ontario's COVID-19 science advisory table released a report recommending that our vaccination strategy should not just be delivered based on age alone, but it should also target those in communities with the highest amounts of COVID-19 transmission.

These public health experts argue that this could not only lower Ontario's overall case count, it could also save lives. Dr. Peter Jüni, one of the report's authors, warned that if those who have suffered the greatest burden during the pandemic aren't among the first to get the vaccine, then we could risk having a third wave.

Black, Indigenous and other racially marginalized communities have been amongst the most affected by this pandemic. According to Toronto Public Health data, as of December 31, 77% of all reported COVID-19 cases in Toronto identified as being part of a racially marginalized community, even though they make up just over half of Toronto's overall population.

Black Creek Community Health Centre has held multiple town halls in my community to help educate people about the vaccine. Throughout this pandemic, they have helped to organize many mobile COVID-19 testing centres, where thousands of people who might have otherwise not been able to be tested received COVID-19 tests.

Many essential workers in my community cram into crowded buses just to put food on the table to feed their families. If this government continues to deny them paid sick days, it must immediately bring mobile vaccination clinics to the communities where it is needed most, and at times where workers can get vaccinated without having to lose pay. Otherwise, many who are most at risk simply will not receive the vaccine and many more lives across this province could be lost.

VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARDS

Ms. Lindsey Park: Earlier this week, we celebrated International Women's Day. Every single day, women in Durham make invaluable contributions to our community, whether on the front lines of the pandemic, in running businesses, educating the next generation or serving as leaders or volunteers in the community.

Last week, I had the privilege of attending an event recognizing the contributions of some of our most outstanding and longest-serving volunteers in Durham region. The Ontario Volunteer Service Awards are provincial awards given in recognition of committed and dedicated volunteer service to an organization. This year, the awards recognized those who have continued to serve our communities

in hospitals, seniors' centres and community associations, even during one of the most challenging years on record.

Speaker, of those volunteers who received an award in Durham—whether it was a youth award, an award recognizing five or 50 years of service—70% were women. They served at Grandview Children's Centre, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Durham, Lakeridge Health, Port Perry Seniors Club, Community Care Durham, Oshawa Senior Community Centres, Feed the Need in Durham and the Durham Children's Aid Society, as just a few examples.

I want to thank all the incredible women of Durham—the mothers, the daughters, the sisters and the grandmothers—who serve our community every day.

HIGHWAY OF HEROES CLEANUP

Mr. David Piccini: I rise today to thank a very special person to our community of Northumberland-Peterborough South: Kerri Tadeu. It was in November 2016 that Kerri, along with Master Corporal Collin Fitzgerald and Corporal Nick Kerr, adopted a one-kilometre-plus stretch of the Highway of Heroes in Grafton, starting a litter cleanup to honour Major Michelle Knight Mendes, Canada's 118th Canadian soldier who died abroad in service of our country in Canada's mission in Afghanistan.

1030

Major Mendes grew up just outside the small town of Grafton, Ontario, graduating from RMC and then going on to pursue a master's at Carleton University. She was seen as a rising star in Canada's Armed Forces. Her family tribute said she "touched so many lives it would be impossible to name everyone. She lived everyday to its fullest potential and saw the best in everyone."

It's in that spirit that her friend Kerri Tadeu brings together a truly remarkable group of volunteers, Silver Cross Mothers and veterans to clean up the on- and off-ramps along the Highway of Heroes. This cleanup has now stretched to mark the Highway of Heroes from Trenton to Toronto. Folks like myself growing up along this stretch of highway fondly recall shops closing and community members gathering along the bridges to mark the fallen who paid the ultimate sacrifice.

Mr. Speaker, I've had the opportunity and honour to join Kerri, along with the Premier and our parliamentary assistant for the Minister of the Environment, to mark this important cleanup. I'd like to thank all the remarkable volunteers for honouring our brave men and women, for taking part in the cleanup, and I would encourage everyone to do it this season.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our members' statements for this morning.

REPORT, FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that the following document was tabled: a report entitled Expenditure Monitor 2020-21: Q3, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario.

NATIONAL DAY OF OBSERVANCE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I understand that the Premier has a point of order that he wishes to raise.

Hon. Doug Ford: I do, Mr. Speaker; thank you. If you ask, I believe you will find there will be unanimous consent to observe a moment of silence, recognizing all Ontarians who have been impacted by COVID-19 on this National Day of Observance.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Premier is seeking unanimous consent of the House for a moment's silence to remember all the Ontarians and Canadians who have been impacted by COVID-19 on this National Day of Observance. Agreed? Agreed. Members will rise.

The House observed a moment's silence.

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

COVID-19 FATALITIES

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: As I've done every Thursday, I seek unanimous consent for the House to observe a moment of silence to pay tribute to the 75 Ontarians who have succumbed to COVID-19 over the past week.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition is seeking unanimous consent of the House for a moment's silence to pay tribute to the 75 Ontarians who have succumbed to COVID-19 over the past week. Agreed? Agreed. Again, I'll ask members to rise.

The House observed a moment's silence.

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

The member for Brampton North has a point of order.

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

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Brampton North is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to bring forward a motion requiring the government to implement paid sick days legislation to help protect workers. Agreed? I heard a no.

It is now time for oral questions.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, there's a new report being released today that raises serious concerns about Ontario possibly facing a third wave of COVID-19 in our province.

We know that the second-wave strategy for the government was to, really, do nothing and wait for the vaccines

to arrive. As a result, thousands of people lost their lives in long-term care and elsewhere, and we went into another lockdown.

My question for the Premier is, is this the strategy to prevent Ontario from going into a third wave: do nothing, wait for the vaccines, hope for the best and perhaps end us up in another lockdown?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I can assure the leader of the official opposition that we are taking every step we can to prevent going into a third wave.

We have the vaccinations well under way. As a matter of fact, yesterday we overcame one million vaccines being administered. So we're well on our way to doing that. We are ramping up with pharmacies, mass immunization clinics and primary care so that as we receive these vaccines in increasing quantities, we're going to be able to get more needles into people's arms to provide them with the protection they need.

We're also taking every step we can because we know there are variants of concern out there that are expected. The modelling has said to us that it's going to be the dominant strain very shortly; we're now at about 40%. So we're preparing our hospitals, creating additional capacity. We're dealing with preventing greater outbreaks, and we've put a six-point plan in place to make sure we can deal with that, which I will discuss in the supplementary.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Premier: The vaccine rollout has been slow, it has been sloppy, it has been poorly planned and poorly executed. And the government hasn't put in place the kinds of things that were necessary to stop the spread of COVID-19; for example, paid sick days for workers.

Here we have a situation where they've rushed the reopening and they haven't put any additional measures in to stop the spread. It looks like they're hanging their hat on a failed strategy from the second wave, which was simply to rely on the vaccine.

Is this really all the Premier has to offer to Ontarians—a failed strategy to prevent us from a third wave and going into another lockdown?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Premier to reply.

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker: If our strategy has failed, what do you say about the rest of the country? We're leading the country in most vaccinations—over a million vaccinations.

We've also put mandatory on-arrival testing for international travellers, and if we didn't do that, we would see the cases go much higher.

We had enhanced screening and sequencing, maintaining public health measures, strengthening case and contact management, implementing enhanced protections in vulnerable populations, leveraging the latest data to inform public health.

Every day, people are going into long-term care—they're getting rapid tests. We're deploying hundreds of thousands of rapid tests all throughout the system—long-term care, education, manufacturing.

Now, with the distribution of the vaccines, we have mobile units going out there—we have hospitals, public health units, mass vaccination centres.

Maybe the NDP should hop on board and give us suggestions rather than sitting here and complaining every single day.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I guess the Premier doesn't listen when he comes in to question period. We've been offering all kinds of solutions for a whole year now; they just don't want to implement them, Speaker. That's the problem.

1040

But you know, we're not in the clear and I think people are worried. The rollout of the vaccines has been completely confusing and messy.

We needed new measures to protect people, like the ones the NDP has been asking for, things like paid sick days, things like smaller class sizes, and things like paid time off to go get your vaccine. But this government doesn't seem prepared to do any of that, and in the meantime, it looks like we're waiting for the vaccines to prevent a third wave.

It didn't work in the second wave; that strategy did not work.

Why is this Premier not prepared to learn from his mistakes and actually put a plan in place to prevent us from sliding into a third wave and yet another lockdown in our province?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker: I just want to remind the Leader of the Opposition again that not only are we leading the country in vaccinations—we obviously need more—but we are still, as of today, and we've never moved from this spot, number one with the lowest cases, with the exception of the Maritime provinces, anywhere in the country. We're number one in the lowest cases in any jurisdiction our size in North America.

So, it's not about us. It's about all the front-line health care workers. That's what the Leader of the Opposition misses. Every time she gets up and criticizes, she's criticizing the doctors, the front-line health care workers, PSWs, paramedics, the tens of thousands of people who are out there giving it everything they can.

Again, maybe she can hop on board and help out once in a while.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. Speaker, Thunder Bay is in absolute crisis. They have the highest per capita cases of COVID-19 in our entire province. I want to share something that the medical officer of health there has said.

Dr. Janet DeMille says, "There is no sense in sugar-coating it. Things are not looking very good right now." This is from a couple of days go.

"A significant and uncomfortable amount of cases are being reported every day...."

"COVID-19 is essentially everywhere. It's in many different places, and it's spreading."

Speaker, why didn't the Premier announce yesterday that they were sending a whole bunch of vaccines to Thunder Bay, a place that clearly needs them desperately?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much for the question. I can advise that, while the situation in Thunder Bay is serious, there's no question about it, the number of cases has actually gone down today, from 67 to 48.

We have sent significant resources in there to help them deal with that. We have provided 20 assigned provincial case managers who have gone up there. They've asked for 10 more; we're going to do that.

I've had conversations with the federal minister, Minister Hajdu. The federal government is doing what they can as well to provide some isolation housing.

But we are doing the case and contact management: 92% of the cases are being reached within 24 hours. We've also funded the hospital by another \$2.7 million to create 30 new beds.

We are containing it; it's coming under control. We know there are significant resources that are still needed to help them, and they will be receiving additional vaccines as well.

But right now, the important thing is to stop the spread of this and to make sure that we can keep this contained and get these numbers down even more, and put them into another framework when they're ready to do so.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Since February, the NDP member for Thunder Bay—Atikokan has been ringing the alarm bells about what's been going down in Thunder Bay. All we got from this government was another failed slogan. This time it was called "an emergency brake." It was never a plan. It was just a slogan for the government.

We have a crisis in Thunder Bay. We have not had the kind of response necessary. We didn't hear that the vaccines are going to pharmacies yesterday. We didn't hear Thunder Bay on the list of hot spots that was announced.

How can it be that since February there has been a crisis unfolding in Thunder Bay and weeks later the government still has not sent the vaccines necessary to get the virus under control in Thunder Bay?

Hon. Christine Elliott: There are several steps that need to be taken. One is to contain the outbreaks, and that is what we are doing right now. We are providing the case and contact management. We've done what we needed to do to boost the hospital capacity so that if people need to be admitted to hospital, there is a place for them in their community and they don't have to be transported hundreds of kilometres away.

We've also done whatever we can to deploy rapid tests. We've deployed over 82,000 of the Abbott Panbio test. We're doing all the testing that we need to do.

We are sending vaccines and they are being used as well, but there are two pieces: dealing with the outbreak and then making sure people are vaccinated. We are dealing with both of those issues, and we are working very hard with the local medical officer of health to bring the situation down. As I indicated earlier, the number of cases has gone down by 19 cases from yesterday, so the plan is clearly working.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: People in Thunder Bay have been begging since February for some help. They were begging for isolation centres. They were begging for more supports. They were begging for things like paid sick days. And all the government said was they have an emergency brake. They basically had a slogan, but they didn't have a plan. They acted with no urgency when it came to helping Thunder Bay.

So I guess my question is, why has the government been missing in action when it comes to Thunder Bay, unwilling or unable to actually provide that community with the vaccines they need to keep people safe and stop the virus from spreading throughout the community?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Our government is dedicated to maintaining the health and safety of every single person in Ontario, regardless of where they live. Dr. Williams, our Chief Medical Officer of Health, looks at this data on a daily basis, is in regular contact with the local medical officers of health, and together they make recommendations to our government as to what should be done, whether the emergency brake should be applied, where they should be in the framework.

There are certain things that can be done in different parts of the framework, as the member very clearly knows. We are watching every part of Ontario very carefully, particularly with respect to the variants of concern, and we're taking action where we need to, as we have done in Thunder Bay.

INDIGENOUS HEALTH CARE

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

My question is to the Premier. All Indigenous people across Ontario have not received equitable access through the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, even though they are part of the phase 1 priority group. The majority of Indigenous people live off-reserve in cities, including Toronto and Thunder Bay. Vaccination efforts for off-reserve Indigenous people were delayed by the lack of access to vaccines and resources to develop Indigenous-led vaccine programs.

Where is Ontario's plan to respond to the urgent need to vaccinate urban Indigenous people living in Toronto

and Thunder Bay who are currently being hit with the third wave?

Hon. Doug Ford: Well, through you, Mr. Speaker, our government is working with Indigenous partners right across the province to ensure they have the tools to mitigate the challenges of COVID-19.

Ontario has dedicated over \$37 million in support for the unique needs of Indigenous people during COVID-19, including \$16.4 million for the transportation of people and goods, support for urban Indigenous people, self-isolation, and prevention and awareness of the pandemic. We also made it a priority for the 31 fly-in communities. Ornge did an incredible job going in there—well received. People were as happy as punch.

I'll tell you, \$10 million to ensure continuity of the services offered by Indigenous social service agencies to vulnerable children, and \$7.4 million—I've got a list all the way down here. I could keep going all day. At the end of the day, do you know who gets all the credit? Chief RoseAnne and Minister Rickford. That's the reason—as I've heard from numerous people, the Indigenous community has never been treated better, ever—

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Back to the Premier: Indigenous communities off-reserve are not happy as punch when we talk about this pandemic.

We know Indigenous people are overrepresented in correctional facilities and living without homes in urban areas. There have been multiple outbreaks in First Nations and among urban Indigenous people due to incarcerated Indigenous community members having COVID-19 upon release. Public health units have acknowledged the rapid spread of COVID among those in correctional facilities and people without homes. It should be a critical priority for these groups to be vaccinated.

I ask again, what has Ontario done to work with Indigenous-led health providers to vaccinate vulnerable urban Indigenous people as part of phase 1 priority rollout?

1050

Hon. Doug Ford: Again, through you, Mr. Speaker, that was one of our highest priorities, to go into the 31 fly-in communities. Not only did Ornge fly in, but the member flew in, too, to get his vaccine, so thank you for doing that and kind of jumping the line. I talked to a few chiefs that were pretty upset about that, for flying into a community that he doesn't belong—but that's here nor there.

We have also provided \$11 million in emergency funding to First Nations tribal councils and PTOs to address urgent needs. Ontario is prioritizing residents of the First Nations elder care homes in fly-in Indigenous communities as part of phase 1 of our vaccine rollout.

Mr. Speaker, the first round of vaccinations has been offered to adults in the 31 fly-in First Nations, which was a massive, massive success. As of March 7, Operation Remote Immunity has administered 15,324 doses, including 12,660 first doses and 2,664 second doses. So thank you, Ornge, for doing such a great job.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Speaker, we know it's been a challenging time for everyone in Ontario, but especially to farmers. I speak to many farmers, and they say owning, running and operating a farm can be very stressful, and this has been a particularly difficult year for them.

Last week, I had attended the virtual AgKnowledge Forum, hosted by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, in partnership with the Holland Marsh Growers' Association and Nottawasaga Futures. While on the forum, the topic of mental health was discussed, and I can say I had a plethora of information to give to the forum when it comes to this government's work on mental health for our farmers.

But I wanted to ask the Minister of Agriculture if he can provide us an update on some of those extra actions we've taken when it comes to attention for our farmers and their mental health.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Perth-Wellington and parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Speaker, through you, I'd like to thank the member for Barrie-Innisfil for this important question. She represents a truly beautiful riding right here in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, mental health is an extremely important topic, and I am happy to bring attention to some of the initiatives our government has been working on to highlight mental health within the sector. This government cares about the well-being of farmers and farm families in Ontario. We acknowledge there are unique challenges faced by them when dealing with mental health. Research has shown farmers are experiencing stress, depression and burn-out at levels higher than both the general population and other occupations.

Because of this, I believe it is more important than ever to make sure we take the time to talk about farmers' mental health. Earlier in this term, the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs brought attention to mental health struggles faced by farmers, and we put together a first aid tool kit that allows farmers easy access to resources available. These include information about immediate help, financial difficulties and mental health resources.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you for that excellent answer. I know our government wants to continue to encourage farmers and farming communities to help address the stigma around mental health and know that it is okay for them to seek that help. Obviously, we have lots of support through the Ministry of Agriculture for them to access.

I know the Minister of Agriculture has also been working to expand some of the supports for farmers, and I wanted to give this as an opportunity to the minister to expand on some specific ways that our government is planning into the future to assist farmers to continue with this very important conversation.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Mr. Speaker, thanks again to the member for the question. Our government is focused

on ensuring the well-being of everyone in Ontario, and as I stated earlier, we know that farmers face a unique set of mental health challenges. Because of this, the minister will be hosting a round table this afternoon to encourage open dialogue, highlight what we have done and continue to do to get farmers the help they need. It will also identify possible gaps in where we go from here.

We are also investigating ways to enhance and expand CMHA Ontario's role in the In the Know program developed at the University of Guelph, as well as how to expand the Farmer Wellness Program, a program supported by OFA across the province.

Our government is committed to being a champion for farmers' mental health, and we will continue to work with the sector for innovative solutions and ideas.

ELECTION FINANCES

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. The question is about election financing and ethical standards.

This week, we saw the Premier rewriting the law to protect developers' rights to build a warehouse on significant and protected wetlands.

Now we see that the Premier has two big-ticket fundraisers lined up in the next week, starting tonight—on the one-year anniversary of the pandemic declaration, no less—with a \$1,000 ticket to get onto a Zoom call with the Premier. For a minimum wage worker—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to interrupt the member. The question has to be about policy, it has to be about a bill, and it—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):—not about internal party matters.

Again, I'll recognize the member for Essex.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you, Speaker.

For a minimum wage worker, that's about 70 hours at work—so we can be pretty sure those folks won't be joining the call with the Premier tonight.

The question to the Premier is: Who is on the attendance list to lobby the Premier tonight at the \$1,000-a-ticket fundraiser, and what new pieces of legislation or MZOs will he be writing tomorrow as a result?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to disallow the question. Do you have a supplementary opportunity?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Speaker, yesterday, the PC Party let it slip that the Premier is planning another \$1,000-a-ticket fundraiser in Vaughan next week.

A year into this pandemic, the Premier seems more concerned about raising cash for his PC Party than bringing in relief for Ontarians who need it the most. That's why he brought in legislation to double up the donations. This is legislation that is currently on the floor of this House. This is live legislation that's currently on the floor, which doubles the donation limit for deep-pocketed donors, especially those who want development permits to pave over wetlands.

When Ontarians and small businesses are barely holding on a full year into this pandemic, why is the Premier rewriting election laws and taking in big-donor cash for developers who want to pave wetlands to build warehouses?

Interjections.

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

The government House leader to reply.

Hon. Paul Calandra: This is a member and a party which launched their election campaign on the weekend with respect to environmental policy.

We have been working very hard throughout this pandemic to ensure that all Ontarians—first and foremost, that their health and safety is taken care of. The Minister of Health has been working very, very hard with all members on this side of the House. That's what we've been focusing on—health and safety, small businesses, getting the economy back in order, investing in long-term care, investing in health care.

The Minister of Finance has been doing an exceptionally good job of working across party lines to try to ensure that the economy gets moving.

What you see again, Mr. Speaker, is exactly why the NDP never forms government in the province of Ontario: They flip-flop all over the place, but ultimately they are an angry party without policies, which Ontarians could never see electing into government.

We will focus on the future, optimistically seeing what Ontario has to offer all Ontarians—

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

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is to the Premier—and Speaker, I extend my heartfelt condolences to all who have lost their loved ones due to the pandemic in the past year.

A year ago, I stood in this Legislature and asked the government to close the doors in long-term care to protect our most vulnerable, who are susceptible to respiratory viruses. Sadly, there was a delay, there was slow action, and we failed our residents in long-term care in the first wave. Then we had an opportunity to make up for it in the second wave, but we did worse, and the results were devastating.

A year on, we are now staring down a third wave. People who work in long-term care are still struggling to get the supports that they need to do their jobs safely.

My question to this government is, what are you doing to improve these long-term-care homes and to prepare for the third wave?

I have a suggestion: How about immediately implementing paid sick days? You have \$4 billion that you've put aside in contingencies. There's a budget coming up on March 24. Will you do that in that budget?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Long-Term Care.

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Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Our government has been actively and decisively working to address the COVID-19 issue in long-term care and across Ontario. We've been doing that all along from the very beginning with staffing and were able to hire over 8,600 staff with the pandemic pay with the first wave; and then planning with the staffing in the longer term and creating the necessary staffing that was so badly neglected by the previous government to create 27,000 new positions in long-term care to get to that four hours of direct care for per resident per day in four years. We've put up to \$1.9 billion by 2024-25 for that, and we've been renovating, redeveloping and modernizing long-term care this whole way through, not only dealing with COVID but understanding the imperative to address the urgency of staffing and capacity and to retain staff. We will continue to do it.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Long-term-care homes in our province need resources today, not years into the future. Your \$4.2 million that you announced will only allow 372 PSWs to receive their training, and they won't be ready for another four years. This is not going to address the immediate concerns that we have. For the Thunder Bay region alone, they need 500 PSWs and other front-line-care workers to respond to the essential workers that they need in that region. There is a province-wide deficit in this area.

Now is the time for your government to develop a career path that people want to aspire to in PSWs, to improve the working conditions and the standards of care, to make sure that they can work in a safe environment without risk, and to provide higher wages for these essential workers to recognize the work that they do in long-term care so they don't have to take on two or three jobs outside of long-term care.

Will this government in the upcoming budget invest in personal support workers and the money required—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Again, the Minister of Long-Term Care.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you for the question. For anyone who has been listening for many, many months now, they will understand that our government has been working diligently to address the long-term staffing crisis in the long-term-care sector and the emergency response: the pandemic pay \$4-an-hour increase for PSWs, \$461 million for that; on top of that, the temporary wage increase, a \$3-per-hour increase for that; a \$1.38-billion expansion across the sector; the 8,600 people that we were able to hire into long-term care with the resources we had in the first wave; added to that, 8,200 PSWs alone to be trained in the next coming months to be ready for the fall.

Billions of dollars have gone towards staffing and COVID-19 support, and we've been at this the whole time. Where have you been?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Again, I'll remind members to make their comments through the Chair, not directly across the floor at each other.

The next question.

MINERAL EXPLORATION AND PRODUCTION

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Across the globe, governments and businesses are examining strategies to build back stronger and emerge from this pandemic with a competitive advantage. While approaches may vary from one jurisdiction to another, one thing is certain in Ontario: Natural resources, innovation and technological advancements will be the centre of our economic recovery, and the critical ingredients to today's technology are critical minerals.

Ontario is home to a vast number of critical minerals, including copper, zinc, platinum, lithium, chromite, nickel and other materials that are in high demand. With the global demand for critical minerals set to increase exponentially, can the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines expand on how Ontario is seizing this great opportunity in a very ethical and safe manner?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Peterborough–Kawartha and parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much to the member from Barrie–Innisfil for that question. Yesterday, I had the pleasure of joining Minister Rickford, Minister Fedeli, First Cobalt, Frontier Lithium and Indigenous community engagement to announce that Ontario is developing a critical mineral strategy. This is part of our commitment to drive investment, increase Ontario's competitiveness in the global electric vehicle and green technology marketplace, all the while creating career job opportunities in Ontario's mining sector.

Last year, the World Bank estimated the demand for critical minerals will increase by as much as 500% by the year 2050. These minerals are essential components in medicine, aerospace, defence and zero-carbon-emission electric vehicles. Ontario is positioned to supply the entire world with critical minerals that are vital to the strategic high-growth industries, like electric vehicles, computer and telecommunication technology and other clean technologies that support a low-carbon future. This presents a tremendous opportunity. I'll have more to say in my supplementary.

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

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Countries all over the world are racing to find suppliers of responsibly sourced critical minerals to support their manufacturing and technology sectors. Whether it's graphite, lithium or platinum, it can be found here in Ontario. Mining companies have a lot of options when it comes to deciding where they would like to go and develop their new operations. It's important that, from the very beginning, we have a development strategy here in Ontario and that we develop it as soon as possible, not to lose on this incredible potential investment and

these jobs and to highlight Ontario's great ethical and safe practices.

Will the minister tell us here in the Legislature and the rest of the world what we are doing to really amplify this sector?

Mr. Dave Smith: As demand grows for critical minerals, Ontario is positioned as a stable, reliable and responsible supplier. Environmental, social and governance factors have never been more important. People want to know that they're investing in areas with responsible, environmentally conscious governments, and that is exactly what investors are getting in Ontario. We'll continue to collaborate with community stakeholders, business owners, regulatory bodies, conservation groups and Indigenous community rights holders.

The Ontario Mining Association had this to say about it: "We applaud this initiative and look forward to working with government on developing Ontario's Critical Minerals Strategy. This is a great way to support Ontario's transition to a low-carbon economy and boost our ability to meet growing global demand for responsibly sourced minerals."

Mr. Speaker, the industry is excited, our government is excited, and we look forward to developing this strategy in collaboration with all of our partners.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: My question is to the Premier. In many ways, Niagara is uniquely vulnerable to COVID-19, with one of the oldest populations in Ontario. We can't turn back time; however, when you diverted 5,500 doses of life-saving Moderna vaccines from Niagara, we were in the middle of a crisis where we had one death every three and a half hours over a span of a week.

As I said, we cannot change the past, but you can consider Niagara now and today. Yesterday, Niagara was not included in either the family physician or pharmacy pilot vaccinations. Niagara has one of the highest percentages of variant COVID-19 cases in the province. To be excluded yet again is a disgrace.

Mr. Speaker, my question is, will the Premier immediately include Niagara in these pilot projects and treat Niagara fairly in its vaccination rollout?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I can certainly assure the member opposite that Niagara has always been treated fairly and will continue to be treated fairly, with respect to all things related to COVID.

I can advise, with respect to the comments that you first made with respect to the distribution of vaccines, that the initial plans for the Moderna distribution were changed when protocols for the movement of Pfizer—it allowed these vaccines to be transferred to long-term-care homes as well as other high-risk congregate homes. Vaccinations for these vulnerable populations were prioritized for both vaccine types, including for residents, staff and essential caregivers.

Niagara's initial allocation of Moderna vaccines was reallocated to ensure that second doses were available in areas that had first administered Moderna vaccines, while the Pfizer vaccine was allocated to Niagara. Allocations to Niagara have been monitored carefully, and Niagara did and continues to receive vaccines above its population-based share of vaccines. So they are absolutely being treated fairly—

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Speaker, through you, back to the Premier and to the minister: I would like that answer given to the people who had a member of their family pass away every three and a half hours during the first wave.

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Back to you, Acting Premier: Yesterday, my office reached out to our family physician clinics and pharmacies to ask them if, given the chance to be in the vaccination pilot, would they have the capacity to get vaccines into the arms of seniors in Niagara? The response was simple: a resounding yes. Niagara North Family Health Team was able to administer 800 flu shots a day, with the capacity to do even more.

Mr. Premier, they are just waiting on you. With over 370 deaths in Niagara from COVID-19 and a diverted shipment of Moderna, we know the cost of the slow rollout to Niagara's seniors population. Mr. Premier, when will this government make the people of Niagara a priority, and give the green light to our pharmacies and family physicians to administer the vaccines to continue to save lives?

Hon. Christine Elliott: First, we regret the loss of any life in Niagara or any other part of Ontario. But the reality is that we did not receive significant volumes of vaccines from the federal government until recently. They are only starting to come in in quantities.

With respect to the vaccinations that can be provided through primary care physicians as well as in pharmacies, we are going to be using the AstraZeneca vaccines because they're easily transportable and can easily be used. We are working with pharmacies and we are working with the OMA to bring this forward. This is going to be done as soon as we receive additional doses. We've only received 194,500 doses of AstraZeneca so far, which are going to be used in the three areas—in Windsor, in Toronto and Kingston Frontenac—because they are time-limited. They expire at the end of this month.

We will be receiving more doses, and as we receive them they will be expanded to pharmacies across the province. I can advise you that the area of Niagara is considered to be a hot spot and will be receiving additional allocations of vaccines.

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. John Fraser: My question is to the Premier, but first I have to say the comment the Premier made to the

member from Kiiwetinoong this morning was beneath the office.

The government has put forward Bill 257. It essentially does two things: It expands access to broadband in Ontario, which is a good thing, and, secondly, it gives the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Premier unfettered power to allow building anything anywhere they see fit, with no right of appeal. And it's retroactive, Speaker.

They've taken expanding broadband, which is about creating economic opportunity for all, with a measure that's about creating wealth for the few—their friends. Speaker, through you, will the Premier do the right thing and remove schedule 3 from Bill 257, protect our wetlands, protect our green space and protect our environment, our communities and our families?

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

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, we've been clear in this House: Every single ministerial zoning order that has been issued has been issued at the request of the local municipality. For the first time in over a decade, this provincial government has a very good working relationship with all of our municipal partners, unlike the previous Liberal government.

I would also like to remind the member opposite, when he and his party were in power they made use of MZO's regularly. On this side of the House we issue an MZO only at the request of the municipalities, where projects are important and are going to be a main economic driver to the local economy and create tens of thousands of jobs. We will continue to do that.

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

Mr. John Fraser: You've used it 33 times in the last few months, so I'd stop using that line.

This schedule has such a McVety feel to it—sorry, I withdraw. I'll take that back. It's more retro; it's like we're checking a box on the Dean French to-do list. Schedule 3 grants excessive powers to the minister and the Premier, and it overrides communities and our own provincial policies.

I know the government thinks it's clever to put a poison pill in a bill, and we're going to deal with that here because that's what we do. But here's what it is: It's a poison pill for families. It's a poison pill for communities. It's a poison pill for the environment. It's a poison pill for wetlands. It's a poison pill for the future.

Will the Premier do the right thing and take this poison pill out, actually pull it out and let's debate it as a stand-alone here in this Legislature?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: No, Mr. Speaker. No, because we will continue to advance economic projects that are good for the province of Ontario.

Let's be very clear: For years, we have been hearing from Liberal and NDP politicians that you can balance the economy, and when you take care of the environment, you have social licence to move forward on economic projects.

That's what we have done with this bill. And what have they done? They've turned their backs on the economy; they've turned their backs on the environment.

This is a Liberal Party that increased WSIB payments, that increased taxes, made us the most indebted sub-sovereign government in the world; that put windmills on farmers' properties that they didn't want, in communities that they didn't want—evicted farmers from their lands. This is a Liberal Party that was tossed on their butt because Ontarians lost faith. The only ones who believed in the Liberal Party was the NDP who supported them for so many years.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: March 15 marks World Consumer Rights Day. This government wants consumers to feel confident that they are well-informed when they spend their hard-earned tax dollars and money.

Providing Ontarians with strong consumer protection legislation and readily available, user-friendly education and compliance tools will help strengthen protection and promote trust and confidence for the people of Ontario. That's what this government has done all along. Everything we do, we put the people first and we do not take the people's trust for granted.

Before COVID hit, the member for Barrie–Springwater–Oro-Medonte and I held a seniors' day where we had the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services staff come in and talk about how we can strengthen consumer confidence and protect our seniors.

I want to ask the Minister of Government and Consumer Services to also explain some of the other steps her ministry has taken to align legislation with marketplace realities to protect our Ontarians.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I'd like to thank the hard-working member from Barrie–Innisfil. You're doing an amazing job on behalf of your riding.

Speaker, in the spirit of World Consumer Rights Day, I would like to share with everyone that our government is committed to providing Ontarians with a wide range of protections for everyday transactions, from buying furniture through to renovating their homes. That is why we conducted the first comprehensive review of the Consumer Protection Act in 15 years to address new technologies and also on how we can better protect consumers in a changing marketplace. We've consulted with the Consumer Reporting Act to help consumers better monitor their credit ratings. We have passed legislation to cap interest rates that lenders can charge on payday loans, and we have launched consultations on other high-cost, alternative financial services to strengthen regulation and protect vulnerable borrowers from potential harm.

Speaker, we have a plan to build a modern and equitable system that truly serves hard-working consumers, both now and for future generations.

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

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you, Minister, for taking care of the current and future generations and really showing that consumer protection doesn't stop at everyday purchases and loans. It's much more.

Consumer protection should always safeguard Ontarians from exorbitant prices in times of crisis. For example, it was our government that put in emergency orders when it came to combatting price gouging when it came to very important protective goods during this pandemic, and since we've launched that initiative, there has been a significant decrease in complaints, which means that these measures our government took have worked.

But consumer protection should always be there for Ontarians when they need it, especially for large purchases, like when they purchase a home. So, can the Minister of Government and Consumer Services also further elaborate on the actions our government is taking to protect Ontarians for these large purchases?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I would be pleased to. I can tell the member from Barrie–Innisfil and everyone watching today that we've been very, very busy on that front.

Speaker, I want to share with you that we passed the Rebuilding Consumer Confidence Act to promote higher-quality new home construction and to protect consumers from bad actors. We also passed TRESA, the Trust in Real Estate Services Act, and we introduced the first phase of regulatory changes, with the second under way, and we look forward to bringing that to the House in the future. These changes will strengthen professionalism and ethical standards in the real estate sector across this province, to better protect buyers.

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Also, our government has designated the Home Construction Regulatory Authority to license and hold new home builders and vendors to professional standards. We also launched a condo guide to help condo buyers make informed decisions. We're being very proactive and—

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

The next question.

UNIVERSITY FUNDING

Mr. Jamie West: The CCAA process is not appropriate for a publicly funded university like Laurentian, and my community of Sudbury is frustrated. The CCAA process is designed for the private sector, and very rarely then.

With Laurentian, the CCAA excludes all of the people who are most likely to be at risk but have had zero ability to influence the financial decisions that created the crisis. For example, students, faculty and research departments are all at risk. However, none of them are responsible for the continuous post-secondary cuts made by successive Liberal and Conservative governments, nor are they responsible for the financial decisions of Laurentian's board of directors, which includes four government appointees.

Students like Adam Kirkwood shouldn't be paying the price. Adam is a PhD candidate at Laurentian University,

and because of CCAA, Adam's research has stopped. He estimates that he has lost \$10,000 of his own fellowship funding, and now he's not even sure if he'll be able to complete his research or be able to graduate.

My question, Speaker, through you to the Premier, is: Will the Premier provide emergency funding to ensure that graduate students like Adam can complete their research and be able to graduate?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member for the question. What I can confirm is that, proportionally, Laurentian University has received more than 40% of their total revenue through grants provided by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, compared to the roughly 23% average of the university sector overall. What I can also note is that consistent operating grants for Laurentian University over the past five years are close to \$80 million, and we're going to continue to provide support to colleges and universities.

As was noted by the parliamentary assistant yesterday, a special adviser, Alan Harrison, has been deployed to provide advice and recommendations to the minister regarding the financial situation at Laurentian and also to offer perspective on governance and their strategic planning processes, to make improvements going forward.

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

Mr. Jamie West: Back to the Premier: It's important to note that the Conservatives talk about the funding, but Ontario is not just below average when it comes to per-student funding; they're so far below average that every other province is above average.

Laurentian University is well known for its expertise in research, and because of CCAA, that's now at risk as well. A Toronto Star article indicated that Laurentian University's professors and graduate students had secured tens of millions of dollars in research funds, and now they have no idea if they will be able to complete that research.

Carol Kauppi is the director of Laurentian's Centre for Research in Social Justice and Policy. She said, "We don't know about the future of our research centre, and our research."

Not only is the CCAA process impacting Laurentian's current research obligations, Laurentian's access to future research funding could also be negatively impacted.

As Professor Albrecht Schulte-Hostedde said, "The cost is" also "to our reputation, there is a cost ... to our relationships with the granting councils," a cost "with potential students..." a cost "to our communities" as well.

My question, through you, Speaker, to the Premier: Will the Premier provide emergency funding to ensure that Laurentian University's current research programs are saved, and their future reputation is preserved?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: What I can confirm is that Laurentian University students remain the government's top priority as we continue to assess options to support Laurentian as the university undertakes its next steps towards setting sustainable operations.

But in the context of students, it cannot be left without being said that it was this government, following 15 years of the former Liberal government, where tuition factually rose to the highest and most expensive in Canada—it was this government that actually cut tuition by 10%, providing \$450 million directly into the pockets of students, a historic cut that's making a difference every day for students in the province of Ontario. It was this government, during the pandemic, that put a six-month OSAP moratorium in place, recognizing the challenges for these young people. We'll continue to be there for students at Laurentian and right across this province.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Good morning. My question is for the Premier. So many struggling small businesses have reached out to my office, frustrated that they cannot get quick access to the Ontario business support grant. They've done their part to contain COVID and now they're asking the government to step up and help.

Frustration turned to anger yesterday when they learned the government is pulling out all the stops to build an Amazon warehouse on environmentally protected land. Now small business are wondering why the Premier is pulling out all the stops for Amazon but they are having to wait days, weeks and months for the help they were promised.

Will the Premier commit today to speed up approvals so that small businesses get the financial support they need to survive?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant and member for Willowdale.

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you to the member opposite for raising the important issue of supporting small businesses. I know in our budget consultations last year with that member we heard from small businesses directly about those very difficulties.

That's why this government has been there from the beginning with a series of permanent measures, as well as most recently the Small Business Support Grant program. Speaker, almost \$1.3 billion—that's a figure as of yesterday morning—has reached the hands of those small businesses. That is providing real relief to weather this storm, and the average waiting time for those application processes, to have money in hand, is 12 days.

Of course, there are the cases where there are some mistakes made on applications or perhaps a more complex file. I offer to the member opposite, if you have a particular business that is unable to access those funds, to contact my office. I would love to work with you to see what the issues are.

But the reality is, Speaker, this money is getting to the small businesses. We know that job is not done, and I look forward to tabling the budget in 13 days.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, over and over again, I've raised this issue. I think I've heard members of other parties raise this issue. I've written the minister. I've

spoken directly to the minister on this issue. There are many small businesses that are still waiting months after this program was announced to access the money they need just to survive.

And so imagine how they felt yesterday, when many of them are struggling to compete against Amazon, that literally the government is ripping up all of our planning rules and environmental protections for an Amazon warehouse. These businesses are just saying, “Get us some help. We closed down to stop the pandemic and we just need some help.”

I’m asking the member opposite to please provide them with some assurances and some guarantees that these applications are going to be approved in a speedy manner so businesses get the money they need.

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you again to the member. As I said in my first answer, \$1.3 billion has flowed to these businesses in the form of grants of up to \$20,000. The average waiting time is 12 days. If there are cases that require further investigation, please feel free to contact my office.

But Speaker, that’s not all. We’ve also introduced a series of permanent measures. Whether that was an up-to-30% property tax reduction; an elimination of the EHT, a tax on jobs, for the smallest of small businesses; a PPE grant of \$60 million; the Digital Main Street program to help businesses retool to the new reality that is COVID-19; the Ontario Together Fund—Speaker, it’s a long list. I hope the members opposite across the benches, despite their political beliefs, will vote for these additional support measures, because their voting record to date has shown that they oppose those small business supports. I’m hoping that will change when we table our budget in 13 days.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: My question is to the Acting Premier. There’s a resident in my community who came to Canada in 2019, escaping an abusive relationship, trying to make a better life for her and her daughter. Throughout the pandemic, she has worked two jobs just to pay the bills. During the day, she looks after five children while the children’s parents go to work at their essential jobs. At night, she works as a cleaner.

She wants the vaccine but she may not be able to get vaccinated because she’s still waiting to receive her government ID, an ID that the government is requiring people to present before they get the vaccine.

Ontario’s COVID-19 science advisory table has told us that, in order to save lives, we need to vaccinate people based both on age and risk. So my question, and I’m looking for clarification today from the Premier: Is this government really going to turn down at-risk residents from getting vaccinated if they don’t have a government ID?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I’ll just say this to the honourable gentleman: I think the last two questions that we’ve heard there are particularly troubling. It’s not the type of

thing that we should be doing at this point. Obviously, if there’s somebody who needs a vaccine, somebody like that who is the exact type of person who we should be very proud of, who we should be encouraging to come to this country, reach out, let us know who that is. I am know that the ministers will work tirelessly to make sure that she can get her vaccine.

1130

I would say to the honourable member and the leader of the Green Party, when we’re dealing and working with small businesses, of course we want them to succeed and are going to move heaven and earth to make sure that they can succeed, Mr. Speaker. But to suggest that because we’re trying to bring more business to the province of Ontario, that means that we don’t care about small business, that’s not what should be happening at the final stages. There should be optimism. Vaccines are getting out there, Mr. Speaker. We’re seeing great things happen across the province. Now let’s try to focus on helping each other get to the end of this.

So I say to the honourable gentleman: Reach out, and we will make sure that she can get her ID and get vaccinated.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I appreciate the sentiment of the honourable member, but what we are looking for is clarity so that it doesn’t have to be a one-off. It’s that everybody, no matter who they are, gets access to this vaccine, because it helps everyone. That’s what we’re looking for.

Question two: There are many essential workers in my community who do not have paid sick days. Many of these workers who are most at risk of getting COVID-19 may not be able to get vaccinated because they can’t afford to take the time off work since, despite multiple attempts by the NDP, this government continues to refuse to give paid sick days to Ontario workers.

Can the Acting Premier tell me if and when this government will be bringing mobile vaccination clinics to communities like mine that will be able to vaccinate people outside of regular work hours to lower the risk of further spread throughout Ontario?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Certainly, I can assure the member that we are doing everything possible to make sure that people who want vaccines will be able to get them, and we will be doing that through a variety of ways: through mass vaccination clinics, through primary care offices, through pharmacies and mobile vaccination clinics as well. We know that there are people who, because of their work hours or their personal circumstances, are not able to come into the clinics. So we are using every method possible to get to the people who want to receive the vaccines.

With respect to your earlier question, we will make sure that this woman you were speaking of gets her vaccine, because she’s the exact kind of person, as the House leader said, that needs it and deserves it, as does everyone else in the province of Ontario.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Roman Baber: My question is to the Minister of Health.

Yesterday, Statistics Canada released a report which begins, “Beyond deaths attributed to” COVID “itself, the pandemic could also have indirect consequences that increase or decrease the number of deaths as a result of various factors, including delayed medical procedures or increased substance use,” and that “more recently, the number of excess deaths has been higher than the number of deaths due to COVID-19, and these deaths are affecting younger” people, “suggesting that other factors, including possible indirect impacts of the pandemic, are ... at play.”

The report concluded that as early as November, the number of excess deaths from COVID was on par with the number of excess deaths not from COVID, a difference of 44 Canada-wide. Looking at the trend and the harsh lockdown commenced in December, it cannot be disputed that more people are dying from excess deaths that aren't COVID than deaths caused by or with COVID, and these are especially young people.

So now that it's clear that lockdowns are killing more people than COVID, I ask the minister, will she please end the lockdown and actually start saving lives?

Hon. Christine Elliott: First of all, as the member may know, there's been over 6,000—actually over 7,000—people in Ontario who have died from COVID. Every death is a loss to many, many families, and every death not because of COVID is also a great loss to those families.

We are certainly aware that because of the steps that we've needed to take to make sure that we have hospital capacity for people coming into hospital with COVID, we've had to postpone many other surgeries and procedures and tests. We are at about 227,000 right now. As a matter of fact, this is something that I am very concerned about, and we are taking steps to make sure that we can deal with those surgical volumes that have had to be delayed and those procedures.

We have invested up to \$283 million to support additional priority surgeries, including cancer, cardiac, cataract and orthopedic procedures. We've also extended diagnostic imaging hours at health care facilities for MRIs and CT scans and other critical procedures. We are—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Mr. Roman Baber: Speaker, a few weeks ago, I asked the Minister of Health how many elective procedures, be it surgeries or treatments, were cancelled by the province of Ontario since the start of the pandemic; what would be the estimate of patients passing away because their surgeries and treatments were not performed; and if the minister did not have such numbers, would she undertake to ask the ministry staff to perform such analysis and report the numbers back to the House? I didn't receive a reply, except for something that I may have heard right now, nor did the minister come back to the House with these numbers until today.

A March 4 CTV News article describes a study conducted by SecondStreet.org, which used numbers put out by the Canadian Medical Association to estimate that

between mid-March and mid-June, Ontario cancelled more than 184,000 surgeries or procedures. The Ministry of Health at the time said that it had no records, so I'm not sure which numbers the minister is referring to today.

But my question to the minister is: Why doesn't the ministry have such records? What are the numbers she just cited? Which period does it actually represent, mid-March to mid-June or the entire year? Will the minister commit to—

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

The Minister of Health to reply.

Hon. Christine Elliott: I can assure the member that the number is 227,000 procedures. I've been reviewing this data on an ongoing basis, and that is as of two days ago. That is updated on a regular basis.

This is something that, of course, we're all concerned about. As we're dealing with COVID and the variants of concern, we are also concerned with the people who have had delayed surgeries, who need to have cardiac surgery, who need to have cancer surgery. We are putting hundreds of millions of dollars into reducing—

Interjection.

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I'm not sure if the member wants to hear my answer or just wants to keep nattering on over there, but this is the answer: The answer is, we are dealing with it. We are reducing those surgeries and procedures as much as possible, and we are putting hundreds of millions of dollars into doing that.

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr. Faisal Hassan: My question is to the Premier. Twelve families that have lived at a nice apartment building at 2419 Keele Street in York South–Weston have been given N13 notices by their new landlord and are being renovicted. Many of these families have lived there for decades, and I have heard from shocked residents. Ainess states that “our home is nothing more than an asset to make money from but to us it is a home.”

Another tenant, Flynn, has lived there more than 10 years and says, “We make our rent and pay our bills no matter how hard it may be sometimes and we still get an eviction letter. Even when we play by the rules we are still punished. There is no help for us. We only have each other. This is not matter of choice for us, this is about survival. Forcing us to move out now especially in the middle of a global pandemic is an act of violence.”

Premier, why is this allowed to happen? Why is it so hard to just have a place to live? Why are there no protections for tenants? And why are N13s continuing to be allowed—

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

Hon. Doug Downey: The member opposite—thank you for the question—was talking about very specific situations. I won't address very specific ones in case they are in front of the board. It's very important that we recognize that the landlord and tenant tribunal is an independent

board. Tribunals are independent, arm's-length from government, so we don't wade into those individual pieces.

But, Mr. Speaker, it's important that we have a system that allows people to have their voices heard, and it's exactly that; whether they be a tenant or a landlord, that they have a fair system that's working, that allows them to have it heard in a reasonable amount of time. I was proud to announce today that accelerating justice and the reform of tribunals is something that we're undertaking, and we will see substantial change through the course of this calendar year.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our question period for this morning.

The member for London West has informed me she has a point of order she'd like to raise.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, we know that vaccine hesitancy is a reality in many communities as a result of generations of systemic racism, historical traumas and poor treatment by the health system. The member for Kiiwetinoong did what all of us are called to do. He stepped up, led by example and continues to be a big part of the efforts to show that vaccines are safe. Today, he was recognized for his leadership in helping to fight vaccine hesitancy in Ontario First Nations communities with insults from the Premier. This has no place in Ontario's Parliament—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. That was not a valid point of order.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Scarborough–Guildwood has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Minister of Long-Term Care concerning paid sick leave—

Interjections.

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

This matter will be debated Tuesday, March 23, following private members' public business.

DEFERRED VOTES

SUPPLY ACT, 2021

LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2021

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 261, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021 / Projet de loi 261, Loi autorisant l'utilisation de certaines sommes pour l'exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2021.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bells will now ring for 30 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes. I'll ask the Clerks to prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1141 to 1211.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 261, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021, has been held.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 55; the nays are 18.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 67, this bill is ordered for third reading and the order shall be called immediately.

SUPPLY ACT, 2021

LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2021

Mr. Calandra, on behalf of Mr. Bethlenfalvy, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 261, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021 / Projet de loi 261, Loi autorisant l'utilisation de certaines sommes pour l'exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2021.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 67, I am now required to put the question. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, the bells will now ring for 15 minutes—

Interjection: Same vote.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Same vote? Same vote.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 55; the nays are 18.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There being no further business, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1213 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HEALTH PROTECTION AND PROMOTION AMENDMENT ACT (TEMPTATION BE GONE), 2021

LOI DE 2021 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA PROTECTION ET LA PROMOTION DE LA SANTÉ (FINI LES TENTATIONS)

Madame Gélinas moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 263, An Act to amend the Health Protection and Promotion Act to permit the regulation, restriction and

prohibition of high fat, high sodium and high sugar food / Projet de loi 263, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection et la promotion de la santé pour autoriser la réglementation, la restriction et l'interdiction des aliments riches en gras, en sodium et en sucre.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll invite the member for Nickel Belt to explain her bill.

M^{me} France Gélinas: The bill is called Temptation Be Gone. I would like to thank my OLIP intern Amelia Boughn, who worked really hard on this bill.

The bill amends a subsection of the Health Protection and Promotion Act so that the sale and promotion of high-fat, high-sodium and high-sugar food would be banned from the entrances and the exits of different premises, as well as the lineups to go to the cash. It would also be prohibited on web pages—when you go to pay and when you open web pages—so that the temptation to buy those foods will be gone.

It will add three new subsections to the Health Protection and Promotion Act related to the regulation, restriction and prohibition of high-fat, high-sodium and high-sugar food.

PETITIONS

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Dave Smith: “Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas now, more than ever, we need an Ontario-made plan to help build infrastructure faster, strengthen our communities and lay the foundation for growth, renewal and long-term economic recovery; and

“Whereas as the province recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ontario government is taking action to remove barriers to help build better infrastructure faster and strengthen communities, while laying the foundation for future growth, renewal and long-term economic recovery; and

“Whereas COVID-19 has made reliable broadband access even more critical for families and individuals across Ontario to work from home, learn online and access essential services; and

“Whereas by removing these barriers, more Ontarians will be able to access reliable broadband sooner;

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

“Take action to remove barriers and help expand” broadband access “to unserved and underserved communities across the province by passing Bill 257, Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act, 2021.”

I fully agree with this petition. I will sign my name to it and send it down to the table.

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Lorne Coe: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas now, more than ever, we need an Ontario-made plan to help build infrastructure faster, strengthen our communities and lay the foundation for growth, renewal and long-term economic recovery; and

“Whereas as the province recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ontario government is taking action to remove barriers to help build better infrastructure faster and strengthen communities, while laying the foundation for future growth, renewal and long-term economic recovery; and

“Whereas COVID-19 has made reliable broadband access even more critical for families and individuals across Ontario to work from home, learn online and access essential services; and

“Whereas by removing these barriers, more Ontarians will be able to access reliable broadband sooner;

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

“Take action to remove barriers and help expand access to broadband service, to unserved and underserved communities across the province by passing Bill 257, Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act, 2021.”

I agree with the content of this petition. I will affix my signature and provide it to one of the ushers.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'm rising on a point of order with respect to standing order 58, I believe, just to outline the order of business for following the break week.

First, I'd like to congratulate and commend all the members for the safe return of the House, and congratulate everybody on that.

Speaker, to the opposition House leader: We have not yet finalized the business for the return after the break week, but we will endeavour to be in touch with both the opposition House leader and the independent House leaders to provide a status update early next week.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECTING ONTARIO ELECTIONS ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LA PROTECTION DES ÉLECTIONS EN ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 8, 2021, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 254, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to elections and members of the Assembly / Projet de loi 254,

Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les élections et les députés à l'Assemblée.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: It is always a pleasure and an honour to be able to stand in the Legislature to speak to various legislation that comes before us on behalf of the people of Hamilton Mountain. Today is no different. The bill is titled the Protecting Ontario Elections Act.

When we go through the bill, there are many things in the bill that are good for the election coming in 2022. When we talk about adding advance poll days, those things are important, and those are measures that need to be put in place, particularly as we try to make our way through this pandemic. So I would not say that this bill is a waste of time in this House whatsoever. I truly believe Elections Ontario has to have the ability to prepare themselves for the election when that election is called.

The unfortunate part, Speaker, is that the government has found a way to help themselves through this bill, not unlike many other things that we have seen come through the Legislature. Great titles, a lot in the bill, such as the broadband bill—but then the government throws something into it that creates chaos, that takes away our constituents' trust in government.

I know you, Speaker, as well as every member in this House, I'm quite sure, has heard from their constituents that they have no trust in government, that it doesn't matter who we elect because we're all the same: "You say one thing, you get elected, and you do another." These are things that our constituents say to us, and it's bills like these that create that mistrust.

We had, not that long ago, changed the election rules act under the Liberals to try to take back and put some public trust back into our elections by restricting access to ministers by taking away union and corporate donations so that it had to be individual donations. It removed the cap and brought it down so that everybody could participate on the same playing field, or at least possibly have the opportunity to participate on the same playing field.

1310

And then we see this bill in front of us that is backtracking all of that voter trust that we were hoping to build. By putting in subsidies, which all members when they were elected received, based on per-vote data—by putting that in, that took some of that "have to raise money" from folks. Typically, the people who have the most money are sometimes not always in it for the right reasons; not all, of course, but we have seen examples of that happening. I'm pretty sure the Premier was very clear that he was taking that away, that nobody should have the ability to get elected on the backs of our government dollars. But what it did—what was behind it, I believe, was to put some trust back into it, to take that mistrust from the public when thousands and thousands of dollars are raised, and then we see things happen back in return.

The government, in its wisdom and for their own benefit, I'm quite sure, has doubled the money. They have increased donation limits to \$3,300, and they will increase that limit \$25 every year after that. They have increased

the amount a candidate can donate to themselves from \$5,000 to \$10,000. Ha. There is no way that this MPP can donate \$10,000 to herself. I struggle to donate \$5,000 to myself. So who is this benefiting?

Most folks that we want to be able to get elected here to the Legislature—it's about levelling the playing field. It's about making sure that anybody has the ability to get elected to this House. I'm the kid who made it, Speaker. I come from no means. It's not about the education that I had. I'm not a doctor. I'm not a lawyer. I don't come from any professional profession. I was a waitress and a bartender before I became an assistant to a city councillor. And it all happened because I loved my community. It was a natural progression.

But how many people have that opportunity, particularly when we have this big money in the way? That prohibits people who come from meek means from getting involved, and I think that's totally against what we should want for our Legislature. Sure, we should have lawyers and doctors, but we should also have a school crossing guard, someone who has worked in a grocery store. Our job and our responsibility here are to be able to reflect our communities, not reflect how much money we can bring in to get elected. That's the hard part about this bill—the things that I know my colleagues have talked about and then the changes around the third-party spending donations and limits.

I think there are always going to be groups that need to ensure—because we all know, too, that a lot of our constituents pay no attention to what's happening until there is an election knocking on their door. They have no idea what happens here at Queen's Park. So when we do have groups that speak out—like the autism group, right? The autism group spent a lot of time through elections helping and doing things. The teachers, Ontario Proud—we have seen so many different groups. Do I agree with all those groups? No. Do I agree with the antics of those groups? No. Should there be some kind of formality that sets standards of what's true or not true? That's important, but I don't see that in this bill. Instead, what I see is the limited ability for those same people to be able to raise their issues throughout the campaign—important issues, on both sides. There has to be some kind of truth factor and how we weigh that, but it's not in this bill.

It creates new, explicit rules around members' social media accounts and what they can be used for. I have two social media accounts. I have an MPP page, and I have a Monique Taylor page that I've had ever since I joined Facebook. So what are my rules going to be around that? I'm not quite sure. Is the government going to try to define what I can say on my page—what's partisan, what's not, that I'm speaking out too much against the government? I don't know what those rules mean. I don't think that strangling us—my MPP page, I would never put anything—I try really hard not to put parties on it. It's not attached to anything to the Legislature. So I do keep that freedom for myself. It's mainly the work that I do here in the Legislature. My personal page—I'm still not that bad on it, but there are times when I criticize the government,

because that's my job. My job is to ensure that my constituents get what they need. I have a platform to talk about the things that I think the government is doing wrong—just as when the government was in the official opposition, right here on this bench, they did those same things. Now they want to change the rules to make things easier for themselves.

I think it's unfortunate that every bill that comes before us has something in it that tries to dig us and pinch us. It's politics. Instead of doing good bills for the benefit of our constituents and to actually make things better, there is always that pickle in there just to try to corner us on a decision. We're seeing it in the broadband bill. We've seen it in so many bills, where they're good initiatives, just enough for the government to stand up and say, "You don't support this. You voted against this"—things that, of course, we would never vote against. But they have left us no option because of the poison pill within the bill.

That's all I have. That's all my time. I appreciate the opportunity.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions for the member from Hamilton Mountain?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I took the member up on her advice about her social media and her Facebook. Her MPP fan page for her riding—she said it was very non-partisan, and yet there is a posting for her nomination meeting which is happening. As far as I'm aware, nomination meetings are very political, so I just want to ask her if she'll be taking that post down.

Miss Monique Taylor: No—because that is exactly the reason why I don't tie it to the Legislature. If you go to my MPP website, I don't connect it. My connection of what I'm allowed to do—I believe I'm following all the rules, so I don't think there is any reason for me to take it down. I'm happy to have a look through all of your members' stuff to see what's there. But it shouldn't be about pitter-patter—again, these are the problems that we're having in the Legislature. Let's talk about my concerns with the raising of the limitations on fundraising. Let's talk about our constituents' concerns. Instead, you want to just pickle me and knife me, to say, "Ha, ha, caught you." No, I'm following the rules.

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

The member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank my colleague the member for Hamilton Mountain for her remarks. I'm interested in her perspective on the fact that this was the second piece of legislation introduced by this government, back on February 25, after the second time that this province had to go into lockdown as a result of COVID-19. I wonder what she thinks about that. What message does it convey to the people of Ontario when the second bill that this government introduces after a provincial lockdown is about putting big money back into politics? It's about increasing donation limits so that the deep-pocketed donors who are much more likely to contribute to that party than any other are once again free to engage in pay-for-play politics.

1320

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member from London West. I did state that it's important that Elections Ontario have the ability to do what they need to do. You could have done that with the snap of a finger.

We've agreed on so many things. If we actually worked together with the government and were able to ensure that our elections had that ability to move forward in a clear view, we would do that. Instead, the government brought this forward and we're spending all of this time on it. People at home are waiting. They're starving for money for their small businesses.

Speaker, I spent time on the street with people without homes on Saturday. I will be going back tonight to make sure that Lisa gets a flashlight, because that's what she needs, and hopefully I can find the young 17-year-old boy again just to make sure I can give him another peanut butter sandwich and a hot chocolate.

These are the types of things we need to be doing. These are the concerns of our constituents. We need to ensure that their interests are taken first, not padding our own election pockets.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norman Miller: Just to ask the member about whether the member supports free and fair elections, and whether the member supports making it a level playing field for our independent members, as the legislation would allow them to create constituency associations, which allow those many benefits that we as members of parties enjoy, and it makes it a little fairer for them, come the next provincial election.

Miss Monique Taylor: Absolutely—a fair playing field is exactly what I talked about. But increasing donation amounts is taking away from that level playing field that we were just trying to get to. It's a perfect example that there are good things in the bill. There are things that we could probably have gotten unanimous consent on and had this bill done and over with because we have important work to do.

Instead, you're increasing donation limits, which only benefits so many. If you look at our donation amounts, we have way more donations than they do, but our donation limits are much lower. If you look at that, how are you levelling the playing field?

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, member, for your speech. One of the things that I think is really critical to people's confidence in elections is a sense that they're fair and that they reflect public needs, public interests. We can see what happens in the United States, where people lose confidence in elections and that undermines the legitimacy of government as a whole, to, in fact, tragic consequences, again as we have seen.

Can you speak to how this bill will undermine people's confidence in the fairness of the electoral system and what that means for the system of democracy we have here in Ontario?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member from Toronto–Danforth. He’s absolutely right. I will reiterate it again: Increasing spending limits does not level any playing field, and when you’re not levelling the playing field and you’re actually retracting that for their own benefit—and to say it, the Conservatives typically have higher donors that are able to make those high donations compared to other members, so it takes away from levelling the playing field.

The third-party times, moving it from six months to a 12-month window, I think is stifling voices that have a right to be heard through our election process.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Actually I’m quite troubled by what I’m hearing here, because what the members opposite seem to be suggesting is that people who donate to this party or to the Liberal Party—or even to them—if they want to donate a certain amount, then they need not participate in their democracy. I’m actually quite troubled by that, Mr. Speaker. I think the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka highlighted quite nicely how we were ensuring that the independents have a voice in elections for the first time ever, and ensuring that the power of third parties, which we’ve all complained about—their influence—is reduced in elections.

But the part I want to talk about most is, she talks about being able to work together. I wonder how we can work together when the member said that her job is to oppose the government. I know for me and my colleagues, our job is to represent our constituents. I wonder how we can work together when the member thinks her number one job is to simply oppose the government.

Miss Monique Taylor: If we look at the eagle and the owl, I think it’s very clear, our roles here in the Legislature. It is the role of the opposition, the official opposition, to keep the government to account.

I’m sorry that the House leader is confused by our roles here in the Legislature. Maybe he will be able to get that soon and he will learn to work with the opposition, particularly during this pandemic, when thousands of lives are literally on the line. By just trying to pickle me and trying to play politics with the words I’ve said—I don’t think I said anything critical in my 10-minute speech here. I think I was very clear that I’m very much for fair elections. I’m very much for voter engagement, and bills like this make it difficult for our constituents to see through the politics and to actually want to participate in our electoral process.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Spadina–Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: My father always told me that the Conservative Party is the party of the rich. After the Liberal cash-for-access scandal, the maximum donation was reduced to \$1,250. This government, the Conservatives, got in and they increased it to \$1,650. Now they’re doubling it again, to \$3,300. Is this really just about allowing their donors to have more political influence during elections?

Interjection.

Miss Monique Taylor: I’m saying for my response, not for the question. He asked a legitimate question.

My response is, what is the purpose of increasing donations when it takes away the level playing field, and still increasing our subsidies to help us through that? That was the purpose of the subsidies: to take away those large-level donations to level the playing field. I can’t speak for the government, but it does raise questions and it raises questions with all of our constituents.

Interjections.

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

Further debate?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: It’s always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the residents of St. Catharines. When I was notified that I was going to stand and speak to Bill 254 this afternoon, the Protecting Ontario Elections Act, I texted my office. I asked them a simple question: How much correspondence have we received in St. Catharines in our office asking for increased donation limits in the midst of a pandemic? We’re in the midst of a pandemic. The short answer was zero, a big fat zero. There was no one who had contacted my office. Well, they’ve contacted it, but not asking that question.

At the risk of being overly theatrical, the actual reply from my office—I’m going to read it. I’m going to read the text, word for word: “Since January 1, 2021, our office has received 687 different voice messages—not a single one of them asked about doubling the donation limit to political parties.”

1330

The reason for that is pretty straightforward, Speaker: No one in our communities across Ontario has increased donation limits as a priority in the midst—again, may I repeat—in the midst of a pandemic. The conclusion is simpler than that: The government should spend less time worrying about its election finances and more time fighting for the people of Ontario for COVID-19. Please, stop politicking.

St. Catharines’ history with money in politics is probably not unique but is part of our local story. I have always been careful about election finances, Speaker, because I take representing my constituents in St. Catharines seriously. I think too much money in politics has influence, and it could be a detrimental influence. When you double the amount someone can donate to a political party, that changes the influence, and I have major equity concerns about that.

Getting back to when I was a municipal leader in the city of St. Catharines for the city of St. Catharines’ city council nearly a decade ago, many of my council members took money from big developers that were going to be developing within the city limits, and it became a very big issue: hours and hours of debate that council went through. But it also became a big issue because a lot of the councillors took big donations to run their campaigns from big developers, Speaker.

My community saw clearly that it was about money and how that influenced the politics and how that influenced

so many decisions. So do you know what they did? Do you know what the people in the community did, Speaker? They showed their values by where they cast their votes in the next municipal election, and nearly every one of those council members was not elected. Nearly every one of those council members that were not elected had received money from developers, and they had to pay it back. As I may state again, they did lose that election.

Since I was one of the few members that did not take their money from the big developers, I never had that problem. I got to represent my constituents within my ward as a strong case, knowing that I could look at myself in the mirror and not worry about what decision or how my vote was going to be influenced.

I bring this up because even though my office has received zero proposals from my constituents asking that this government double the amount of money they can give to a political party, I know where their values are. The values of my community are the same as the values of the rest of us. More money in politics is really, really not a good thing. I think bad decisions are made and people have trouble looking at themselves in the mirror when they receive big money from big developers.

Queen's Park should work for everyone. No matter how much money you have and no matter how much money you give to politicians, everyone should have a voice. When I hear from the families of long-term care; COVID victims that have lost their loved ones; health care workers that are overworked, some suffering from PTSD; families struggling to find child care because they can't afford to go to work; business owners who see that what took a lifetime to build in our downtown is at risk; and so many more groups of people that I can stand here and say have things to say, none of that includes being able to have wealthy people give more money during an election. In fact, increasing the amount someone can give disproportionately silences the folks that cannot give as much. But does that make them any less of being a voice in our province? Absolutely not.

Simply put, this is not a new problem. The previous Liberal government tried to rack up big money with cash-for-access. After years of pay-to-play in Ontario, I am proud of my caucus right here, the official opposition, for finally rooting it out. Instead of focusing on the devastation of COVID-19, we have to sit here and debate for hours and focus on raking in campaign cash, bringing back the previous government's cash-for-access politics. Shame on us.

The government should be for everyday people, any person in Ontario. That's who should we be here for—regular people, like the ones in my community; not the wealthy developers who have the money, who get in the pockets of some politicians. Everyday people, regular people, like the ones in my community, deserve a voice. We believe the views of the nurses, moms, single moms, single dads and small business owners are just as valuable as the views of someone who is very, very wealthy—shouldn't we all?

This bill does make a few other changes, and there is one I'd like to talk about. The Premier campaigned on getting rid of the vote subsidy, and it is clear that this is no longer happening. Regardless of where you land on this matter or how you parse the words of extending this vote subsidy, it is clear it is absolutely still happening. It reminds me of when this government talks about expanding the time of care for long-term-care residents and says they will not do it now but in the future—five years from now, I believe. Can we trust that? It reminds me of when we are told that we will be adding more incentives for more staff for nursing homes. Really? There's no action, but they commit to it in the future. I haven't seen any action—but in the future. How much weight do we put on all of these commitments? The bottom line is, it's about trust.

I have to say it again: We are in the middle of a pandemic. In the middle of a pandemic, this legislation does not reflect the priorities of my constituents in St. Catharines—the priorities that have to see their small businesses downtown reopen so we can at least shop and dine and be that wine route that we've been for so many years. Let's bring it back to life. In fact, it does not reflect the priorities of any members' constituents in any of our ridings. Expanding money in politics is the wrong move, with the wrong priorities, and is another example of making a commitment to do something and breaking that promise.

I will stand here today and I will let the constituents of St. Catharines know that I will continue to be their voice no matter how much they donate to a political party.

We're not here to accept big money to make bad decisions.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to again thank you for letting me rise on this bill and to represent the constituents of St. Catharines.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: Without getting too partisan here, this government has invested billions in social services, billions in infrastructure, billions in health care, billions in education.

To be quite frank, I'd love to hear what the member from St. Catharines thinks we should do, other than spending billions on these projects.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: You throw billions and billions of dollars—you can throw billions and billions of buckets at fire, but if you keep putting out fires here and there—we have to make sure that we have a she-covey. We have to make sure that you put some money towards those hard-working health care workers in St. Catharines, who are working, day in and day out, without child care, and who are having to spend money—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Through the Chair.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you. Through the Speaker—Madam Speaker, I apologize.

We have to make sure that this government is looking after everyone. And you could look at yourself in the

mirror instead of throwing money at everyone. Put that money into action, not five years from now. Quit making promises.

1340

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A reminder to all members that it must be directed to and through the Speaker, not across the floor. Thank you.

Further questions?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I want to thank the member from St. Catharines for her speech on this bill. The bill itself includes a mandate that elections cannot be held on weekends or holidays. So my question to the member is: How can this be a bad thing when many voters, as we know, are from lower and middle classes and would benefit from being able to vote on a day off from work?

I have many in my riding of Brampton North who are essential workers. Being able to vote on the weekend is something that they would cherish to be able to do. So I'm going to ask the member: Why do you think the government, for one, put that in there? And is it a bad thing to allow voting on weekends and on holidays?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you for the question from my colleague. Of course, everyone deserves the right to vote. I think that when you speak on behalf of the health care workers in your community, it's really important that we also realize that while we're debating this bill here this afternoon we have to thank them for all the hard work they're doing today, right now.

Through you, Madam Speaker, we have to thank all our health care workers that are working very hard today. But everyone deserves the right to vote.

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

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: My question sort of came up just now in debate. When we talk about the time you have to vote and we talk about holidays and weekends, well my family is Jewish. We celebrate High Holidays. Election after election—it's so frustrating, and if the MPP for Thornhill was here, she would give you an earful. It's frustrating because you can't vote. It's a High Holiday, you're observing it, and some people who are more Orthodox have to observe it even more, so you don't have those options.

Thanks to the Ontario Chief Electoral Officer's—the recommendation he had made was to extend the amount of voting days. So now if you are of the Jewish faith, you have more options of days you can vote, and that's in the bill. So my question to the member is: Are you conscientious of other people who have different religious beliefs who may not be able to vote on a Saturday or during High Holidays and that these changes help those individuals?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Through you, Madam Speaker, I would like to answer that. I feel that within this bill, we have to go back to: Everyone has the right to vote. It's our democratic right throughout the province of Ontario, Madam Speaker, that everyone has the right to vote.

Why are we standing here today, when we're in the middle of a pandemic, debating on election finances? I think that we should be really prioritizing what COVID-19 has done to everyone in Ontario, how we can make sure that we have a recovery plan and make sure that everyone in Ontario is going to be able to recover from COVID-19 healthfully.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: My question is—this was the second piece of legislation after the holiday break. This government came back, and this was the second piece of legislation they brought back, which was to increase the amount of funding they can get from their donors.

We're in the middle of a global pandemic. What should the government's priorities have been, coming back during a 100-day lockdown in the city of Toronto and lockdowns across this province?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you to my colleague for that question. What should we have been looking at when we came back? It's quite clear, and it's been quite clear from the constituents of St. Catharines and, I'm sure, every member of this House has had the exact same questions brought to their office. No matter how much money you have or how much money you're going to receive, we need this government to stand up. We need this government speak on how families in long-term care are going to make it through; how health care workers in long-term care are going to make it through this pandemic; how families are going to make it through; how businesses downtown in all of our ridings that have put their whole livelihood into their businesses—we have to make sure that they have a recovery and that they recover healthy from COVID, not worried about the third wave and how it's going to shut them down.

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

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you for the speech, member from St. Catharines. I just did want to point out that corporate and union donations were banned in I think it was 2017, and the increase brings us to the middle of the pack for personal donations across the country. In fact, there are a couple provinces that have no limits on personal contributions to political parties.

But I wanted to focus on timing and the fact that part of this legislation is to allow for more technology in elections, as recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer. There's another recommendation for five flexible advance polling dates—again, from the Chief Electoral Officer and with COVID in mind. That came from this COVID report, that if there's still COVID around in the next election, in June 2022, these will make it safer and fairer for everyone to be able to fully exercise their vote.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: It's great to see that there's maybe some kind of a plan coming this way for COVID-19, because we haven't seen a plan all the way through wave 1, Madam Speaker. We never saw a plan from this government through wave 2. We're faced, possibly, with the variant coming through St. Catharines

with the high numbers today. So I'm glad to see that we're looking five years or two years—a year and a half, I guess, now—for some kind of a COVID plan. Isn't that great?

We should have been making plans, Madam Speaker, on how we're going to recover from COVID-19 this time last year. It has been a year, and we haven't seen any plans, so I'm glad to see this bill does come to some kind of a plan.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): We have time for a very quick question and answer.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: We'll get away from cash-for-access, ministers having half-a-million-dollar quotas, \$10,000-a-plate dinners—have we not learned anything from that? My question to the member from St. Catharines: How many pink collar or blue collar workers do you know who can afford to write a cheque to a political party for \$3,300?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you to my colleague here from our side of the opposition. That's easy: zero—a big zero.

I said at the beginning of my words here this afternoon that when I asked my constituency office how many people had called and wanted to see increases for donation limits, that was zero too. But St. Catharines is blue collar and we have one of the most senior populations. The average donation is \$29 in St. Catharines. So we have to work hard, and I accept that, but—

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

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The House will come to order. Burlington and Kitchener-Conestoga: I'm standing and there is further debate.

Further debate?

Mr. Parm Gill: It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to the Protecting Ontario Elections Act, 2021. This is a bill that, if passed, would take strong, concrete steps forward to ensure that the province's electoral process is equipped for urgent and evolving challenges, particularly around COVID-19, while also protecting each and every Ontarian's essential voice during elections.

As I'm sure all members in this House can agree, every individual in the province of Ontario is a driving force of our democracy. Whether it is casting their vote or putting their name on a ballot, everyone has an important role in the democratic process.

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That is why our government wants to ensure that the electoral system continues to evolve to protect Ontarians' central role in elections and promote fairness in the electoral process for everyone. With this bill, we are promoting fairness by protecting our provincial elections against outside influence and interferences, like under-regulated third-party advertising and irregular campaign spending and collusion.

Our government is also proposing amendments to the Members' Integrity Act to clarify the rules that allow members of provincial Parliament to maintain an individual social media account before, during and after a writ period, as long as they follow the appropriate rules and guidelines that apply to them at the time of posting. We all know that politicians and voters are active on social media, and this legislation would provide a way for the Legislature to set other social media rules of conduct, both for today and into the future.

These proposed changes will help protect Ontarians' voice in campaigns and make it easier for them to cast votes safely. They will modernize Ontario's electoral process and ensure it is updated to meet urgent challenges, including COVID-19.

To ensure Ontario is prepared for the uncertainty and risks that continue to surround COVID-19, our government is acting under the advice of Ontario's Chief Electoral Officer and the recommendations outlined in his special report released in November 2020 on election administration and the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as his 2018-19 annual report.

That is why we are proposing to increase the number of advance polling days from five to 10. During a COVID-19 environment, this will make it more convenient and, more importantly, safer for people to vote, and reduce the number of people in polling stations at any given time. Not only will this keep public gatherings at polling stations low, but it will provide people with more flexibility and opportunity for advance voting in communities like mine and across our great province.

Speaker, in my riding of Milton, there are small rural parts, including Campbellville, Kilbride, Moffat, Brookville and Nassagaweya, and the residents in these parts of my riding ought to have the same access to advance polls as those who live in the town of Milton.

During the 2018 election, a number of residents in Campbellville were understandably upset when they learned that they would need to get in their car, possibly get on Highway 401 and drive into town in order to simply vote in advance polls. They pay the same taxes; they are owed the same access to voting as those living in more dense and urban areas.

My team and I worked hard with our local returning officer to try to get an advance polling station in 2018 but were unsuccessful. We were told by the returning officer that his hands were tied and that due to the short period of time that advance polls were open, he couldn't authorize new or additional locations. I'm confident that this piece of legislation will now facilitate the returning officer setting up an advance polling location in Campbellville.

Madam Speaker, it's an honour to represent each one of my constituents each and every day. Regardless of whether you live in a town, whether you live in Brookville, whether you live in Moffat, whether you live in Nassagaweya or even in a rural part of Burlington that happens to be in my riding of Milton, I'm proud to represent each and every one to the best of my ability each and every single day.

With that, I move that the question be now put.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Mr. Gill has moved that the question be now put. There having been over nine hours of debate, I am satisfied that there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion that the question be now put, please say “aye.”

All those opposed to the motion that the question be now put, please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, unless I receive—thank you very much.

Pursuant to standing order 30(h), it has been requested that the vote on the motion for closure on second reading of Bill 254, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to elections and members of the Assembly, be deferred until deferred votes on Monday, March 22, 2021.

Second reading vote deferred.

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 17, 2021, on the motion regarding amendments to the standing orders.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to the standing orders. It has been one of my, obviously, great honours to be able to serve in this House as House leader, in particular with such a fine group of MPPs who have done such a great job during very difficult circumstances.

As you know, Madam Speaker, because I know that you are, in particular—not only because in your role as Speaker, I know how important the standing orders are to you if you are to enforce the rules. And we’ve seen certainly how well these new standing orders have really been for all of the members.

I think we’ve talked a little bit about how this has opened up debate and some of the previous standing order changes, how it has opened up debate for members, how it’s made it more lively, more fair. We’re seeing fewer and fewer bills being time-allocated because of the changes that we’ve made. We’ve seen the influence of independents increase in this chamber like never before. I think that’s a point of pride at least for this side, the government, because we do believe that all members are important and that all members should have an opportunity to effectively represent their communities, whether within a party or not. It’s part of the reason why we announced, or in the creation of a new elections act, we made sure that independents were also respected in that and that they have the opportunity to raise funds and to create constituency associations. It’s about making changes that bring this place, I would say, up to date, but at the same time giving the Speaker the tools to ensure that you and the other Speakers

can keep control of the House, but at the same time that we can ensure a lively and vibrant debate.

I’m also quite happy by the fact that the changes have meant that really, I think, for the first time ever, private members’ business has been given the recognition that it deserves. We have seen a lot of good private members’ bills come forward. I know there are a couple already on the order paper for this session. I know the member for Kitchener–Conestoga has brought really probably a very overdue bill, frankly, with respect to school bus safety. I thank him for that. Again, it’s long overdue. But because of the changes that we have made, we can ensure that bills like that not only make it to committee but get back into this House, are debated and that we have the opportunity to pass them. It shouldn’t just be the government’s job to bring forward important legislation. It should be all of our jobs, and we’ve seen that in what I think has been a magical time for this place, that cross-partisan, that bridge-building that we have been doing since being elected.

I don’t recall a time when this House has been as close as it has been ever, to be honest with you, Madam Speaker. This has been a shining time for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, despite the fact that we are in the middle of a pandemic and the challenges that we face in the pandemic, and despite the fact that it can never be easy for a Progressive Conservative government to face off with a socialist party as its official opposition. I know that’s not easy.

1400

But at the same time, if I may just say, what an opportunity we’ve had to work together as closely as we have worked together over this last number of months. I’ve said it on a number of occasions—look, we were able to pass budgets unanimously, a number of bills unanimously, by working together, by bridge-building, but that doesn’t mean that, obviously, on occasions we’re not going to disagree. Of course, there are going to be disagreements, and that’s why I think it’s important that we make some changes to the standing orders.

One of the changes we’ve introduced, as you know, Madam Speaker, is to increase the amount of time for debate. Yet again, the government has decided—and this is something that, I would say, Madam Speaker, I didn’t come up with. The members of this caucus were very forceful in reaching out and advocating. They said they wanted more time in the House. Although we’ve expanded time in the House for the consideration of bills, members of my caucus—and I hope members opposite; they haven’t reached out to me on this particular item. Many of the members of my caucus have: “Listen, if there’s an opportunity to expand the amount of time we sit in this House, let’s do it.” We looked at the clock, when we could do it, and we thought, “Why not Wednesdays, take some time on Wednesdays.” We know that all the caucuses happen on Tuesdays, but on Wednesdays there’s a little bit of time we could recapture, two hours of time we could recapture and put back into the Legislature for the consideration of government bills, for the consideration of

motions and for the consideration of private members' business.

I want to thank the member for Burlington because this really was an initiative that she brought forward to me. Earlier, I heard the member from St. Catharines talking about the calls she was getting into her constituency. I was surprised that there's not that many calls coming to the constituency, because I've been inundated, as I know a number of you have, not only with suggestions of how we can help and do things better in the pandemic, but calls of support for the good work that is being done, not only by members of provincial Parliament on both sides, but also by front-line workers in communities.

The member for Burlington had come to me and suggested that we take this time, we add it for debate, and we said, "Yes, absolutely; let's see." We took it to caucus and it was a unanimous vote of caucus. Now, that's the way we do things in our caucus, Madam Speaker. I apologize if I am letting a caucus secret out—I apologize to my caucus members—but we work together in our caucus. What happens is, we debate things in caucus, we listen and then we come forward with initiatives. Whether it's on bills, whether it's on private members' bills, we have lively debates but, ultimately, as the Premier has said on a number of occasions, it's the members that matter. We matter because we represent the people in our community.

As I said, when the member for Burlington came forward with the initiative, I thought, "You know what? It is a good initiative." And I certainly hope—I think we'll probably get support for that. I can't imagine anybody being against having more time to debate bills. It really highlights what I started my speech on—and I'm sure you'll agree, Madam Speaker—that bridge-building that has been happening across the aisle, really since Premier Ford took office, has been remarkable.

We've heard it talked about a lot by the opposition. You've heard it often, how frustrated they were with the previous Liberal government, how they worked together with the Conservatives in opposition to the then Liberal government. I was a bit confused because they voted with them so often and then they kept them in power for so long when they didn't have to but—

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It was a majority government.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member for London mentions that there was a Liberal majority government for some time. And she's right; you can't throw Liberals out when it's a majority government. But gosh, I've got to tell you, I wish in 2011, when they had the opportunity to throw them out at that time, when there was a minority government, as opposed to propping them up, they would have still continued to work with us and joined with us—that spirit of co-operation that was so evident before and after—to get rid of them. I mean, think of how things would have been different for the province of Ontario had that actually happened.

But that's history, Madam Speaker. We need not reflect too much on the past, because we have had such a

wonderful opportunity to continue to work together, again, as I say, in a way that we never have had before in this place.

I know there have been a number of private members' bills from the opposition that have passed, and I'm quite proud of that.

Interjection.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, probably a record number of bills have passed from the opposition, and they have been quality bills.

I know the member for Windsor–Tecumseh is here, and I want to make a special mention to him. In a very sincere way, he fought for the poet laureate for this place. I'm not sure how long, but I know he fought for it for many, many years. He did not give up on that. I would submit that the rules of the House really made it difficult for private members' bills to pass when the government wasn't supportive of the initiative. The changes that we made—but it's really less about the changes that we made than the fact that the member brought forward a good bill, good ideas, supported it, did not give up, and I know very soon we are going to have a really special opportunity in this place to see that finally, after—I'm not sure how many years, but after far too long, we are going to see that come to fruition here.

Interjection.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I know the member for St. Catharines is suggesting that that's irrelevant, Madam Speaker, and I think it is relevant. This is the problem that we have, Madam Speaker. This is the problem that we have. You have a government and some members of the opposition that are so focused on making this place a better place, making it work better: more debate, more vibrant, see how we can reach across the floor, pass important pieces of legislation. I'm shocked to hear the member from St. Catharines say that private members' business is irrelevant: "It's irrelevant." My gosh, try saying that to all of the people who are passing good bills.

I look at the debate that we had on line 5. Prior to the changes that this House approved, we would not have had the opportunity to have take-note debates so that everybody could put their thoughts on the record. Because of the changes that we all have done to this place, we brought that in and we were able to really move. As I said, all credit goes to the member for Sarnia–Lambton on this, Madam Speaker, you'll know. I'm glad the member for Toronto–Danforth is in, because I never, ever thought that I would see the member for Toronto–Danforth be supportive of a motion that called pipelines the safest way to move our natural resources around. I didn't think that would happen. But because of the hard work of the member for Sarnia–Lambton—granted, they voted twice against it, but finally, they came around, and they voted in favour of that motion, Madam Speaker.

Not to go too far astray, I know that I did call on one of the members for Brampton whose brother is the leader of the NDP to really take that spirit of co-operation that we had here and bring it to his caucus in Ottawa. Look, supporting pipelines in the way that we have in this place,

the NDP, that spirit of bridge building—pipeline building, colleagues. Not even bridge building: In this case, it's pipeline building. In that spirit, it's spectacular. There are going to be, I hope, many more opportunities.

Now, I'd be remiss if I didn't say I was surprised to see the NDP—not the NDP. Excuse me. I think we can agree on this, colleagues, if we don't agree on everything: I think we can agree on the fact that I was very surprised to see that the Liberal—actually, I shouldn't say surprised, Madam Speaker. I shouldn't say surprised, because—

Interjection: Disappointed.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, the minister is correct. I was disappointed to see that the Liberals abstained from all three votes on such an important piece of infrastructure. I was disappointed that they didn't see the economic value of line 5 and how important it was to jobs and economic development. Given the historic shift of the NDP in support of pipelines, I thought that maybe we would see the Liberals, but I guess it's not a surprise—to those of us who support pipelines, it's not a surprise that the Liberals turned their back on the economy and on the environment all at the same time, Madam Speaker.

But I digress too far, and I appreciate the House's indulgence in that. But when we're working together, I think it's the best time that we have.

1410

I look at the member for Ottawa West–Nepean. Now, talk about bridge-building and working together: He brought in a bill that will see the time change—and this weekend, we're going to see the time change. But he didn't just stop at the time change and getting the bill. It wasn't good enough for him to just pass it here, because given the unanimous support across the aisle for that, he then reached out to Quebec; he's reaching out to New York. That's one member who could have an enormous impact on the province.

I know I mentioned the member for Windsor–Tecumseh. I'll mention the member for Parkdale–High Park, the first Tibetan-born member to be elected, to have a bill passed to recognize Tibetan heritage and culture in this House. I was quite proud of that fact, and I know all members were happy to do that. Again, working across the aisle, building bridges together: That's when this place works. The member for York South–Weston, the first Somalian Canadian to sit in this House, as well got an important private member's bill passed by working together.

Bridge-building across party lines: That's really what it's all about. Even when we disagree on certain things, we don't have to—that's why I was a bit surprised—I'm sure you were too, Madam Speaker—to hear the member for Hamilton Mountain suggest that her job is to oppose the government, and then reflecting on the owl and the eagle. I think it's our job to represent our community. I don't look at my job as just to stop the opposition from presenting bills and turning them all down. They do have some good ideas on occasion, and when they have those good ideas, we pass them. But by the same token, I do get that we are a government that believes in lower taxes, trying to balance budgets, making investments in critical areas of

the economy, and I get that when you're faced with a socialist opposition that believes in high taxes, high debt, red tape and measures like that, which have failed in so many economies around the world, there will be some tension always. I do understand that, but I do always appreciate them.

With that, Madam Speaker, I think it would be prudent to move an amendment, if you wouldn't mind. I move that the motion be amended as follows:

That the words “for the duration of the 42nd Parliament” be deleted; and

That the following be added:

“Standing order 77(d) is amended to add the words ‘the government House leader,’ before the words ‘the minister’;

“Standing order 120 is amended by adding the following clauses:

“120(d) Where the Chair of a standing committee is a member of the party forming the government, the Vice-Chair shall be a member of a recognized party in opposition to the government or an independent member; and where the Chair is a member of a recognized party in opposition to the government, the Vice-Chair shall be a member of the party forming the government.

“120(e) Failing the appointment of a Vice-Chair pursuant to clause (d), any other member of the committee may be appointed as a Vice-Chair.”

I'll hand that over to the Clerk.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Mr. Calandra has moved that the motion be amended as follows:

That the words “for the duration of the 42nd Parliament” be deleted; and

That the following be added:

“Standing order 77(d) is amended to add the words ‘the government House leader,’ before the words ‘the minister’;

“Standing order 120 is amended by adding the following clauses:

“120(d) Where the Chair of a standing committee is a member of the party forming the government, the Vice-Chair shall be a member of a recognized party in opposition to the government or an independent member; and where the Chair is a member of a recognized party in opposition to the government, the Vice-Chair shall be a member of the party forming the government.

“120(e) Failing the appointment of a Vice-Chair pursuant to clause (d), any other member of the committee may be appointed as a Vice-Chair.”

Mr. Calandra, I return to you, if you would like to—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, this motion here is all about bridge-building and working together. What it does is ensure that where there is—what we have done in this motion is that we have given Vice-Chair positions to the opposition. Again, in the spirit of co-operation and working together, we have given some of our Vice-Chair positions to the opposition so that they could perform those very important functions, and at the same

time balancing it out so that our committees truly remain independent.

This motion really came—we were trying to do it together. But I took the words of the opposition House leader very much to heart. When the opposition House leader brought forward a point of privilege in this House with respect to me being too bipartisan, I took it as a badge of honour. I have been working—all of us have been working—in a fashion that is bipartisan. That's just the Progressive Conservative nature, to work together.

This motion allows that to happen. It allows us to work together. It makes our committees truly independent, Madam Speaker. I know that you will appreciate that. And look at what we've accomplished. Gosh, we had a motion from the Liberals begging us not to call an election and a motion of confidence in the government that was unanimously supported by the Liberals, the independents and the Greens. We had a point of privilege saying, "For crying out loud, you're just being too darn bipartisan. Stop it." We said, "No." We turned our back and said, "No, we are going to continue to be bipartisan. We're going to continue to work across party lines and build bridges."

The debate on this motion should collapse almost immediately because this is about keeping our committees independent and fair. What other government has given up spots so that the opposition can participate in committees? I am so proud to be a part of a government that takes—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. Further debate on the amendment? I recognize the member from Windsor—Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker. I sometimes think we have too much fun in this House. There's an American saying, "Inside the Beltway," where the only people who understand what's going on are the people who work on the Hill or in Congress or in the Senate or at the White House. Because when it comes to standing orders, I daresay there are even a few members in this House who aren't as familiar with them as perhaps they should be.

The government House leader has, without notice, given some amendments to the standing orders that were introduced as the first motion when we returned from our winter break during these days of COVID-19, because there has been some controversy over members from the opposition being appointed to committees or being appointed to Chair a committee or not being appointed to be a Vice-Chair of a committee. There is a bit of controversy. It has gone back and forth.

I was hoping to hear, with this new amendment, that the number of opposition members on committees would have been increased to make it fair and balanced, working together hand in glove as we work together to improve legislation in this provincial Parliament. I didn't hear that. I did hear talk of bridge-building, which I think is good—unless you're talking about London Bridge, which, as we know, has been falling down, according to the nursery rhyme.

But if we're going to be building bridges, I think we should have a conversation across the aisle between the

House leader teams so that we're all on the same page. As the House leader has said, in his caucus there are votes, and people are invited to partake and have their voices heard. Well, I'm not sure—and I only know what I'm told; I'm not privileged to be part of my House leader's team—but I hear there's not a lot of dialogue. There is not a lot of give-and-take. There is not a lot of conversation between the teams of the various House leaders in the House.

If we are going to be building bridges, then I think we have to get back to the days when we had regular meetings and regular dialogue, and people were all on the same page as to what the agenda was going to be.

Earlier today—I respect the government House leader, as he knows—he stood up on a point of order and said that normally at this time, he would have had a discussion with the opposition House leader and told her what the agenda was going to be on the week that we come back. He apologized for that and said he'll do that in the day or two ahead. That's a good thing. I think it behooves—is that the word? When we are all on the same page, it helps us all.

1420

I know I was told last night that today I might be speaking to Bill 257, the broadband bill, so I did spend a few minutes this morning looking at that. I did come in this afternoon—and I have to tell you, my ego is such that I was very pleased to hear the government House leader talk about private members' bills. He mentioned the poet laureate bill as well as a bunch of other PMBs.

I enjoy speaking to PMBs. I enjoy listening to what we have to say on those days—and we are doing that more and more often. As a member who has been here only seven and a half years, I really appreciate the change in the standing orders that allows more of us to bring forward our private members' bills.

My friend from Ottawa West—Nepean has a daylight saving bill. I say to my friend, as I did during debate, you forgot about Michigan. You're talking to New York; you're talking to Quebec; but Ontario is a province that shares a border with Michigan. Where I come from, in Windsor, with the just-in-time delivery back and forth—especially in the automotive industry. We have trucks going back and forth. We have the busiest border crossings in North America. If we're talking about changing daylight saving time one way or the other, we have to have a conversation with Michigan because of the number of plants in the automotive industry that are connected to the Canadian automotive plants. If it's just-in-time delivery, you can't expect Michigan, GM, Ford and so on to all of a sudden send something to a plant that hasn't started working and won't start working for another hour or that stopped working an hour ago. I pointed that out during the debate, when my friend from Ottawa West—Nepean first introduced this bill. I was hoping in subsequent media interviews and government news releases that we would have heard or seen the state of Michigan listed as one of the key players. That hasn't happened. I'm disappointed by that, because I just can't see going ahead with this. It's one thing to talk about the New York Stock Exchange; but when you're talking about goods back and forth across the

border, you have to have the people on the assembly line in the same time zone. So I hope that gets improved at some point. I hope at some point we do have that conversation.

We are so connected with America, especially down in my part of the province. We're inundated with American media all the time.

I know everyone on that side of the House took the time during the presidential inauguration to tune in to watch the new president and the new president's administration come into office. As someone who brought in the private member's bill on the creation of a poet laureate for Ontario in honour of Gord Downie of the Tragically Hip as a means of recognizing one of Canada's great poets, songwriters and performers, I was blown away, as I'm sure many of you were, when America's first youth poet laureate gave her presentation at the inauguration of President Joe Biden. I said to myself, "This is perfect timing for when Ontario introduces our first poet laureate in the next month or so." We've been working on it now for just over a year. We've had a lot of people, a lot of interest. Willo Downie, Gord Downie's daughter, has played a role with the committee that was named to interview the poets laureate, and I hear that she was invaluable to the committee by providing her advice.

I brought that private member's bill forward during my first year here, which was, as I say, seven and a half years ago. The Liberal government—the minority government of Ms. Wynne—wasn't interested at the time. I didn't give up, because when I served on city council in Windsor, we created the position of a poet laureate for the city of Windsor for Marty Gervais. Marty was there for many years and, a couple of years ago, became the poet laureate emeritus, and Mary Ann Mulhern became Windsor's poet laureate. At that time, we also brought in a youth poet laureate. So when I saw America with their first youth poet laureate, I said, "Wow, what better timing could we have when we introduce Ontario's poet laureate, in memory, as I say, of Gord Downie?"

The government House leader mentioned the member from Parkdale–High Park being the first Tibetan person elected to the assembly, who brought in a private member's bill on the Tibetan day of heritage. Yesterday, as I went out for lunch, there was a parade around Queen's Park—you may have heard the horns—in celebration of all things Tibetan and calling for more freedom for the people of Tibet, and I thought at that time about my colleague the member from Parkdale–High Park's private member's bill.

So I do think that changes to the standing orders, changes to the committee makeup, can serve us well. I'm a bit of a traditionalist. I'm a presiding officer, as you know. I enjoy my time in the Speaker's Chair, as well as my colleague from Windsor West, my colleague from Chatham–Kent–Leamington and, of course, my colleague from Oshawa. Windsor West, Chatham–Kent–Leamington, myself and Oshawa—right; I was afraid I was going to forget somebody there.

So when I hear changes and amendments to the standing orders, I pay attention, and I know I'm not the only

one. But for the most part, to the people at home, whether we get a deferral slip on time so that we don't have to vote on it right away and we don't have to ring the bells for 30 minutes—I mean, that's a good thing, and it's always good if we improve our way of doing business.

Now, when I first came here, I asked the question, "Why is it on Wednesday?" I recognize that on Tuesdays, when we normally have a caucus meeting, we don't come back from the lunch break until 3 o'clock. I get that. I asked, "What about Wednesday?" and somebody told me—I don't know if it's true—that cabinet meets on Wednesdays, and so we give time for cabinet to meet, so they don't miss whatever's going on in the House, or that there would be a cabinet minister here to introduce something or to stand up and speak. I get that. Now, I guess, if we make this change and we come in at 1 o'clock on Wednesday, cabinet can still meet—we don't worry about cabinet; they have their own way of doing business, and I see nothing wrong with that. The House is still going to do what it has to do with that extra couple of hours, and all the better.

When my friend was talking earlier about the roles we play—yes, as members of Her Majesty's loyal opposition, the official opposition, we do have a role to hold the government to account, and we do have the symbols to make sure that the government makes wise decisions and make sure that we are vigilant when it comes to legislation in the House. So I didn't think my colleague and friend from Hamilton Mountain was out of order at all when she suggested that part of our job is to oppose government legislation when we hold them to account, if it's not something that we agree with 100%, because we all know about the poison pills that can be slipped into a piece of legislation.

I have all kinds of quotes, if you want to hear them, from opposition members—three of them now in cabinet—who, in the past, have opposed the poison pills, the little tidbits in a bill that would cause them to vote against it and, back in their home ridings, to be held to account, perhaps, for voting against a budget that was bringing in a new hospital in the riding or whatever it was, because they couldn't vote for a budget because of the 99.7% bad things that were in there, as opposed to the one or two little things that would improve life in their riding. Maybe later on this afternoon I'll have a chance to entertain you with a few of those quotes.

1430

There is so much to talk about when it comes to the standing orders, and I know my friend the government House leader—I thought I could see a bit of his tongue in his cheek when he was having, I thought, fun with us earlier, talking about the bridge-building across the aisle and the spirit of co-operation. But those are the things that we all need to improve upon.

I think most of us in this House have a pretty good relationship with all members. There may be one or two of us who don't see eye to eye and perhaps would never want to have a beer with another member who they don't particularly take a shine to. I get that. But I think, for the

most part, if we bump into each other on the street, maybe with our families in tow, we're going to stop and say, "Hello. How are things going?" and have a conversation, and that may be after we've had a major disagreement in the House over a policy.

Now that we've changed the way of doing business—and I do like, I say to the government House leader and his team, the occasions now where we have the opportunity, after somebody speaks for 10 or 20 minutes or an hour, to have the give and take of 10 minutes of questions and responses.

When we first started out it was more interesting, because the government members weren't given speaking notes right away and had to stand on their feet and respond, or they weren't given speaking notes right away just to ask a question, but now that has changed, because there are more speaking notes made available to more members, and it takes away from the give and take. If I'm standing talking to you for 10 or 20 minutes, I should be able to respond to your question on what I just said—if you're asking me about something I just said, as opposed to reading what our friends in the side row have passed to us, saying, "Here's how you respond."

There's a funny quote that I may get to later this afternoon. There was a government official in Washington who worked for three different presidents, three different administrations, and one of the things he's known for is when one of the George Bushes made a promise during a campaign to protect wetlands, that there would be no loss of wetlands, when in fact that didn't happen. When this bureaucrat was asked by the media to explain it, he said, "Well, the President didn't say that. What he did was read the notes that were prepared for him in a speech." Well, go figure. The words were spoken, but he didn't act on them, because he didn't say it. These were words someone gave him to read in a speech, and he read it, but he didn't say it.

That is the problem some of us have with government speak, with politicians. We're all expected to have principles, and we come to this House with principles—or I hope we do—and somewhere along the way it's, "If you don't like these principles, I've got another set over here." We should be saying what we're going to do, and we should be able to do it. We should not be putting poison pills into bills.

We do it when we're in opposition. We say to the government, no matter who's in power, all the time as we hold the government to account, "Well, I like your bill, except for that poison pill you put in, and I don't think I can support it." Then the government says, "Okay. If you don't support it, I'm going to have a headline that says, 'Thompson Did Not Support New Hospital in Kincardine'"—or whatever it is; substitute any name. This is the fear, I guess, that some members have: that if they vote against the bill, somebody on the government side is going to send out a news release that says they did not support the new plant. Well, they didn't support the new plant because it's being built on a wetland, perhaps, or whatever the issue is.

But when it comes to the standing orders and changes to the standing orders, if we can improve the amount of

work we do and the amount of work we do together across the aisle—people at home wouldn't see this, but every now and then someone across the aisle will, working together, do the hand clasp, as I see my friend from Kitchener–Conestoga and the member from Sarnia–Lambton doing the same thing now, and I know my friend from Perth–Wellington wants to do it as well. We do this from time to time, because that's the collegiality we have. Even though we may be opposing each other in debate, I think we can still go outside after and have a drink or have a meal and discuss what happened in the House today.

Talking about amendments to the standing orders, it's like my friend from St. Catharines said: In her thousand phone calls and emails, nobody said, "Why don't you double the amount of money that a person can donate to a political party in Ontario?" That's not a topic of conversation. It's the same as nobody is going to go out and say, "When it comes to standing orders, I think this would work."

Now, I know my friend from Burlington did bring in the idea that we start meeting on Wednesdays, and I think that's a good thing. I'm glad we're doing it.

While I have the floor, Speaker, I move that the amendment be amended by adding the following words after "government" at the end of clause 120(d):

"And that the appointments made under the standing order must be agreed to by the party assuming the vice-chairship."

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Mr. Hatfield has moved that the amendment be amended by adding the following words after "government" at the end of clause 120(d):

"And that the appointments made under the standing order must be agreed to by the party assuming the vice-chairship."

Further debate on the amendment to the amendment to the government order?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the amendment. It gives me an opportunity to spend some more time talking. First of all, I'm going to address the amendment to the amendment. I have to be honest with the honourable gentleman: I'm surprised at that amendment. We just talked about how we wanted to ensure independence of committees. We talked about how important it was for members to have an independent voice in this House, how important it was for the independents to have a say.

I don't think the member will be surprised that I'm against that amendment, because the whole point of committees and what we're trying to do is increase the independence of committees. I'm not looking to have my Premier or the leader of Her Majesty's opposition tell me who should be serving on a committee. I don't expect to go to the Leader of the Opposition and ask for permission for the committee and then tell my members of my committee who might be sitting on a committee, "Well, the Leader of the Opposition insists that it has to be this person." That's just not the way committees are supposed to function.

I've lost something here. My understanding is—and colleagues, please point of order me if I'm wrong on this, and Madam Speaker, you can correct me if I'm wrong. I am under the impression—I'll use you as an example—that you are an independent voice. When you are in that chair, you are independent. It is your job to keep order in this place and to make sure that we function fairly. That is the whole point as well of a committee—the whole point of a committee.

It leads me to believe, then, that we have been operating under the assumption, as Progressive Conservatives, for all of these years, that when our members go to committee they act independently, they take a look at legislation and they vote the way they want to, and the opposition is taking orders from the leader's office. That is a shocking admission.

To actually try to change and amend the standing orders to put that in writing would then mean, if we agreed on that, colleagues, that we are agreeing that committees are not independent and they are the not the master of their own—

Interjection.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'm surprised at that, but I shouldn't be surprised I guess, because we have heard on a number of occasions in this place—they ask, “Will the government House leader or will the Premier make sure that my bill is passed at committee?” And I've gotten up or another minister has gotten up or a parliamentary assistant has gotten up and said, “Well, the committee will decide on their own.”

1440

But now what we're hearing this, Madam Speaker—and I think we have to spend a little bit of time on this. We have to spend a little bit of time on this amendment. I just want it to be clear—I hope I can do as good a job on speaking about why this amendment should not happen as the member for Sarnia–Lambton did in getting the NDP to change their position on pipelines. I hope that by the time I'm done, members will agree with me that this is—I'm really at a loss for words, Madam Speaker. The whole point of committees is to be independent, and now to hear that the opposition is actually—and all the members on the opposition, you should really look at this. This is an enormous, enormous power grab by the leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition.

I can see the Liberals: They're shaking their heads. They're not in agreement with this. I can see the Greens don't seem to be in agreement with this. What this is, Madam Speaker, is the leader of Her Majesty's official opposition politicizing the Chair, politicizing committees.

Now, it shouldn't be a surprise, again, because we've heard the questions, and there was a point of privilege suggesting that I'm working in too bipartisan a fashion. I never thought that I would see before a chamber, a Legislative Assembly—I know what I want to say, but I'm not going to say it.

Interjections: Don't say it.

Hon. Paul Calandra: No, you're right; I'm not going to say it. So many have fought so hard for democracies,

and it is our job as legislators to make sure that we, independent of party, independent of what we think as legislators—as people who are elected to this place, it is our job to protect the privileges of members of provincial Parliament. That is one of our number one jobs.

It's the same when I hear the members of the opposition suggest, “Oh, we shouldn't be talking about elections. It's not important right now.” Well, I'd also say that that is one of the most, if not the most important thing that we will do in this chamber, protect elections for future generations, because we've seen what happens when people suggest that elections aren't fair and equal. We saw what happened in the United States when there was a suggestion of that.

But that aside, Madam Speaker, again, I want to be clear, and I'm speaking directly, because I know the independents are aghast at the amendment to this motion. Frankly, I'm shocked that the NDP are bringing forward a motion, again, to politicize the appointment of a Chair or a Vice-Chair of the Legislative Assembly.

Oh jeez. Oh my God. And the motion actually—colleagues, now that I've had the opportunity to look, the motion actually excludes independents from the motion.

Interjection: A poison pill against the independents.

Hon. Paul Calandra: After speaking about poison pills, the member for Windsor–Tecumseh then puts this to exclude a group of people who have every right to sit in this place and have their voices heard.

Now, it was the same argument we heard when we were trying to give questions—and we did it unilaterally. We gave questions from question period—as you know, we had six questions. We gave three of those questions to the independents so that they could have a bigger voice. The NDP were opposed to that. But I get it, because they want more time for themselves. We did, of course, throughout the pandemic, give the NDP two of our questions as well.

But then to amend the motion to politicize it and then politicize it to the extent where only the leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition could decide who would be serving as a Chair or Vice-Chair on behalf of the entire NDP caucus—what's the point of the rest of them? What's the point of having the rest of them here? Because they are clearly getting their marching orders from their leader, which, again, is shocking in contrast to what we have done, Madam Speaker.

Let me talk really briefly about deferral slips and getting rid of deferral slips. I think we all are in agreement. It's a small measure, but we put it in there. I remember when the member for Perth–Wellington came to me. He has a really important piece of private member's legislation in front of this House. One of the challenges that we have is that—and we saw this, and I'll come around to it—committees are not allowed to sit when the House is not sitting. So the member for Perth–Wellington said to me, “Well, why is it we can't have committees sit when the House is not in session? If the committees are truly to be the masters of their own business, then they should be allowed to call themselves back to committee by a vote of the majority of the members of the committee.” I thought the member for Perth–Wellington raised a very good point

about that because, of course, we believe on this side of the House that committees are independent, they work independently, they do their job, and they are very effective at doing it. But when the member for Perth–Wellington raised this and said, “Can we make that a standing order change?”—and then seizing on what the member for Burlington had said, I thought, “Okay, we have the basis to actually improve the Legislature yet again.”

I know that the member for Perth–Wellington right now must be as shocked as the rest of us are to hear that the NDP want to politicize the appointment of the Chairs and the Vice-Chairs in the hands of the Leader of the Opposition. I can see the members of the NDP; even through their masks, I can see their embarrassment that they are clearly going to be forced to vote against this.

I'm going to say to my caucus members here, my colleagues here, for us, this will be a free vote. You can vote any way you want on these standing order changes, colleagues. I can tell the members opposite we will vote against politicizing committee Chairs.

What have we done to that? Because it's not just me standing up in the chamber and saying, “Oh, we want to vote. We want to depoliticize.” So let's look. What have we done?

General government: the Vice-Chair was a Conservative. Who is the Vice-Chair now? Well, the committee decided that the leader of the Green Party should be the Vice-Chair of the general government committee, so a Conservative was replaced by the member for Guelph, the leader of the Green Party.

The justice committee Vice-Chair was a Conservative member who resigned as the Vice-Chair. The committee voted to have the member for Ottawa–Vanier, the independent member who, with this motion, would be forced to resign—if we passed this, the independent member would be forced to resign by the leader of the NDP so that a Conservative could be put back on as the Vice-Chair. That's what they want to do. But we said, “No, we want to make it freer. We want to make them more bipartisan.” You will remember the point of privilege saying I was too bipartisan—a badge of honour, Madam Speaker. Anyway, it was the member for Ottawa–Vanier, Madame Collard, who took over that.

The regs and private bills committee, a wonderful committee: It has been doing some really good work. It has been passing some PMBs. Now, that was a Conservative Vice-Chair. But what did the members of our committee do? They decided that the Liberal House leader should be the Vice-Chair of that committee. So the Conservative resigned, and the Liberal House leader was elected as the Vice-Chair of that committee.

The social policy committee: The Conservative resigned, and an NDP member was elected as the Vice-Chair.

The standing committee on finance: The member for Ottawa West–Nepean came to me and said, “Listen, in the spirit of bipartisan co-operation and the spirit of bridge-building, I am going to resign as the Vice-Chair of that

committee and let the committee elect somebody else.” They went out, they elected somebody else, and it was the NDP member for Kingston and the Islands, but he immediately resigned, because he said he couldn't hold the government to account if he was in a Vice-Chair's position. But now, what we're finding out is that he obviously didn't have the permission of the leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition to serve as the Vice-Chair.

To all of those new members over there, let me tell you this: Do you know this means? It's the leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition, or it's the highway. If you're not falling in line with the leader of Her Majesty's official opposition, there's no way she's going to ever let you be a Vice-Chair of a committee or a Chair of a committee, not a chance. So for all of you who think that by working hard—we hear it from you all the time: “Work hard.” The member for Hamilton Mountain—I was so proud of what she was saying: that she worked very hard, that she's not a typical politician, but she wanted it. Well, under this system, under this amendment, it doesn't matter how hard you work, it only matters whether you impress the leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition. And if you happen to be an independent, forget about it, because there's going to be a veto over it. It's quite shocking.

1450

We have a select committee on emergency management in this place. Now, the member for Humber River–Black Creek, the NDP member for Humber River–Black Creek, was elected the Vice-Chair of that committee. He chaired his first meeting the other day. He did a good job of it. He's doing a really, really—honestly, a very good job of it. He has been independent. He has been strong in guiding the committee in the absence of the Chair, but he has done it independently. Now, it strikes me that because this happened so early on that the leader of the NDP is going to suggest that he resign because she wants to pick who that person will be on that committee. I find it shocking.

And in that spirit of bipartisanship, the committee on estimates elected the member for Flamborough–Glanbrook, and the agencies committee elected the member for Scarborough–Agincourt as Vice-Chair of that committee. What is that? So the NDP are the Chairs of those two committees, Madam Speaker, you'll know. They are the Chairs of those committees, and the Vice-Chairs who were elected were Conservatives.

It doesn't matter that we gave up five Vice-Chair positions. That's not the point. The point is that there is an equality here and that committees now, finally, for the first time, become independent, truly independent bodies, and they work on their own. That's what started, of course—excuse me just a moment. I tried to button my suit up, but I find that this time of day it's harder to button that suit up than it was in the morning.

But that's what started this whole, “You're being too bipartisan.” But again, I just really want to speak to the members opposite on this. Let me, again, read for you: “And that the appointments made under the standing order” may “be agreed to by the party assuming the vice-

chairship.” Surely to goodness, you must be worried about this.

I know I said it earlier today and congratulated. It wasn’t well received. I get it. I congratulated the leader of Her Majesty’s loyal opposition on 12 years as being the leader of the—for some reason, that wasn’t well received. I don’t know why. It’s not easy to be a leader of an opposition party for 12 years. I know that. It’s a tough job. But she’s the leader of Her Majesty’s opposition and has been able to, for 12 years, guide the NDP from third party to opposition. That can be celebrated. But it wasn’t well received. I don’t know why.

But now, this, Madam Speaker: This attack on democracy that we’re seeing today by the NDP certainly cannot be allowed to stand. It cannot be allowed to stand. And I implore, I beg my colleagues across the floor—I beg my colleagues across the floor—do not set this precedent. Do not set this precedent, because then what will that mean for the Speaker who sits in the chair? Not this Speaker, but any of the Speakers.

There are members from all caucuses who serve in the Chair. Does that then necessarily mean that the Speakers should no longer be independent? I know when the current Speaker, Speaker Arnott, was elected to the Chair, he was elected by a secret vote of this House. So are we to revert back to the election of Speakers by appointment? Should the Premier be deciding who sits in the Speaker’s chair now? Because that’s what this motion is suggesting, that not only should Vice-Chairs, who are independent—but it stands to reason that they’re suggesting that the Speaker should also lose that independence, and all the Deputy Speakers. I’m literally flabbergasted by this.

So I will say to my colleagues opposite—it’s not going to surprise you. I will use the full three minutes, because this level of attack on something as independent as committees should not be allowed to happen. I have never seen a motion brought forward to the—after everything we have done to improve, and we’ve done it together. Because, look, we might bring forward the changes to the standing orders, but we all have to agree upon it.

Now, we heard the previous opposition House leader—you’ll remember this, Madam Speaker. Remember? We said reasoned amendments—the whole world was going to collapse. We heard for weeks, “Oh, they’re getting rid of reasoned amendments.” They’re still there. They’re still there, reasoned amendments, but have not been used once since the standing orders were changed—not one use of the reasoned amendments. If it’s a valuable tool, it’s still there for the opposition to use.

Now, we heard, “It’s going to ruin democracy as it stands. This is going to be the worst thing ever.” That’s what the previous opposition House leader said. I wonder how he would feel today, knowing that it’s not him, it’s not his party, it’s not the individual members of the NDP who will decide on these positions; it is the leader of Her Majesty’s loyal opposition. I think Ontarians will look at this—and I’m under no illusion that millions of Ontarians are watching this right now. But Madam Speaker, we’re a year out from an election. I think it would certainly give

pause to anybody to think that if the leader of Her Majesty’s loyal opposition wants to appoint partisan chairs to non-partisan positions, what kind of government would the Leader of the Opposition run?

My gosh, it really highlights why they have not served in government in the history of this province but once for five years. And as I mentioned before, it was a government that was so poorly received that its former Premier, of the NDP, abandoned the party in horror and fled to the Liberals—not that that’s a badge of honour. I can see the Liberals and the independents in full agreement, I think, with what I’m saying here today.

I will say this: I truly hope the members opposite will reflect on this. I have never seen an attempted power grab like I have seen here, especially when we have made so much progress.

I know the member for Windsor–Tecumseh—and I thank him. He mentioned how I get up and tell the business of the House. Every Thursday I rise and give the business of the House. He asked me why I don’t have House leaders’ meetings. Well, the reality is, why would I do it in a secret room when I can do it here in front of the entire Legislature and everybody can hear what the business of the House will be going forward?

The reality was, Madam Speaker, that it really didn’t matter when we had House leaders’ meetings, because the NDP, unlike the Liberals and the Greens and the other independents, could never make a decision without first asking the leader what it was that they were allowed to do. So we would never have the status of business on a Thursday. We would never have it on a Friday, a Saturday, a Sunday. If we were lucky, by Monday at midday, we would have the opposition House leader coming down from on high with the tablets letting us know what it was that the leader of Her Majesty’s opposition—I never dreamed that I would see a motion like this from the NDP. I can tell you, Madam Speaker, I will be voting against it and I encourage all members to vote against this attack on democracy by the NDP.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate on the amendment to the amendment to the government order?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I listened carefully to the government House leader and his remarks on the amendment to the amendment. He used a lot of words like how shocked he was, how flabbergasted he was by the amendment to the amendment that was brought forward by the official opposition.

I want to say, Speaker, what shocks me, what leaves me flabbergasted, what leaves me speechless and disappointed and ashamed of this government, is the fact that these changes to the standing orders were the first piece of business that was brought forward by this government back on February 17, when we returned from the second provincial lockdown that this province has experienced since the pandemic was declared. And now, on the verge of recessing for a week so we can return to our constituencies, here we are again dealing with unbelievably minor

changes to the standing orders when there are huge priorities that people expect us to be dealing with.

The government House leader referenced the millions of Ontarians who might be tuning in. If they are, I hope that they start calling the government MPPs and saying, “Why are you talking about this? Why aren’t you talking about paid sick days? Why aren’t you talking about investments in long-term care that the long-term-care commission has revealed this government thought were too costly to make?” Why are we dealing with this right now?

But regardless, this is something that I feel very strongly about, just as strongly as the government House leader feels about the subamendment that was put forward by the NDP.

1500

I do want to address some of his comments. He talked about his fear, his concern that the amendment moved by the NDP would undermine the independence of members. That’s what he talked about. I would ask the government House leader to reflect on what kind of independence there is when a majority of government members of a committee vote to elect a Vice-Chair and that Vice-Chair says, “I do not want that position. I decline that opportunity,” and yet the majority of government members go ahead and they make that motion anyway.

The government House leader talked about the Vice-Chair of the finance committee. This is what happened: The MPP who was brought forward to assume the position of Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee on Finance was a member of the official opposition. The majority government members brought that motion in to appoint him as Vice-Chair. He said, “I don’t want that position, respectfully,” and yet a majority of government members voted him in. He resigned. He had made very clear that he did not want to assume that position. That’s not respecting the independence of members, for the government to use their majority to move that motion anyway, in direct contradiction to what that member had expressed.

The other example that the government House leader brought forward was with regard to the Vice-Chair of the policy committee. Again, a member of the official opposition was brought forward in a motion by this government, by the majority of the government members of that committee, to assume that Vice-Chair position. She wasn’t even at the meeting, Speaker. She wasn’t even at the meeting: She didn’t even have an opportunity to say whether she was interested in assuming that position, whether she declined assuming that position. She wasn’t there, and yet the majority of government members on that standing committee decided to pass that motion.

The government House leader has talked about his concern that this amendment politicizes the role of Vice-Chair. Honestly, Speaker, I can’t think of anything more partisan than allowing a majority of government members to pass a motion appointing someone into the position of Vice-Chair without their even being there, without their being in attendance at that meeting of the standing committee. So I would challenge the government House leader

about who is politicizing issues and who is trying to play partisan games here. Believe me, Speaker, it’s not the official opposition; it is the government House leader.

I go back to where I started these remarks: about the fact that four weeks into the return of the Legislature, after the second major lockdown in this province, because of the COVID-19 crisis that is gripping communities across the province, here it is—four weeks in. We’re about to recess for a week, a week in which the government’s own science advisory table has said a third wave is coming. The government’s own medical advisors have said that we are on the brink of something very, very serious, with the possibility of a third COVID wave coming across the province.

Another thing that the government’s medical advisors have stated very clearly, have been stating very clearly for months, is about the need for paid sick days, and in particular paid sick days as we are facing the very real threat of a third wave. Health care; medical officers of health; health care experts; the government’s own medical officer of health, the Chief Medical Officer of Health; medical officers of health in health units across province—actually, all 34 medical officers of health—boards of health, other health care organizations: Every single one of those across the province, all 34 of them, wrote a letter to the Premier urging this government to move forward with a provincial program of paid sick days. That is what we could be discussing right now.

We should have been discussing this back on February 17, when this government first introduced these standing order changes. Instead, the government House leader enjoys playing these little games in the Legislature, pretending that this is some kind of an appropriate forum to be talking about changes to the standing orders.

Standing orders are what underpin our democracy. The discussion about standing order changes should be made through a consultative process that engages the official opposition House leaders, that engages the independents, that engages the Liberals and the—

Interjections.

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

A reminder to all members that when the government leader had his full opportunity to address this, the room was quiet. I would like the opportunity to hear this member. I promise that we’ll continue the rotations. Anyone is welcome to then get up and speak, when there’s that opportunity.

I apologize to the member. Please continue.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Speaker.

I want to point out that the official opposition had no notice that these standing order changes were going to be debated here this afternoon. If the Liberals and the Greens and the independents had been given notice that these standing order changes were going to be debated this afternoon, I’m sure they would have liked to be here to participate in this discussion, because standing orders belong to all of us. They belong to this Legislative Assembly, and they should be—the discussions about how

the standing orders work. Do they serve democracy well? Do they function in the best way, the most effective way to address the needs of the people of this province? These are conversations that should be taking place in a collaborative forum.

This government House leader knows that there have been no meetings between the official opposition House leader, the government House leader, the House leaders of the other parties since we returned to Queen's Park after the winter recess. There have been no opportunities to talk about how we function as a Legislature. Are we well served by the language of the standing orders? Are the standing orders enabling that democratic debate that is so fundamental to the health of our democracy? We haven't had that meeting.

I will say that prior to returning here in February, we had a discussion. The government House leader brought to me and the member for Ottawa South and the member for Guelph a proposal to allow committees to meet while the House is adjourned, if there's a majority of members of that committee who want that committee to convene a meeting. That makes sense. We said at the time, prior to getting back here, that we would support that; we would actually support that, moving forward, with unanimous consent. We don't have a problem with that. We think that is an appropriate way for committees to function. The government House leader chose not to bring that forward as a unanimous consent motion and instead incorporated it into the motion that's before us today about standing order changes, I think, so that he could take up time on the government's agenda. I don't know how many hours of debate we've had on these standing order changes at this point, but we are spending valuable, precious legislative debate time talking about issues that are so irrelevant to the challenges that are facing people in this province right now, challenges about the economy.

1510

I go back to paid sick days: The reason that many small business owners have been advocating for paid sick days is because they don't want to go into another lockdown. They want a way to ensure that if one of their employees is sick, they will be able to stay home without having to take an unpaid leave of absence, without having to go to a government website and make an application, without having to figure out if they qualify for the federal government sickness benefit and without having to wait for the sickness benefit to arrive and probably, in many cases, take a much lower amount than they would have had if they had paid sick days from their employer.

This is what small businesses are worried about. This cycle of locking down, reopening, locking down again, reopening and now a potential third wave lockdown is not in anybody's best interest. It's not in the interest of the people of this province. It's certainly not in the interest of the small businesses who are hanging by a thread, who have had to advocate with help from members of the official opposition, who have had to advocate just constantly for this government to acknowledge the kinds of challenges they were facing.

With the lack of commercial rent support—this government likes to congratulate itself for bringing in a commercial rent support program, working with the federal government, and we all know how completely inadequate that was. It required landlords to apply to the program in order for commercial businesses to be able to access that rent relief. It was a disaster, Speaker. It was a disaster, and we were pointing out all the flaws in that program from the very beginning, and it took months and months for this government to finally recognize that something needed to be done. Speaker, we know that commercial rent relief that small businesses need is still not there and the other kinds of supports that businesses need are still not there. Paid sick days are still not there.

I think of my colleagues from Brampton in particular. A study was done by Peel Public Health that interviewed 8,000 workers in Peel between March and January of this year—just less than two months ago—and 2,000 of the 8,000 workers said that they went to work with COVID symptoms; 80 of those said they went to work after testing COVID-positive. Now, did they want to do that, Speaker? Did they want to go to work and risk passing infection to their co-workers, to their employer? Did they want to take infection home to their families, to their community? Of course not, Speaker. Of course not, but they didn't have a choice.

Let's look at who those workers are. Those are workers who work in warehousing, in transportation, in factories. Many of them are low wage. They work in long-term care homes, Speaker. You would not believe the number of PSWs and nurses who don't have paid sick days. What happens when those PSWs—and we know how completely inadequate the wages for PSWs are. So when those PSWs feel that they may have COVID symptoms, and given the pitiful low wages they already get, without paid sick days it would mean having to forego being able to make the rent at the end of the month, being able to pay the bills, being able to buy their TTC pass to get to work. All of these things mean that we are not doing everything that we can to limit the spread of COVID-19.

It has been recognized over and over again that among the many glaring omissions of this government's response to COVID-19, the failure to implement a provincial program of paid sick days has got to be the worst and actually the one with the most potential for negative consequences in terms of COVID-19 spread, especially as the variants—and we heard it this morning from the Minister of Health—are becoming the dominant strain of COVID-19. We know that the variants are much more contagious than the original virus, and without the protection of paid sick days, there is a real possibility, as I mentioned before, that the virus is going to spread very, very quickly and it will force another lockdown in this province, and that is not something any of us want.

But to go back to the amendment to the amendment that we are debating today and the changes to the standing orders, it's mind-boggling—to use a word that I didn't hear from the government House leader, but I find it mind-boggling, Speaker that here we are debating changes to the standing orders at a time of the biggest public health crisis,

the biggest economic crisis that this province has ever faced. There are good reasons for changes to the standing orders. The changes, in many cases, can be accomplished with unanimous consent so we don't take up valuable time on the legislative agenda engaging in a protracted debate that is, frankly, meaningless to the people of this province. The people who are watching here today are wondering, "What are our MPPs doing? Why are they not talking about the priorities that we expect them to be talking about, that we deserve for them to be talking about?"

Speaker, the people of Ontario look to their government for leadership, for responsiveness, for legislative actions that address the highest-priority needs of families and people in Ontario, and we don't see that with these standing order changes. We don't see that in the bill that we were debating just prior to these standing order changes, which allows big money back into politics.

Speaker, I am embarrassed for this government—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. I would actually like to point out that earlier in the member's remarks, she made comment about the attendance of other members. I would ask for her to withdraw.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I withdraw, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. And earlier in the discussion, the member from Northumberland–Peterborough South did the same. He referred to members who weren't here. I would ask him to also withdraw.

Mr. David Piccini: Withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Just a reminder to all of us that it is a tradition of the House.

Continuing with debate on the amendment to the amendment to the motion: Further debate? I recognize the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. The second-to-last time I stood up, I forgot to take my mask off, and I've been teased about it quite a bit, so I will take it off.

Hon. Todd Smith: Put it back on.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you, Minister. I didn't say which way I was teased. Speaker, I will try and keep going through the Chair.

1520

It's always an honour to rise and, today, to talk about the standing order changes. Before I get into the actual issue about the standing orders, I would like to mention that we are in the middle of a pandemic. Specifically, for my riding—I have four health units in my riding, or my riding covers parts of four health units. Before, part of my riding was, and still is, in the North Bay Parry Sound health unit, and they were locked down. They were surrounded by places that weren't locked down and they were very stressed. Now that the Sudbury health unit is going into grey, into lockdown, a different part of my riding will be in lockdown, and again, people are very stressed and very confused. And you know what? It's wearing on people. The pandemic is wearing on everyone and no more so than the families who have lost loved ones, many in long-term care, but many others as well. I know a

little about it. Not about—but I have loved ones who have COVID right now. They seem to be going in the right direction, but it's tough.

We don't get to pick what we talk about here. The government does. I don't subscribe to the idea that anything that we talk about in this House is—changes to elections aren't frivolous. Changes to the standing orders aren't frivolous. The timing is, quite frankly, off, because people are dying in a pandemic. But talking about changes to rules that actually govern how this place works—and those rules that govern how this place works determine how laws are made that govern how people live in our province, so this is not a frivolous discussion.

It is very ill-timed—very ill-timed. Because you know what? The standing orders seemed to work pretty well before these guys showed up. I've been here for a while. I'm not saying that nothing should ever be improved, but you know what? Democracy was functioning before the Ford government was elected—not according to the Ford government, but they—

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's better now.

Mr. John Vanthof: The member for Sarnia–Lambton believes it's better now; I think many people would disagree.

I'd just like to regress for a second, because there are a few folks at home who are—and I don't think too many people at home are watching. Actually, it's pretty hard to watch this at home, because our TVs don't show it, depending on which channel, and broadband—you can't stream it. And maybe that's a blessing for them in this case. Maybe that's a blessing for them in this case. But what those few people—and some of my teachers would be completely shocked that I am standing anywhere where they are talking about the finer wordsmithing of standing orders. They would be quite shocked.

Before I got this job and I was duly elected by the great people of Timiskaming–Cochrane, I had never ever had an office. My office was a milking parlour or a tractor cab. Farmers will relate to this: My first tractor with a cab was an International 1066.

Interjection: A great tractor.

Mr. John Vanthof: A fantastic tractor, but the world's worst cab. We used that a lot. I remember my mentor—and I'd like to mention my mentor who actually got me involved in farm politics and got me involved here, Albert Gauthier, may he rest his soul. He showed up at my farm one day and he saw that 1066 going up and down the field, and he drove out and he was going to tell me something, and he was going to tell me to get a different tractor, because that cab, the sound and the shaking, was going to be the death of me. The tractor stopped at the end of the field and my wife opened the door. She was driving the tractor. Albert came back to the barn and he scolded me for letting—I'll never forget that. A few weeks later, I bought a better cab tractor.

So I never had an office job, never thought I would get here and never thought I would have the opportunity to talk about standing orders. My role here for the official opposition is that I'm the whip. I'm the agriculture critic—

that's pretty easy to see, because I'm a farmer—but I'm the whip, and I'm supposed to know something about the standing orders. Quite frankly, do you know who knows the most about the standing orders? The Clerks. I'm not going to pretend that I know a lot about the standing orders, and I think everyone should recognize that.

The whip's role is to make sure that people are in the right place at the right time and the right committee at the right time. Basically, you're the organizer—which my wife would also laugh at. But I am interested, very interested, in this debate particularly, because I'm very interested, as we all should be, in the rules of how the place works. It's like in hockey, and in all professional sports—professional or volunteer. The teams involved are pretty interested in how the rules are applied and how they're created. Here, over an afternoon, we're changing rules on the fly, and I don't think that's how it should be done.

Now, I listened intently to the Conservative House leader. I have a lot of respect for the Conservative House leader. I really do. I have learned a lot from the Conservative House leader. I'm not going to emulate some of the things that I've learned from him, but I have a lot of respect for him. He is good at his role, and he is incredibly articulate at making his point.

We had a conversation a few days ago—because actually, behind the scenes, we do sometimes have conversations. I was talking to him about when I got elected here. A certain issue in my riding is why I got elected, and on that issue I was so conversant—I think that's the word, Speaker; it's a big word for me. But I was so good at talking about that issue that I could win a debate even if I knew I was wrong on that issue. I told him that when I got here—I was in that corner way in the back, and my speaking style hasn't gotten a lot smoother. I was in that corner way in the back and listening to—and do you know what? Everyone here has different skills. We all try to represent our constituents, and there are some incredible speakers here.

I sat in that corner and I thought, “Do you know what? I've got a big problem, because at home, on one issue, I can beat anybody, but here there are people who can do that on every issue, or they can try,” and for that I respect the Conservative House leader, because he can put forward points which I totally disagree with, but you sit there and think, “You know, if I didn't know any better, I might believe it,” and I respect him for that.

Mr. Michael Mantha: You know better.

Mr. John Vanthof: Well, what triggered me to want to speak this afternoon to this—and this is totally inside baseball, but I think you're going to like this story. The member from, I believe, Barrie—

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Barrie–Innisfil.

Mr. John Vanthof: Barrie–Innisfil.

Mr. Will Bouma: Great member.

Mr. John Vanthof: I have had some good laughs with the member from Barrie–Innisfil. A couple of days ago, behind the dais, she was talking to me about something and she said, “I'm going to start calling you the breakfast club,” because there are a couple NDP MPPs—and we are

socially distanced and we do everything right—and I'm one of them. I sit there and eat breakfast. A few of us were sitting, eating breakfast one day, and the Conservative House leader walked by. The House leader is a busy guy, so he has staff—good ones. They all walked by, and they were all at the same pace, and they were all wearing black masks, and the NDP breakfast club started humming the tune from Star Wars that plays whenever Darth Vader walks in the room—dun-dun-dun-dun-dun. I think the Conservative House leader took that as a compliment, because he turned, took off his mask and smiled. We meant it as a compliment; we truly did. We meant it as a sign of respect, because he is good at his job.

1530

But today, when the Tory House leader talks about how he's always about building bridges and making things run smoother—we didn't hum Darth Vader because he was good at building bridges. That wasn't Darth Vader's role in Star Wars.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I leave the room and get attacked, eh?

Mr. John Vanthof: Welcome.

I don't get nervous when the Tory House leader walks into the room. I do get nervous when the Tory House leader starts talking about building bridges. Personally, I think we have a great relationship; on this, I'm not so sure.

There are several standing order changes, and the one about deferral slips, that you don't need a deferral slip—that's totally inside baseball. I know we have the deferral slip race to get to the Chair. I don't mind not having deferral slips. As a whip, that's one of my jobs. It's not a problem. There are a few other things that I don't think are a big issue. They didn't have to be changed. They could have stayed the same.

On this, the amendment that the government put forward today—a true bridge builder would talk to the other members of the team. On the standing orders, we should be a team, because these are rules that affect everyone. A true bridge builder would have said, “We're looking at doing something on committees. What do you think would work for you?” And I would hope that the official opposition and the independents would have said, “Okay, let's see what we can do.” There are actually some parts of this system that work like that, but not very many. So that's what a true bridge builder would do.

This motion has been on the floor for a while—and I don't know all the right terms. My teachers, once again, would scold me. There's a former teacher in the chair who feels like scolding me—and I say that respectfully, Chair. This motion has been on the floor for quite a while. There has been some acrimony regarding how Vice-Chairs have been elected at committee or appointed at committee. The opposition has brought that up. When the Conservative House leader said that he's doing this in response—great. If he had said, “Let's talk about how we can do this,” we could have had some advance notice and talked about the motion and tried to avoid the situation we're in, where we're having to try to fix things on the fly. That is how a true bridge builder works.

Often, those who say they're bridge builders—if you have to say you're a bridge builder, I'm not sure you're actually a bridge builder.

It would have been better if the Conservative amendment had come—had we been consulted, we could have tried to work on wording that we would all agree to, or that maybe we wouldn't agree to, but at least we'd know what the wording was. One thing: If you know ahead, you can have better debates. You don't have to listen to me talk about tractors, right? Not everybody likes to listen to me talk about tractors.

But that didn't happen in this case. That didn't happen in this case, so the Conservatives put forward an amendment and we were forced to try and fix it by putting forward a subamendment. What struck me listening to this debate is that, with the outmost respect to the Conservative House leader, because he didn't have the time—and, quite frankly, we didn't have the time to really craft this, to really think about it. But he hasn't had the time to truly digest the amendment.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Oh, I have.

Mr. John Vanthof: Well, he says he has. He spent a lot of time talking about how the leaders of parties would now be dictating who's on—but look at the amendment. It doesn't say “recognized party;” it says “party,” with a small P. I'm not going to impugn—I'm sorry—because this is a debate. A case can be made that there is something being read into this amendment that, quite frankly, isn't there.

If you read the amendment, “And that the appointments made under the standing order must be agreed to by the party assuming the Vice-Chairship,” it doesn't say “the recognized party;” it doesn't say “the leader of that party.” It says “the party.” The party could be an individual. The party be an individual who is an independent, the party could be a party, but again, it's up to the party how that is agreed.

Laughter.

Mr. John Vanthof: Now, the Conservative House leader seems to find this incredibly funny, and this was the one part of the speech I wasn't trying to make funny. But we are not—

Mr. Robert Bailey: I can't help it. I'm going to leave.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'm driving people out of the House, Speaker.

So I would say that this whole process could have been done much more smoothly if there had actually been advance notice, which would make the standing orders much better. We are going to have disagreements on all kinds of things, and I appreciate that. But on this, on standing order changes—when the Conservatives say that they are all about independence, in the case of some of these committees, under their watch, members are voted as a Vice-Chair without even being there, without having given their agreement.

That's what we're trying to get to here. It can't be denied that one of our members was nominated and voted into a Vice-Chairship by a majority of government members without—

Hon. Paul Calandra: On a point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Just for clarification, I believe the vote he's talking about—the NDP voted in favour of that Vice-Chair as well.

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

I return to the member.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker.

But the issue is that that member was at no point part of the conversation. That member was unaware of the goings-on of that meeting, the goings-on of that election as it was happening. Now, as the whip, if I had known, I would have alerted the member. I had no knowledge, and neither did the member. That is what this amendment to the amendment is trying to combat. The Conservative bridge-builder does not agree. Perhaps we are the ones trying to build a bridge.

1540

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate on the amendment to the amendment?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I was elected to and brought to this House in 2011. I look across the way and I see some very good friends. I see some individuals that I've worked with. Something about that class of 2011, right? Something about that class. We came in together. I think we went through an entire process of almost a month where we received all kinds of indoctrination, particularly on process, the importance of the traditions of this place, the importance of the standing orders, the dos and don'ts of what we should and shouldn't be doing. The importance of remembering what your role is as an MPP: That is to make sure that you bring the voices of your constituents to the floor of the Legislature, right?

The importance, when those cameras are off, of getting out of your seat, walking across, and extending a handshake, having a discussion, talking about common goals—you're not always going to agree on the positions that you're coming from; you're not always going to agree on how to get to a destination. But damn, that destination that we all want to get to is something that's really treasured, that we really want to get to, that we really want to achieve, in order to make lives a little bit better for those who have actually put us into our roles, into these positions.

I want to use some of the little bit of time that I have to talk about traditions. It's one of the things that I hold very near, and it's one of the things that gives me great pride in being an elected member in this House. For a long time, Speaker, I used to come to this place and I shied away from the idea, when people referred to me as a politician. I felt a little queasy about that. But I hold it with great pride now, because I have a lot of pride in the work that I do.

When I talk to constituents back home and they tell me, “What the heck is going on over at Queen's Park?” I always try to tell them—to the students, I tell them about the eagle and the owl and the importance of symbolism

and the things that you discover around this place on a regular basis.

The traditions are something that I always hold to, which makes me the person that I am. It makes me the politician that I am, because there are historical processes that we've always had in place in this House. Is there room for improvement? Sure, there's room for improvement. I've seen some of the improvements that have been recently done. We've heard some of our members who have talked to those improvements. We've seen changes to the standing orders that have come, good and bad. Let's say that we're going to agree to disagree on some of them. Some have been good. Some have proven to demonstrate the abilities of certain members who have come up to rise and shine, when it comes time to debate.

But there are traditions that have been here for years and years and years. And I've walked the hallways here in this Legislature many times. On Sunday nights I walk into this place—and I've actually had the security guards run after me, Speaker, because I was playing hide-and-seek with my boys in here. We enjoy going through the hallways that are here, and I've always shared the traditions of this place.

One of the traditions is discussion. One of those traditions is—I remember, as a new MPP, I used to sit back here and I used to watch how the House leaders would function. They talked to each other and they'd go behind the chair and there were some extensive conversations. I was always wondering, "What's going on there?" Then I would hear about the discussions that they're having at the House leaders' meetings. What happens at House leaders' meetings? What are the discussions that are going on there? How come I'm not part of it?

Those are some of the traditions that have historically taken place, by individuals who have walked here. I'm very proud, each and every time I walk through those doors, that I'm one of those individuals. I'm following in those footsteps.

Just when we came back from the break, our leader had indicated that she wanted to know if I would be willing to step into a new role and to become deputy whip, to become part of our House team, which is one that I took with great pride. First, I said, "Wow. Thank you very much for providing me with that opportunity." But learning is something that I've always appreciated and wanted to do for many, many years.

Now, being part of that House leaders' team, I was looking at the advantage of having those House leader team meetings. Remember I talked a lot about the history as far as the things that we would discuss and how we would resolve things here? Well, would you be shocked if I told you that I have yet to see one House leaders' meeting? I've had maybe one or two conversations with the government House leader, but something like we're talking about today, where we could be talking about—this is important stuff as well, but we could be talking about a lot of different priorities that people across this province are quite concerned with.

We could be talking about sick day pay. We could be talking about broadband—we are talking about broadband, but we're talking about broadband in the same conversation as a poison pill, which we've all talked about to a great length this week in regard to what's going on and why there is a schedule 3 in a broadband bill. But we could be talking about that.

We could be talking about the standing orders in regard to how we can change these so both sides can come here and say, "You know what? We've claimed a little bit of a win. This is a better process for us. It's not going to hurt you. It's not going to hurt us. We respect the traditions of this House by opening up discussion." That almost sounds like building bridges. That's what it sounds like, and that's what we should be doing, and it's unfortunate that we're not doing more of that.

I listened very attentively to the House leader while I was in the back as he was delivering his remarks as to why he was not going to support our subamendment to the amendment. I tell you, I just love these cameras in regard to how great a show we can put on when these cameras are on. I'm sure he and I are going to have a nice chuckle about it tomorrow morning, or next week when we come back, when we're talking: "What the heck was that about?" Because the cameras are going to be off.

The thing that I like to stress with people back home is that when the cameras are on, you see that play from a lot of perspectives, and I'm going to say from both sides of the House. It happens; there's a lot at play. What I like to tell people, especially my constituents in Algoma-Manitoulin, is that when those cameras are off, there's a lot of work that gets done.

Again, those are some of the traditions that have been in this place that I take quite seriously in my role as an MPP and I take quite seriously in my role as part of our House team, and I wish that this government, particularly this House leader, along with his team, took that opportunity. Those bridges—if you want to build a bridge, take me up on that tradition. Take me up on those discussions. Take us up and let's sit down and really nail down what we need to do to improvise and to improve this place, because the quicker we improve this place and the quicker we improve the opportunities that we have to communicate better, the quicker we're going to be able to resolve a lot of the issues that a lot of Ontarians are facing.

I've often used the Clerks down here as well, and I have to take my hat off to them. I watched them go into action, because as we saw this government come up with this amendment, we wanted to make sure and they wanted to help both sides to come to a consensus on the decision. That's bridge-building. These are our heroes that we have in this House. They go over and above on each and every call. They're just trying to make this place work better while respecting the traditions of this place.

I'll be sharing some of my time with the member from—

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Brampton North.

Mr. Michael Mantha: From where?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Brampton North.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Brampton South?

Interjection: North.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Brampton North. Sorry. I should know that by now. My gosh.

I just want to end off by telling the government House leader that if you want the process of this House to function better, start by talking to our team. Start by having those discussions and respecting some of the traditions that I've grown to live by and be so proud of and to consider myself a politician. We'd go a long way to building bridges.

1550

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member from Brampton North.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I want to thank all the members who have been speaking to this motion. The motion itself has three things—and people at home watching, I just want to give you a little idea of what this motion is. Any recorded vote is automatically pushed to the next deferred votes, and deferral slips are no longer required. That's one.

The second part establishes a mechanism for committees to meet during any adjournment period. A majority of members requesting a meeting, the committee debates a motion on the business in question. If the motion passes, meetings are scheduled to deal with the business contained within the motion. That's two.

And the third motion basically gives the government House leader the power to change the start time for p.m. orders to 1 p.m. on a Wednesday by writing to the Speaker, which they obviously still have the power to do.

Now, I'm sure, Madam Speaker, people watching this segment right now are wondering, what year are we in? Is this 2018? Is it 2019? No, it's 2021. And yes, we are in a full-fledged pandemic, and here, today, we are talking about standing order changes. The standing order changes, as my colleague mentioned, are important, but the timing—I'm trying to find a good word for it—is questionable. That's the word I'm going to use.

In my riding of Brampton North and across the Peel region, we are in a pandemic. We have the hot spot. We have the highest number of cases, and unfortunately, we have lost a lot of people. We have lost a lot of businesses. But today, we are talking about the standing order changes. This isn't something that the opposition agreed upon; this is something that the government has decided to do.

With the deaths in the hot spots in Brampton North, we also have essential services and essential workers who are going to work sick, because they can't stay home, because they can't afford to stay home, because they're not getting pandemic pay and they're not getting sick pay. This is what we should be debating, Madam Speaker, not talking about the standing orders.

We need to keep Ontarians safe. This government says that's what they're all about, but when we stand here at almost 4 o'clock in the afternoon on our final day before we go on constituency week, what really matters to Ontarians is not the standing orders. It really isn't. I could read what the standing orders are, but I'm not going to,

because I want to continue talking about the pandemic. On the anniversary of the start of the pandemic, we are talking about standing orders. Unfortunately, the government—and the House leader says that he wants to be working together with the opposition. But in the opposition, we didn't know that we'd be talking about the standing orders until five minutes before he started talking about the standing orders. That is not dialogue. That is not working with the opposition.

When it came to the amendments to the standing orders, one big controversy that we've been talking about here is committees and the fact that in these committees Vice-Chairs were named and these Vice-Chairs, in some cases, weren't even there at the committee or they had to resign because that wasn't the role that they wanted. But of course, the government with the majority passed it through and then we had to have our members resign. These are some of the things we're dealing with, with this government.

In my first year, I was part of a group on this side that met with the House leader. I was part of the House team, and it worked well. However, we have a new House leader who does not seem to want to work with the opposition.

Madam Speaker, I'm going to leave the rest of my time—I know you're probably going to check—for the member from Spadina—North York?

Mr. Chris Glover: Fort York.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Fort York—and I'm going to sit down now. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member from Spadina—Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's always an honour to rise in the House, and today is a particularly important day because it's the one-year anniversary of the pandemic. A year in, we're all feeling fatigued with the lockdowns. There have been so many tragedies, so many people have lost loved ones and co-workers and friends, and we should acknowledge the suffering that people have gone through. The flag out in front of Queen's Park today is flying at half-mast, as are flags across province, for all those who have been lost to this pandemic.

When we come in here today, the people who are watching at home have got to be wondering, "What are you going to be debating about? What is the priority of the government, especially right now with this pandemic and with schools being closed; with 3,700 deaths in long-term care; with at least 20% of small businesses in this province estimated to go out of business during this pandemic, and the estimate may be as high as 40%?"

So what are we debating here today? We're debating an amendment to the standing orders. For those who don't know, the standing orders are actually rules that govern the House. These are very important rules because they are the foundation of our democracy and our democratic process here in the House. But we were functioning all right before these changes to the standing orders, and they're really not that huge, these changes.

The things that people across Ontario want this government to be focused on, want us to be talking about right now, is making our schools, our long-term care and our long-term-care homes safe. They want us to be talking about the vaccine rollout, which has been a mess to this point. They want us to be talking about how we can save small businesses.

I had a meeting with small business owners from my riding yesterday, and they were talking about a number of issues that would be top priority for them far over any standing order changes. One of them was saying that he owns a live music venue. He cannot get insurance. One business owner told me that for businesses that have gone under, that are closed now, the landlords are selling the buildings because they can't get insurance for the buildings. There's a huge crisis with insurance for businesses in Ontario.

The live music venues, as well as this insurance crisis that they're facing, are wondering why stores have a percentage of people who are allowed into stores. Most stores are 25% capacity, grocery stores are 50% capacity, and they're wondering why live music venues and other music venues are limited to 10 people. There's a business owner in my riding who has an 18,000-square-foot business, and they're only allowed 10 people in that entire space.

When we're talking about what the priority of this government should be, it should be what changes can you make to make sure that businesses survive. You need to change the regulations around insurance and make sure that people and all businesses can get insurance so that businesses are not closing down because of a lack of insurance.

You need to make sure that our schools are safe. It's a year into the pandemic, and we still don't have fully rolled-out asymptomatic testing in our schools. You need to change the water fountains in our schools so that students don't have to touch them. They should be touchless water fountains, so that's one less point of contact in our schools.

There are so many things that this government should be focused on, and these minor changes to the standing orders are not what the people of Ontario are asking them to be working on.

1600

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

Mr. Hatfield has moved the following amendment to the amendment to government order number 60, a motion respecting standing order changes. Mr. Hatfield moved that the amendment be amended by adding the following words after "government" at the end of clause 120(d):

"And that the appointments made under the standing order must be agreed to by the party assuming the vice-chairship."

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

A recorded vote being required, unless I receive a deferral slip—

Mr. John Vanthof: Hopefully, this has the right date.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): It appears to be the right date.

Pursuant to standing order 30(h), the whip requests that the vote on government order 60, amendment to the amendment, be deferred to deferred votes on Monday, March 22, 2021.

Vote deferred.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I am sure if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to see the clock at 6. Agreed? Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Ford government should establish a rent relief program issued directly to residential tenants who have experienced financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic to help ensure no tenant faces eviction for pandemic-related rent arrears or debts both during and after the pandemic.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Pursuant to standing order 101, the member has 12 minutes for their presentation.

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: It is an enormous honour to rise to speak to motion 143, which would, if acted upon and enacted, ensure that no tenant in Ontario loses their housing because they have lost income due to COVID-19 and can't pay rent or rent-related debt.

I want to begin by thanking my colleague the member for Toronto Centre for all her work on this important motion and for graciously encouraging me to bring it forward so that we can debate it here today.

I also want to thank the many rent relief advocates who are with us in spirit here today and who have spoken out at our press conference, on social media, and via emails, phone calls and messages.

Speaker, today is the one-year anniversary of the understanding that COVID-19 had arrived in Ontario—and a lockdown that quickly followed on its heels. Immediately, lives were disrupted. People died tragically. Jobs and incomes were lost. Small businesses shuttered, many never to reopen. Those of us who could work from home were instructed to do so, but so many of us relied on work that couldn't be done from home. So many Ontarians work in industries that disappeared overnight, in entertainment or retail or hospitality or personal services;

if their jobs didn't disappear completely, their hours were slashed.

People panicked. The Premier promised them that they would be okay. He promised them that no one would be evicted because of the pandemic. He told them that if they had to choose between food on the table and rent, they should choose food. He promised them that he would protect them. But when the eviction notices started coming due to rent missed because of the pandemic, as early as May, the Premier was nowhere to be found and neither was his protection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Stop the clock.

I'm sorry to interrupt the member. Just on a technicality: You're blocking your microphone and we don't want to miss the audio. Perhaps if you shift it to the side. Sorry, we want you to be able to be heard. Please continue.

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Yes, he paused evictions during the first lockdown but they restarted in August, right around the time that the Premier passed Bill 184, which plays a prominent role in this story.

Bill 184, you may remember, made everything worse. Yes, it demanded that landlords negotiate with tenants, but it also made it easier for tenants to be evicted. That's because if a tenant agreed to a repayment plan that they later couldn't meet, if they were the proverbial day late or dollar short, the landlord could have them evicted without another hearing at the Landlord and Tenant Board—i.e., even faster than before.

And when the eviction hearings got going, the LTB became an eviction factory. We've all heard the stories: multiple hearing rooms processing claims at the same time, dozens of evictions shoved through every hour, evictions happening in under a minute. In many cases, adjudicators even warned tenants of the dangers of signing repayment plans they wouldn't be able to keep up. In one case that I witnessed personally, a hairstylist was among those who signed such a repayment plan. "Be careful," the adjudicator said, "What if you lose your employment again?" A week later, hair salons shut down in Toronto, and they have yet to reopen.

Sajid is a tenant in my riding who was served an eviction notice for rent missed during the first wave. Sajid's wife is disabled and can't work so the family relies on his income for everything. They have two kids. Sajid holds down two jobs as a security guard. He lost one of those jobs during the first wave of COVID, and the hours at his second job were greatly reduced. Stress and anxiety caused him to become ill, which means he now needs medication—yet another bill he has to pay each month on top of rent, food, the phone bill, transit fare and the Internet. Although Sajid began paying his arrears as soon as he got his job back and his income increased, between the first and second waves, it wasn't enough for the landlord. Sajid and his family were served an eviction notice.

Zinnat Jahan is another tenant in Beaches–East York who is fighting eviction for rent debt. Her husband, the family's main breadwinner, died of cancer in January, and her hours as a server at McDonald's were slashed during

COVID. She fell behind in rent and decimated her savings trying to pay everything she could to the landlord, and yet, she was served with an eviction notice.

Sajid and Zinnat are emblematic of the hard-working families who have been evicted or who have been pushed into housing precarity by the pandemic. The same communities that has been hardest hit by the pandemic—communities of immigrant, working class, Black, Indigenous and other people of colour—are the same communities most at risk of losing their housing.

These are also the communities of people who are on the front lines in essential jobs, the same people we banged on pots for and that we called our heroes and she-roses. But what are their thanks? The jobs they hold are essential but precarious. They don't come with benefits. The number of hours and the income they generate are not guaranteed. These jobs often don't pay enough during the pandemic to ensure that those who hold them can pay their rent.

Workers in these communities can't stay home to do these essential jobs. They have put themselves at risk every day to do them for a year now. Many of these families have lost loved ones to COVID in part because of those essential jobs they hold, and yet, they are the same communities at the highest risk of losing their housing.

These are the communities that most need paid sick days, but the Premier has repeatedly refused to give them any. These are the communities that most need a moratorium on evictions, yet the Premier has repeatedly refused to keep them safe. He has expressly broken his promise to them. This is why this motion is so absolutely crucial. Rent relief, a subsidy that will allow tenants to repay their arrears and remain housed, is the last protection between many renters and housing precarity and a slippery slide towards homelessness.

The income that people lost during previous lockdowns is not coming back, even if they eventually regain their jobs and the number of hours they work. People with precarious jobs often have little in the way of savings and, as in Zinnat's case, they have often run through them and still find themselves in rent debt and under threat of eviction.

That is the reason that the Federation of Rental-housing Providers of Ontario sent the government a letter on October 15, 2020, whose first recommendation was to ask the government to create a program to address rental arrears accumulated during the current pandemic. They write, "The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted thousands of families living in rental housing in the province of Ontario. Many of our residents had their incomes drastically reduced due to necessary provincially imposed closure of businesses. Some still have not been able to get back into the workforce...."

1610

"FRPO has been surveying our membership every month ... to better understand the scale of this problem. Approximately 7% of families have been unable to pay their full rent since the pandemic started. This represents 98,000 families in Ontario who are potentially at risk with months of accumulated rent arrears.

“Some of these families may eventually be able to repay the ... \$12,000 they owe, but many will have very little ability to ever repay this amount even if they are to gain employment in the near future. We must remember that most Canadians are already living paycheque to paycheque during the best of times....”

The FRPO’s proposal was for the government and corporate landlords who can afford it to pay the lion’s share of those arrears, which would give the tenants a chance to get back on their feet and to stay securely housed while we all struggle to recover from this pandemic. Speaker, it’s clear that when you help struggling tenants with their rent, you also help mom-and-pop landlords who need that rent in order to pay their own mortgages. Everybody benefits.

I’d like to read a few words by some tenants and tenant advocates into the record here. Robert Field of the Graydon Hall Tenants’ Association writes, “Meaningful rent relief and eviction protection is long overdue, as many tenants suffering income loss due to the pandemic continue to struggle to make ends meet.”

Alyssa Brierley, executive director of the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, writes, “Tens of thousands of tenants in Ontario are in crisis and need urgent support from their governments. In March 2020, the Premier promised that no one would lose their home ... and yet no direct support has been provided to tenants.... It’s time for the Ontario government to provide meaningful financial support.”

Shabana Mulla, a member of the Crescent Town Tenants Union who has herself struggled to pay rent during the pandemic, writes, “Tenants across the province have lost loved ones, jobs and income throughout this pandemic. This is especially true in working-class and immigrant communities. And now we face mass evictions from our homes, due to a crisis that is not our fault. We need an immediate solution.”

Speaker, at the beginning of the pandemic, the Premier was quick to join the rallying cry of, “We’re all in this together, and together we will get through this,” but the truth is that we have never all been in this together. The communities of immigrant working-class people in this province, many of them Black, Indigenous and other people of colour; the ones with no savings and precarious front-line jobs; the ones who rent their apartments and don’t own homes or have jobs they can stay home to do: Those communities have been hit in ways that people with white-collar jobs have not. The Premier has consistently broken his promise to protect them. That needs to change.

I want, finally, to note that homelessness was in absolute crisis, already an emergency before the pandemic. The pandemic has made it worse right across the province. Evictions due to COVID-related income loss are now adding a whole new wave of homelessness that the province cannot afford. And yes, landlords were meant to negotiate with tenants, but I have heard corporate landlords say at the LTB that COVID should play no role in a determination of eviction, that the only factor at play is whether people owe arrears or not. I’ve heard them say they want to proceed as though this is business as usual.

It is much, much cheaper for governments and taxpayers to keep people housed than it is to care for them once they are homeless. Rent relief is in fact the fiscally smart policy, as well as the human and moral thing to do, the right thing to do. The Premier needs to keep his promise, keep people housed and put in place a rent relief program right away. Nobody should be losing their housing because they lost income during the pandemic.

I just want to say in the minute or so that I have left, on behalf of all the people who are on the verge of losing their housing or have already lost it, families who are working as hard as they can but cannot do this by themselves, that they desperately, desperately need your help—need the government’s help, through you, Speaker. And so, on behalf of all of those people, I am begging the government to do the right thing and give these people rent support so that they can remain housed.

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

Mr. Parm Gill: It’s a pleasure to rise in the House to discuss the member opposite’s private member’s motion.

From the onset of the pandemic, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has introduced a number of protections and supports for tenants. That’s because our government recognized that many Ontarians continue to face financial difficulties as a result of COVID-19. That’s why our government has frozen rent increases for the vast majority of Ontario’s tenants for 2021. This change is in effect starting January 1, 2021, until December 31, 2021. This includes households that receive rent-gear-to-income assistance.

We have also given service managers the ability not to penalize their tenants through RGI calculations, even if a tenant receives temporary payments under the Canada Emergency Response Benefit or EI.

Ontario was the first province to freeze rent for the entirety of 2021, and we are proud of that. The BC NDP government has recently followed our lead in having this freeze in place for one full year.

Last summer, we passed the Protecting Tenants and Strengthening Community Housing Act, which mandates the Landlord and Tenant Board to consider whether a landlord attempted to negotiate a repayment agreement with the tenant before resorting to an eviction for non-payment of rent during COVID-19. This measure promotes repayment agreements over evictions for non-payment of rent and aims to maintain tenancies rather than resorting to evictions.

Speaker, at the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak, our government took decisive action to stop residential evictions to keep Ontarians safe in their homes. In response to the concerning rising number of cases, our government declared a state of emergency and put in place a stay-at-home order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and protect the health and safety of all Ontarians. This was the second time in less than a year that we put a pause on residential evictions. We wanted to ensure that no Ontarian would be forced to leave their home while a

provincial stay-at-home order was in place, so we put in place a province-wide stop on residential evictions.

We then extended the pause on residential eviction enforcement in the areas that remained under provincial stay-at-home orders to ensure that no one was forced to leave their home while a provincial stay-at-home order continued to apply to that region.

We were the first province to sign a joint investment agreement with the federal government to provide funding directly to people to help them afford their housing costs. The Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit makes \$1.4 billion available in a portable benefit directly to those who need it most. I am proud to update members of the House that this number has increased to 7,500 Ontarians that have now received direct rent assistance through this program. That number is continuing to grow. We even surpassed our first-year goal by 50%, helping thousands more Ontarians than we originally thought we would be able to in the first year.

Recipients are able to use this money towards rent in a unit of their choice, anywhere in Ontario, instead of waiting for traditional rent-g geared-to-income assistance in social housing. However, under the National Housing Strategy, Ontario currently receives \$490 million less than its fair share when compared to households in core housing need. I know the minister has already raised this with his federal counterpart. We hope that we can continue to work with all levels of government to create and sustain much-needed affordable housing units, but Ontario needs its fair share of National Housing Strategy funding.

In direct response to COVID-19, our government has provided \$510 million through the Social Services Relief Fund to municipal service managers and Indigenous program administrators. This funding is flexible. Municipalities across Ontario have been using this funding to address COVID-19 outbreaks in ways that best meet their local needs, including helping people to stay in their homes by providing increased funding for rent banks and utility banks, as well as providing emergency loans to those who are in need.

1620

Yesterday, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing announced an additional \$255 million to help service managers and Indigenous program administrators respond to the rise of COVID-19 cases in some emergency shelters and help prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place. This brings the total social services relief fund to \$765 million provided to municipal service managers and Indigenous program administrators.

This new funding will save lives, protect homeless shelter staff and residents and help prevent more people from becoming homeless. This funding can be used to acquire motel and hotel spaces to support physical distancing of shelter residents, hire more shelter staff and purchase personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies. Speaker, more importantly for today's debate, this funding can be used to add to municipal and regional rent and utility banks to prevent more people from becoming homeless. These rent banks provide interest-free loans

to vulnerable people so that they don't miss their rent payment, while ensuring that mom-and-pop landlords don't enter into financial uncertainty themselves due to their tenant's missed rent.

We also recognize that COVID-19 has highlighted how important it is for every Ontarian to have a place to call home. It has shed light on the pressures felt in our community housing system and underscored the urgent need for affordable housing. But Speaker, these issues are not new. Years of inaction on the housing file by the previous Liberal government has put pressure on our community housing, affordable housing and market housing. That's why housing was a priority when we first formed government and will continue to be a top priority for the years to come.

I am proud that our government is tackling housing pressures head-on by investing directly in more affordable housing, reducing the upfront cost pressure on our partners working to build affordable housing and accelerating the construction of affordable housing units right across our great province. In fact, in 2021 alone, we are investing more than \$1.8 billion into our community housing sector, more than any previous year.

I know that the NDP and the Liberal Party are against the use of ministerial zoning orders, but let me remind the members opposite that every single MZO issued on non-provincially owned land has been at the request of the local municipality. MZOs are helping to accelerate local projects located outside of the greenbelt, because our government will not develop or remove any part of the greenbelt. In fact, we're consulting on expanding the greenbelt. We've already invited one of the NDP members opposite to take part in our consultation, but it was declined because they don't take the greenbelt seriously, Madam Speaker.

Let me list a few examples of the positive impact MZOs are making when it comes to affordable housing. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing issued two MZOs in Toronto earlier this year for two modular supportive housing projects. Speaker, the minister made these MZOs less than 12 months ago, and today there are vulnerable Ontarians living in these completed modular home units. This is only possible because the minister utilized MZOs to cut through red tape and accelerate these critical projects that are keeping vulnerable people safe today. Of course, the minister has issued multiple MZOs in Toronto's west Donlands as part of our government's goal to bring nearly 1,000 affordable units to surplus provincial properties.

It's a shame to see members of the NDP protesting these new affordable units and, in fact, lending their support to projects that would see fewer affordable units created while we continue to face a housing crisis.

At the request of the city of Hamilton, which is within the Leader of the Opposition's own riding, we've helped accelerate the creation of 15 new affordable units by issuing an MZO, to allow the city to meet their timeline to access federal government funding for the project. I would also like to recognize the member from Flamborough—

Glanbrook for her tireless advocacy on this project. Our government has been clear that we will leverage MZO's to help communities get critical local projects such as these moving faster.

This motion calls on our government to establish a rent relief program for residential tenants who have experienced financial hardship as a result of COVID-19, ensuring that no tenant faces an eviction for pandemic-related rent arrears. While this motion is well-intentioned, it duplicates the efforts that our government has taken to protect and support tenants from the onset of the pandemic.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: It's the one-year anniversary of the pandemic, and, over the past year, 60 people experiencing homelessness have died in Toronto.

For this past year, I have been part of a Sunday food program that delivers meals and care packages to vulnerable residents, seniors and people experiencing homelessness. Today, we've got a motion from my colleague the member for Beaches—East York to ask the government to set up a rent relief program for residential tenants who have experienced financial hardship due to COVID-19. From what I've just heard from the government side, you're going to be voting against it.

What really appalls me is that we've got this homelessness crisis. We've got people suffering on the streets. I've been visiting people who have frostbite on their feet because there is no place to go. Because of the pandemic, because we've been in a stay-at-home order, there's not even a Tim Hortons or any place where they can go to get warm.

This government—you're renting condos nearby. To get here, you have to walk past people who are experiencing homelessness, and then you're going to vote against a bill, a motion that would actually reduce the number of people who are made homeless by the actions of this government. Instead, you stand up here and you spin numbers. The government spins numbers.

The financial advisory office of the provincial government just stated that this government cut \$160 million a year out of housing. You're fuelling this crisis. You're fuelling this crisis with the cuts to homelessness, and you're also fuelling this crisis with the eviction blitz that's going on in this province.

Please vote for this motion. Provide real supports for people so that you stop fuelling the homelessness crisis in this city and across this province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Just a reminder to all members to direct their remarks to and through the Chair and not do the direct back and forth, please, and thank you.

Further debate?

Ms. Suze Morrison: It's an honour to rise to speak to this important motion to direct rent supports that are much needed for tenants. I want to thank my colleague the member from Beaches—East York for tabling it.

Many renters across Ontario, in particular in my riding of Toronto Centre, have lost their income due to COVID-19. These folks lost their jobs through no fault of their own this year. Activists estimate that 105,000 households in Ontario right now are at risk of losing their homes because they've been unable to pay their rent this year because of the pandemic. These folks shouldn't be burdened with debt related to their tenancies while we're navigating a health crisis.

In my riding, the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment is more than \$2,000 a month, so many tenants are staring down tens of thousands of dollars of potential debt—again, not because they're not trying their best, but because they've been forced out of their jobs by a pandemic.

Many folks simply have nowhere to go. We've heard from the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation. They've warned us that the mass homelessness that could result from the eviction ban forthcoming could be the largest human rights crisis that our province has ever faced—which is saying a lot, considering the fact that homelessness is already, quite frankly, at a crisis level, and has been for some time.

We cannot allow anyone else to be evicted during this pandemic. For almost a year, my NDP colleagues and I have been calling on this government to provide tenants with the direct support that they need to cover their monthly rent, to subsidize their rent. That's not just good for tenants; it's good for landlords as well, especially those mom-and-pop landlords who are struggling. A rent subsidy is win-win.

But again, this Premier has put money and politics ahead of people. He has refused to put in place the supports that we know folks need. Rent supports are, I think, one of the most important supports we could be providing to tenants.

1630

Speaker, I want to talk about a tenant named Tanesha in my riding. She lost her income during the pandemic as her small business began to slow down. It got to the point where she only had enough money to cover her rent but nothing else. She reached out to her corporate landlord in November, requesting a rent reduction, or the option to break her lease so she could at least leave without penalty. Her landlord refused and then ignored all of her follow-ups for help. Tanesha had to take out a loan for her rent in December and January, but when February hit she had no other options and she simply couldn't pay. Now her landlord is taking her to the tribunal for a problem that could have been resolved months ago. If Tanesha had support from this government in the form of a rent subsidy, she could have paid her rent while she searched for work and she would never have been forced into this situation.

Tenants like Tanesha deserve hope.

I urge all members of this House to vote in support of the motion.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I want to thank the member for Beaches—East York for introducing this important motion.

Many people in my community and across Ontario have been especially hard-hit by this pandemic—usually individuals and families already facing challenges and barriers before the pandemic began. Many have lost their jobs or have suffered loss of income. Many have simply been unable to pay their rent through no fault of their own.

My community is home to a large number of low-income, essential workers who still don't have paid sick days. Those essential workers who contracted COVID-19 also lost two weeks' pay while they stayed home and isolated. Why is the government punishing those who are doing everything they can to try to keep others safe? When you consider that the average cost of rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Toronto is nearly \$2,000, and with the overall cost of food expected to increase by 6.5% in 2021, missing those two weeks of pay could mean the difference between whether or not you'll be able to pay the rent that month or put food on the table for your family. We should not be punishing these individuals by saddling them with even more debt.

Even before the pandemic, many tenants spent more than half of their income just to pay the rent—that's before food, bill payments and other necessities of life. Many families in my community live in small, multi-generational homes, where they further risk exposing their family members to COVID-19 just so they can afford to pay the rent.

And it's not just tenants who are struggling right now. The average cost for a house right now in Toronto is nearly \$1 million. Many small landlords who have scraped just enough money together to put a down payment on their mortgage rely on the rental income they collect in order to pay that mortgage. Without help from this government, these small landlords also risk losing their homes.

Everyone has a right to a roof over their head. This government must do more to help both tenants and small landlords, or the homelessness crisis that our city and our province is experiencing will only get worse.

This is why, for almost a year now, the NDP has consistently called for additional support to help people who have lost income during the pandemic. These people don't just need support now; they will need support after the pandemic is over so they are not crushed by the debt they have accumulated through no fault of their own.

Again, I want to thank the member for Beaches–East York for introducing this motion. I hope this motion passes unanimously so that people can get the help they deserve.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: Speaker, housing is a human right. During this public health crisis, we are also seeing the crisis that we're facing with homelessness and with housing across this province. This was something that was there before the pandemic, but it has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

I want to thank my colleague from Beaches–East York for bringing this timely motion, because it's so important

that we support the people who are struggling the most during this difficult time.

Right after the pandemic started—that was actually a year ago yesterday, when the World Health Organization finally declared this pandemic—about a month after, I was in front of Teesdale, talking to tenants. I remember telling them, “It's okay, the Premier said you can stay home. Be safe. You don't have to worry about your rent right now.” But in fact, what we saw in just months was that the Premier did nothing to protect these tenants. Throughout the months, we also saw the Premier stand in front of the cameras and tell people to stay home, again and again, but he did nothing to protect those people so they could actually stay home and have a roof over their heads.

Constituents in my riding of Scarborough Southwest, and frankly, all across the province, are facing a difficult time paying their rent. A lot of these people, whether it's Teesdale, whether it's tenants in these buildings fighting with these landlords who are in this eviction blitz, trying so hard to just evict in a mass eviction blitz—or it's the small landlords who are trying to keep up with their mortgages and protect their tenants as well, because we have had some good landlords who are also trying to protect their tenants, but they can't because they can't keep up with their mortgages.

This motion is so timely and so well thought out, because not only does it support these tenants with their rent, but it also supports the housing market and the way we can actually protect our small homeowners across our ridings. This motion is a response to the outcry that we have seen across our communities of those who have lost their minimum wage jobs and those who are now on the brink of homelessness, so that they can continue to be able to put a roof over their heads. During this pandemic, we have seen the government put forward bills that actually did the exact opposite. Instead of supporting these tenants, we have seen them pass Bill 184. Instead of supporting tenants, it was completely ignoring the needs of our tenants and actually helping giant corporate landlords push away tenants.

We have also, just a week ago, seen the FAO report, which told us loud and clear that this government is actually failing to address the housing crisis and the homelessness crisis that we're facing across this province. The report also showed that the number of people needing housing is expected to actually grow by about 80,000 families, while at the same time the province will be cutting an average of \$160 million in annual funding of housing programs. That is unacceptable, Madam Speaker.

Once again, housing is a human right, so let's do the right thing: Support the people who are struggling the most during this difficult time. I call on all members across this House to vote for the member's bill and support people across this province.

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

I return to the member from Beaches–East York, who has two minutes to reply.

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: I want to begin by thanking the members for Toronto Centre, Scarborough Southwest, Spadina–Fort York, Humber River–Black Creek and Milton for participating in the debate today.

It is absolutely heartbreaking to hear the government members indicate that they are going to vote against this motion. I think it's particularly heartbreaking on two levels. The first is that, whether the government likes it or not, this is going to be the government's signature legacy of the COVID time. The number of people who will find themselves out of housing and the enormous growth in the numbers of people who find themselves precariously housed and even homeless across the province—this is not a legacy that the government is going to be proud of. And it's not just in Toronto, Speaker. This is literally across the province. We are hearing about the way that homelessness has been exploding during the pandemic.

But the other piece is that, for a party that prides itself on its fiscal management, to be so wasteful of the province's future resources is truly a disgrace, because it is so much more expensive to take care of people when they are homeless than it is to keep them housed. Currently, in the city of Toronto, it is over \$6,000 a month per shelter bed. Nobody's rent that we're talking about here is \$6,000 per month, and so it becomes astronomically more expensive to take care of people once they find themselves in homelessness and chronically in homelessness than it is to keep them housed.

So on every level, in terms of the stewardship of Ontario's resources, in terms of the investment in human beings and just in terms of doing the humane and right thing, I'm begging government members, through you, Speaker, to change their minds and to support this crucial motion for rent relief.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Ms. Berns-McGown has moved private member's notice of motion number 143. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Pursuant to standing order 101(d), the recorded division on this item of private members' public business will be deferred to the proceeding deferred votes.

Vote deferred.

ROYAL ASSENT

SANCTION ROYALE

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): 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 Acting Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Christopher Tyrell): The following is the title of the bill to which Her Honour did assent:

An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021 / Loi autorisant l'utilisation de certaines sommes pour l'exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2021.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, this House stands adjourned until Monday, March 22, 2021, at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1641.

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Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
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Gill, Parm (PC)	Milton	
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Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hassan, Faisal (NDP)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
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Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
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Kusendova, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre	
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Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
MacLeod, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa (PC)	Nepean	Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries / ministre des Industries du patrimoine, du sport, du tourisme et de la culture
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Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
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Mitas, Christina Maria (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough- Centre	
Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Morrison, Suze (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
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Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
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Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
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Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
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Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
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Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
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