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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Saturday 12 June 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Samedi 12 juin 2021

Report continued from volume A.

PROTECTING ELECTIONS AND DEFENDING DEMOCRACY ACT, 2021 LOI DE 2021 VISANT À PROTÉGER LES ÉLECTIONS ET À DÉFENDRE LA DÉMOCRATIE

Continuation of debate on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 307, An Act to amend the Election Finances Act /
Projet de loi 307, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le financement
des élections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate.

Ms. Jill Andrew: I'm honoured to rise, as I do every day, or night, for our community in Toronto-St. Paul's. And make no mistake: The folks in my community know what this abuse of power is. The government's threats and decisions to try to use the "notwithstanding" clause as a way to trample on Ontarians' charter rights, as a way to silence this government's critics say one thing to us in St. Paul's, and to most people across Ontario. It says that our Premier of Ontario is scared, and frankly, that he is desperate and he is eager to silence the very people he and his policies have hurt the worst during the pandemic.

The Premier's policies have hurt families of long-term-care residents. They have hurt our long-term-care residents, our loved ones. We've seen thousands—upwards of 4,000—die during this pandemic.

Parents of children with autism and special needs were crying out for help even before the pandemic. And, Speaker, I'd be remiss if I did not mention that this is not the first time that the government has used their powers to try to silence advocates, to try to silence parents of children with autism. I think back to not too long ago, when the current Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries was the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. We know—it's on record—that autism advocates were essentially bullied. She tried to bully them into silence. Luckily, they didn't go silently into the night.

0340

Our teachers, our education workers, our custodians, many workers in St. Paul's, the ones who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own, those who are injured and cannot work, and our front-line health care and essential workers—these are the people who are being hurt by this government's power grab, by the abuse of power,

by the desperate act of, as my friend from York South-Weston said, using a hammer to squash a fly.

It is ludicrous that we are here this morning, at minutes to 4 a.m., that the government has reopened the Legislature for this urgent matter that they call "protecting elections and defending democracy." How in heaven's name is silencing critics who are speaking out against the deadly policies, quite frankly, that contributed to the deaths of people in long-term care; the callous policies that contributed to residents in my home area being evicted or being threatened with evictions, that have caused the closures of small businesses, that have literally made working people no longer working people—how is any of that captured in "protecting elections and defending democracy"? How is silencing those very groups of folks in St. Paul's, in Ontario—everywhere in this province—protecting democracy?

This bill that seeks to allow the government to use the "notwithstanding" clause, the government's bill that seeks to increase donors' donations—wealthy donors' donations, I should say. I can tell you this, Speaker: My constituent who is on the Yonge Blue Night line right now going to their shift job or coming from their shift job, or the person who is on the Eglinton 24-hour bus right now—I can guarantee you, even if they love me with all their heart, they just don't have \$3,300 to donate.

Again, this obsession, this suggestion that allowing folks access to donate more is an urgent matter that we should be here at near 4 a.m. debating, is ludicrous.

Here are some of the issues that we could have been here debating and that we should have all been proud to be here debating at 4 a.m.—paid sick days. Right here in St. Paul's—well, I'm at Queen's Park, but you know what I mean; I take my community with me everywhere I go—right now, there are people who have to make the decision between whether or not they go to work sick, because they don't have access to permanent paid sick days and those 14 extra paid days for the pandemic. They just don't have them. Three sick days is not enough. I don't have to belabour the Legislature by reminding them of our Premier's ability to tap into his paid sick days—but yet Ontarians couldn't.

We should have been here debating evictions and debating the right and the need—the human right, for goodness' sake—to ban evictions, both residential and small business. But of course, we're not here debating that either.

We could have been debating the need to create a seniors' advocate, someone who could be an independent voice for seniors across Ontario so that the tragedies of

COVID-19 and the tragedy of SARS—which, frankly, the Liberal government didn’t learn much from either—wouldn’t and couldn’t repeat themselves.

We could also be here fighting for our PSWs and our health care heroes so they can be respected, protected and paid what they’re worth permanently, with increases to their salary—a salary that I will say is underfunded, and a sector that is understaffed, under-resourced but expected to do the world, and God knows they’ve done the world. They’ve done the best they could under disastrous circumstances and work conditions.

We could have been advocating to save our main streets, to save our businesses. As my colleague from Parkdale—High Park mentioned—and I echo it—there are many businesses in St. Paul’s that have so-called been approved and haven’t seen a dime. They haven’t seen a dime. Even as some of our patios are opening, some of our business owners are still concerned. They’re still worried, because it’s not about whether or not the patio opened today, but it’s about whether or not the patio will be open next month.

It’s a tough time, and there are many other urgent issues that we could be discussing, as opposed to discussing the government abusing their power to do an unprecedented thing that truly takes away the voice of critics in Ontario, of people in Ontario, of the folks most hurt by this government.

We in the NDP have put all of these bills and motions forward, and the government has systematically shut them down. We demanded a vaccine rollout that was culturally relevant, that was appropriate, that had built-in strategies to support marginalized communities. We know that didn’t happen, because we saw communities high with essential workers, factory workers, BIPOC communities that couldn’t access vaccines in an equitable way, while government members in ridings with very low COVID-19 rates—all of a sudden were identified as hot zones. You would like to think that it would be science that would dictate choices, and not “You scratch my back; I’ll scratch your back. Okay, you’re a hot zone”—the kind of backdoor politics that Ontarians have gotten used to with this government.

And our schools, for goodness’ sake—how many times have we stood in this House begging for more education workers; teachers; child and youth workers, CYWs; ECEs; student equity program advisers? We’ve asked for more supports—mental health workers, guidance counsellors—now more than ever.

I spoke in this House a few weeks back about a young boy in my neighbourhood who died by suicide, an excellent kid, fully engaged in academics. Slowly but surely, the social isolation, the difficulty of “online learning,” coupled with the poor social worker, who had 28 or so kids and didn’t even know this one kid’s name, according to his mother—these are the kinds of barriers, the kinds of systemic holes and gaps that we should be here fighting tonight and fighting to improve, quite frankly.

Instead, we are here because this Conservative government is scared. Their leader is scared and desperate

and decided instead to shove down the throats of my people and all of our people in this building a “not-withstanding” clause that takes away their charter rights, that takes away their voice. We’re not standing for it.

We could be here fighting for live arts. We have the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries here this evening—or this morning. Jeez, the days are bleeding into one another. But we’re not talking about that.

I want to say the title again: Protecting Elections and Defending Democracy Act. “Protecting elections”—right there is the problem.

Interjections.

0350

Ms. Jill Andrew: Wow, look at that. Ontario, St. Paul’s, all who are watching, the government has given me a round of applause for saying the words “protecting elections” during a pandemic. It makes no sense that we would be protecting elections—quite frankly, protecting the behinds of politicians—when we should be protecting the behinds of our community members.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: We’re protecting the New Democrats.

Ms. Jill Andrew: We should be protecting our renters. We should be protecting our seniors. We should be protecting our injured workers. We should be protecting, rather than legislating people on ODSP and OW into poverty. We should be protecting our artists. We should be protecting our children, our small businesses, our homes—have affordable housing, have inclusionary zoning.

We could be protecting small businesses like those in Little Jamaica, like those along Eglinton, like those that are women-led, like those that are in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community—businesses that historically don’t have the same access to finances and supports that others do.

Most importantly, quite frankly, for the moment in history that we’re in right now, we could be debating the need for a robust Anti-Racism Directorate. We could be debating the need for a long-term strategy with short-term, mid-term and long-term agendas and goals to eradicate Islamophobia, to eradicate homophobia. I’m thinking about David Gomez, the young Black guy who was beaten up at Hanlan’s Point on the island just the other day because he dares to be gay.

These are the issues that we should be addressing. We should be creating a space like the Anti-Racism Directorate—or let me redress and say “the government,” because, frankly, they’ve got all the power. They thrive and are obsessed with power.

Use your power in good ways and create an Anti-Racism Directorate that addresses Islamophobia, that addresses anti-Black racism, that addresses anti-Semitism, that addresses violence against any group of peoples or religions or cultures. Do that. That’s an urgent matter. That’s a pandemic that has been going on long before COVID-19, and it will happen long after COVID-19 as well.

There’s so much that’s wrong about the bill, and there’s nothing that’s urgent about this bill.

The Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries mumbled over there, when I mentioned protecting politicians' behinds, "Oh, it's protecting New Democrats."

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Point of order, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the minister on a point of order.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: The member is impugning motive. I'd ask her to withdraw.

Ms. Jill Andrew: You said it. I'm just repeating what you said.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): That was not deemed a point of order, but I will return to the member and just caution. Thank you.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: That's a terrible impression, by the way.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please, member from Carleton.

Ms. Jill Andrew: The truth of the matter is, none of us in here—and maybe I'm showing my hand, but none of us in here should be so worried about our seat that we do the wrong thing for our community. That's the reality. All of us in here, regardless of our political affiliation—I'm going to assume we are probably "well accomplished" in our previous professional lives. I'm sure we wear many hats in here. Everyone has fancy titles. The reality is, you try your hardest in your riding, you give it your all, maybe you win, maybe you lose; either way, you're still going to have life. You're still going to go on. Quite frankly, our role here shouldn't be about protecting our behinds; it should be about doing what's right for our communities.

This bill right now, during a pandemic, when people in Toronto are only just starting to feel a little better—the patios are opening; we can start to have a group of 10 in the park, socially distanced, masked and whatnot. These are small, good moments. Yes, they are starting. But truth be told, if the government had listened to its own Ontario science table a million years ago, this good moment may have been had months ago. Our kids wouldn't be online, exhausted, anxious, depressed; alongside parents and guardians also exhausted, anxious, depressed; alongside teachers and education workers also exhausted, anxious and depressed. It just wouldn't be that way.

To wrap up, because there's so much more I could say—

Interjections.

Ms. Jill Andrew: And of course, the government is laughing at me. They're mocking me. I'm up here trying to speak on behalf of the folks of Toronto—St. Paul's, and they're laughing and mocking. This is how bullies act when they see that their target is bigger than them in spirit, in heart, in authenticity, in true virtue and goodness. They attack. So go right ahead and snap to me all you want.

Lastly, I'm going to end with this call to action. Again, this goes to the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, and this comes from our museums and galleries—because again, Minister, there are a million urgent things that we could be debating right now, and any one of them is more important than what we're doing right

now. I want to give a shout-out to our artists, who have literally been helping us heal through this pandemic; our cultural workers, who have literally been helping us heal for free, offering their support—

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Point of order, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Carleton.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: The member imputed motive to the government's actions, and I'd like the member to withdraw those statements.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I did not pick up on the—

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: That member—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me. I'll make the ruling, and that will be it. Thank you very much. Okay?

I did not pick up on any imputing motive at this point in time.

I will return to the member now for her final comments.

Ms. Jill Andrew: This call to action is called #SupportVisualArtsON. The minister for culture knows it quite well, because it comes from our community museums, which have been begging her since she has been culture minister to increase the Community Museums Operating Grant, otherwise known as CMOG. This grant has not been touched in almost two decades.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Is this the bill?

Ms. Jill Andrew: It's absolutely the bill. What I'm doing here is talking about issues that actually matter to Ontarians. That's what I'm talking about. So if your museums don't matter to you, Minister—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much.

Questions?

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to the member from St. Paul's for your presentation.

Speaker, Ontario is the only province in Canada where the third-party spending is counted in the millions of dollars rather than in the thousands. Voting is one man and one vote. That is [inaudible].

This legislation proposes to reasonably curtail spending by putting reasonable limits on third-party advertising spending in the 12 months leading up to an election.

Does the opposition support this change, or do they think that corporations and pop-up political action groups should be able to spend unlimited money with no rules and no accountability?

Ms. Jill Andrew: I did not hear the beginning of the question because I was getting a note passed by me, but what I heard was something about voting.

So here's what I'd like to say: This government talks about how "the people elected us" as government. Forty per cent of Ontarians voted this government into power. For any teachers or professors in this room, 40% is not a passing grade. So keep patting yourself on the back for a failing grade, because that's what you can consistently do. Frankly, if the Prime Minister of this country hadn't lied to Canadians when he promised proportional representation, you wouldn't be here.

0400

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: It's so apparent that this government is willing to go to absolutely extraordinary lengths to protect themselves. You have summarized this in your speech; it was great. We all learned a lot.

The question is, can you find another group that could benefit from this level of extraordinary lengths of protection?

Ms. Jill Andrew: That's an incredible question.

For goodness' sake, every single one of our associations across Ontario, every single one of our advocates—young people and adults who have been fighting for a livable wage in this province—could benefit from the urgency of this government. Every student, every family, every school community staff person, teacher, education worker could benefit from some attention and the urgency of this government to make their lives better. Yet here we are.

Our nurses' associations could benefit from this government caring about their salaries rather than freezing them to 1%. I don't think this government's salary has been frozen to 1%; correct me if I'm wrong.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Order, please. Order. The member for Carleton, come to order, please. The member for—

Mr. John Fraser: Nepean.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Yes, I know. It's early.

The next question goes to the member for Eglinton—Lawrence.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member opposite. I listened intently and understand that the member opposite believes she was speaking with "true virtue and goodness," to quote her words, and that we should be doing here what is right for our community and acting for the people.

Well, Ontario's elections, we believe, belong to the people—not to American-style super PACs, not to big business, not to wealthy elites, not to special interests, not to third parties.

The non-partisan Chief Electoral Officer, Greg Essensa, in 2016 said that third-party election ads need to be monitored between elections, not just in the immediate lead-up to the election or during a writ. He said that the scale of third-party advertising here in Ontario is much greater than it is at the federal level.

Does the member opposite not agree with this non-partisan election official that we should have some restrictions on the spending of these third-party groups and super PACs—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Back to the member for Toronto—St. Paul's for a response.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Speaker, no one in this House has said that there isn't a decent conversation that can come from discussing a limit to the kinds of big billion-dollar

ads—no one is saying that there can't be a limit conversation. I'm saying now, at 4 a.m. during a pandemic, that elections and donations are not what the everyday Ontarian is talking about.

I'm going to take this opportunity, actually. I would really appreciate it if the member from Eglinton—Lawrence would answer emails from her constituents, because many of them end up coming to my office for help.

Interjections.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Yes, actually—and I'll give you the names.

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

Mr. Michael Coteau: I want to thank the member from St. Paul's for her speech and the points that she made.

Earlier, the Attorney General said that with his tool box, he has been able to fix the justice system in Ontario; in one year, it was fixed. It was interesting, because I had a phone call late last night and this morning with an individual who is being thrown out of his apartment, and he can't get any legal aid help. It seems like they're fixing the problems by eliminating the scenarios or at least the mechanisms that helped people before.

Can you talk a little bit more about how this pandemic has impacted—you touched on this issue—people in your community when it comes to evictions?

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you to the member for your question.

I want to say that the cuts to legal aid, quite frankly, that have happened at the responsibility of this government—the government has cut legal aid—have directly impacted the kinds of supports that our tenants in St. Paul's are actually able to access. It has impacted our tenants. Cuts to legal aid have impacted survivors of gender-based violence, which we also know has increased, while supports to shelters and supportive housing—there is none from the government.

We also know that legal aid cuts have also really impacted people who are going through WSIB; people who are trying to advocate for themselves; injured workers who need support, who are in fear of being deemed—something else that this government doesn't care about.

Quite frankly, there are so many reasons why people in St. Paul's and across Ontario are being evicted, and the number one reason is because this government doesn't care about real affordable housing, supportive housing or inclusionary zoning.

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

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I would like to thank the member across for her remarks.

I want to note, on Thursday, Toronto Star columnist Thomas Walkom wrote that the government has made a compelling case for Bill 307. In fact, he wrote that the Premier and this government deserve praise for using the "notwithstanding" clause exactly the way it was intended to prevent a U.S.-style free-for-all that would damage our democracy.

So my question to the member opposite is this: Why don't you agree with the Toronto Star columnist that it protects democracy from US-style super PACs? This is important to Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Back to the member for Toronto—St. Paul's for her final answer.

Ms. Jill Andrew: To Ontarians watching and to folks in St. Paul's: The government member has just asked me randomly why I didn't agree with a Toronto Star columnist who agrees with the government. I don't know. Maybe that Toronto Star columnist is a Conservative; maybe he's not. I have no clue. I don't care.

The fact of the matter is, we should be here talking tonight about our seniors and elders who have died in long-term care on this government's watch; about the 8,000-plus Ontarians who have died on this government's watch; about the people who are experiencing homelessness, food insecurity and poverty on this government's watch. Shall I go on?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We don't have time for further questions, but we do have time for further debate. Further debate?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Mr. Speaker, I'm tired. I rise this morning—or is it night?—to speak about Bill 307, the Protecting Elections and Defending Democracy Act, on behalf of the people of Kiiwetinoong.

I know I always bring up the issues that we see in Kiiwetinoong. I always talk about how it's a different Ontario when we talk about the issues that we face. I know when we talk about this matter, I can certainly say, Mr. Speaker—with certainty—that they are not profoundly concerned with the big payments going to political parties to the point where this government has to pull the “notwithstanding” clause.

I know this government calls themselves a defender of democracy, yet the actions show the absolute opposite, by trampling individuals' inherent rights.

Sometimes I bring up issues with health. I wish we were talking about health. I wish we were talking about overcrowding. I wish we were talking about water. I wish we were invoking the “notwithstanding” clause on the Indian Act so this government does not continue to play jurisdictional Ping-Pong with the health and the lives of the people in Kiiwetinoong.

0410

I know an example in health: There's a high rate of diabetes in our communities. We currently have 16 boil-water advisories in Kiiwetinoong, 14 long-term, two short-term. In order to have dialysis units in our communities, we need clean water. When people have complications from diabetes and they need dialysis, they have to leave the community. They go to Thunder Bay, Dryden, Sioux Lookout. They have to leave for good. And our people end up going back in a casket when the disease of diabetes kills them. That's the way that jurisdictional Ping-Pong treats our people.

I wish we were invoking the “notwithstanding” clause on these issues.

I always talk about oppression. I always talk about colonialism. I always talk about racism. I always talk

about structural racism. That's exactly what happens in this building. I bring these up.

I talk about the child welfare system. There is such an overrepresentation of Indigenous children within the child welfare systems. We follow the provincial legislation on how the child will be cared for—or in this case, will be taken from these families.

Last week, we had a discussion in this place about the 215 children who were found in Kamloops, at the Indian residential school. It was a good discussion. There was good media. That's the way the systems that are there have been built for decades and decades and centuries—for our children to be there. It's so important. Why are we not invoking the “notwithstanding” clause when we talk about Indigenous children?

As a First Nations and Indigenous person, I see, again, how colonialism works, how oppression works. I see it daily and I've normalized it. Our people have learned to accept that's just the way things are in our communities.

Water, for example—when I saw these young children of Neskantaga rally for access to clean drinking water, I went to their rally. I joined them. I watched them cry. I watched them get emotional—a nine-year-old girl named Bedahbun. A 12-year-old boy had tears coming out of his eyes. He wanted two things at that particular time—I remember the exact date, November 10, 2020, in Thunder Bay—(1) he wanted to go home, because he was evacuated; (2) he wanted clean drinking water, just like this. That's all he wanted. And nothing in this system does even invoke the “notwithstanding” clause—because they just want water.

When you live it on a daily basis, you just learn to accept it as normal. That's just the way things are. That's what happens when you live it for 27 years. That's the way governments treat Indigenous people, federally, provincially, no matter what. I think it's really important to think about that.

I'm not sure what we know about the history of residential schools, the real history of Canada.

Actually, on Monday morning, I was over in Brantford. I went to visit the residential school that's there. It was run by the Anglicans. I went to the back of the building, and there were kids who were writing their names. There's an excellent lady who runs that, and she told me the stories that she has heard. One of the things that was particularly hard to see was when there was—it wasn't a name; it said, “Help me, please.” And then I had spoken to a survivor who went to that residential school about a couple of hours before. Only two years ago, she met that young girl, or that lady, who had written that. She's still alive. Every time she got abused, that's what she wrote. She wrote it again, on top of each time. The reason why I share that is, that's the real history of Canada, the real history of Ontario, the real history of the way governments and churches have treated Indigenous people.

I remember when this government formed in 2018. One of the things that happened was to cancel the Indigenous curriculum-writing. Again, we lost three years already in teaching children—elementary and secondary—about the real history of Canada.

I hope at some point we can invoke the “notwithstanding” clause on those issues, because people are dying. Those 215 children are just the tip of the iceberg.

I think, because I always say—I know I said earlier that it has taken decades, it has taken centuries, to get to where Indigenous people are. It has taken centuries for our people, First Nations people, to get where we are. The change will be in your children, your grandchildren, because we want the same thing, at the end of the day: We want healthy people, healthy families, healthy communities. We want a better province. We want a better Canada. We want a better society.

0420

I wish we would be talking about these issues tonight, but instead, we’re invoking the charter. This government sometimes forgets that it was put in place to protect against this very thing. It’s so important when we talk about those issues that I’m talking about. That’s why overrepresentation in the justice system, the correctional system—I’ve gone to jails in the north. That’s all I see, Indigenous people: 95%, 98%. And when I go there, I know some of them. They call me over. I haven’t seen them in years.

It’s the same thing with the child welfare system. The residential schools, along with the churches, were tools of oppression. I know that’s one of the things that we have to recognize: Religion was forced on us; religion was a tool against Indigenous people.

I wish we were at a better place. In the different Ontario I keep talking about—because sometimes I feel like I’m in a different Ontario—sometimes we talk about programs and services, funding. Those things come and go. Governments provincially, federally, they come and go. But we are still here. I hear governments say that they’re doing this funding, that they’re announcing different programs. That incremental change perpetuates the crisis in our communities. That incremental change perpetuates the colonialism. That incremental change of funding programs and services perpetuates oppression. We never, never talk about the fundamental changes that are needed in our communities: self-determination, honouring the treaties. We never have those discussions.

It’s so important that when we talk about this bill—I wish we’d invoked the “notwithstanding” clause on these issues with Indigenous people, with the First Nations, the First Peoples of these lands. It’s really important that I say these things, because there are things that still continue to happen. Ontario continues to allow the Ring of Fire project to proceed without listening to the communities, the nations that are involved. Attawapiskat, Fort Albany and Neskantaga have declared a moratorium on any development in their traditional and treaty territories.

There is an ongoing COVID crisis that’s happening in our communities. In Long Lake #58, 80 of the 450 residents tested positive. There are states of emergency in Fort Albany, Attawapiskat and the town of Moosonee. In Kashechewan today, a community of 1,800 people, there are 133 cases in that community, and 77 of those 133 are young people aged 17 or under.

Speaker, these are the crises that we should be talking about. These are the crises that we should be invoking the

“notwithstanding” clause for. These are the rights that this House should be working to uphold, not campaign finance legislation. I stand with you to start thinking about that. I stand here as a colleague of the people of Kiiwetinoong to start working towards that type of work.

I thank you for listening. That will be all for now. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for questions. The member for Eglinton–Lawrence will pose the first one.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member opposite. I always listen intently when you speak. Certainly, you raised a number of important subjects.

But the legislation that we’re discussing today, which you touched on a little, is about third-party financing. I think we all agree that we don’t want our politics to become as adversarial as in the United States. I think people feel a lot of bitterness about attack ads, especially when they can come from faceless organizations where nobody knows who is speaking when they come with these ads, or who is behind them.

And so my question really is, for the people in the community that you represent—and for the Indigenous communities as well, if you want to comment—how will this kind of big money in elections, if we don’t put up guardrails, help your community? Or do you think we should have guardrails and limits on big money spent in election years?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I think we need some big money for water treatment plants. We need some big money for schools.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: I’ve said this many times: I always enjoy being in the House when the member from Kiiwetinoong brings the realities of the area he represents.

I’ve got a question for him. If children were feeling ill from rashes from when they were being bathed in Etobicoke, Ottawa or Carleton, or if people were getting contaminated with mercury in their water in Pickering, Scarborough or Sarnia, or had faulty infrastructure in Mississauga or Barrie, or if kids were at their MPP offices demanding clean water in Whitby or Milton, do you think the “notwithstanding” clause would be a good opportunity to address these issues?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I think one of the things is, because of the different Ontario I speak about, because we’re treated differently, if that was an issue in a different place, such as Whitby, perhaps, people would move on it, but not in a different Ontario.

0430

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

Mr. John Fraser: I’d like to thank the member from Kiiwetinoong for his remarks. You could hear a pin drop, and that’s because he speaks softly and with truth. It is about our priorities.

We have to ask ourselves the question: Why are we not talking about protecting people’s rights in communities

where there's not clean water and not access to health care, people's rights all over the province?

I don't know if the member could say much more than he has already said, because I think he just laid it out pretty well for this whole debate.

Do you have anything else to add?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I think that's one of the things that has been very clear to me, being here as a member of provincial Parliament—I knew from the beginning that it was a very colonial place. This place was never built for Indigenous people. It was built to oppress. It was built to colonize. It's built on race. It was built to take over our traditional treaty territories. We need to move beyond that. When we talk about responsibilities, accountabilities, we need to be responsive in a very human way.

We are no different than you. We're all humans, at the end of the day.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question. The member for Mushkegowuk—James Bay.

M. Guy Bourguin: Merci, monsieur le Président : 4 h 30, ça fait différent de parler sur des projets de loi ou des questions.

My question to my colleague: You talked about jurisdictional Ping-Pong, and you talked about Kashechewan, which is a community in my riding. I spoke to Chief Friday, and he talked to me about how serious the situation in his community is. You talked about the numbers. I checked the numbers yesterday. There were 133 active cases, 19 new cases reported: 82 are 17 years old and younger, 50 are 18 years old and older, and one pending.

You bring a perspective here—I represent communities up north. You speak so eloquently about it.

Shouldn't we be debating these types of issues that you're talking about, instead of what we're dealing with here tonight?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I don't mean to sound like a broken record, but it's always a reminder—to be able to answer questions from members. He's talking about the cases in Kashechewan. I've been to that community before, and I've seen the overcrowding of homes; I've seen when you don't have clean drinking water—and how do you practise the public health measures, social distancing? It's so evident in the communities. They're treated very differently from the rest of Ontario. Meegwetch.

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

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: I want to thank the member from Kiiwetinoong for your incredibly and always compelling discussions today. The issues you laid out are exactly what we should be speaking about.

I've been thinking a lot about performativity—when political leaders pretend to care about an issue and they say the right words, but then they don't do anything. For me, performativity is worse than not saying anything, because it gives the illusion that they care, when the actions depict a completely different reality. Why do you think that's happening, and what is it going to take to move to real action on the part of governments?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you for that question. Meegwetch. I've known, I've learned and I've lived that the more our people are oppressed, the more there is a push for colonization and colonialism, the stronger we become as nations.

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

Ms. Jane McKenna: This legislation is being introduced to stop American-style political action and interest groups from having an outsize influence on our elections and drowning out the voice of individual Ontario voters. Both the NDP and the Liberals have said in the past they support getting big monies out of politics.

My question is, what has changed? Why does the member opposite now not support putting reasonable—and third-party spending in the 12 months leading up to the election? Does this mean the member doesn't support the 2016 ban on union and corporate donations?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch for the question. I'm always intrigued with the questions that come back at me—sometimes it feels that people are not listening or they just don't want to focus on the issue itself. But again, I wish this government would be invoking the "notwithstanding" clause on water. I wish this government would be invoking the "notwithstanding" clause on changing the education system, making sure that our children and our grandchildren learn the real history of Canada.

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

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Here we are, in the dead of night for the second time in this Premier's tenure, once again because he's trying in perhaps the worst of his abuses of power yet to do an end run around the Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and limit Ontarians' rights to free speech.

People in my riding of Beaches—East York are all suffering deeply one way or another after 15 months of a pandemic and what feels like an endless series of lockdowns. Parents are desperately worried that without immediate action, the next school year will be just as chaotic as this one was, haunted by virtual school that they have come to dread.

Our small businesses have been walloped. Some have closed their doors for good. For others, recovery will take years.

Many of our tenants are terrified of the sheriff's knock at the door now that that office is open for business again. They're getting evicted for rent debt that was unavoidable and resulted from their pandemic-related loss of income, and they are getting no help from this government in terms of rent relief or even a moratorium on evictions until they can get back on their financial feet. Poverty has deepened. The need for food banks has doubled. The ranks of the homeless have swelled in this province to never-before-seen proportions.

Everyone's mental health has suffered. Domestic violence has increased. People who desperately need surgeries or diagnostic procedures are forced to wait for them for who knows how long.

The vaccine rollout continues to be inequitable and chaotic, as hospitals and health teams battle to get needles in arms before the Delta variant can overtake their efforts.

Many family members are distraught because they still can't visit loved ones in long-term-care homes or hospitals, and those loved ones are suffering immeasurably, their conditions and quality of life irreparably, perhaps, worsened.

0440

In the past 10 days, we have witnessed the devastating, heart-wrenching discovery of the bodies of 215 children at the site of a former residential school. And, as my colleague was just discussing, we know that this is just the tip of that terrible iceberg. We don't know how many mass burial sites of Indigenous children will be found. We do know that the violence that led to their deaths continues in different ways across the province. We need desperately to fix it.

This week too, we have been rocked by the horrific violence of a terror attack on a beautiful Muslim family in London, Ontario, who were mown down by a hate-filled man who used his truck as a weapon. Muslims across the country and throughout Ontario are terrified. "That could have been my family"; "I knew this beautiful family," I have heard all week, through tears.

Muslims are looking for action and they want that action desperately as they watch hate and Islamophobia grow, not diminish. They want funding to the Anti-Racism Directorate restored. They want mandatory anti-Islamophobia education for educators in schools. They want people who experience Islamophobic hate to feel safe when they want to report it and to have mechanisms for reporting it that feel safe and protected. They want to be taken seriously. They want police officers and judges and the justice system generally to have the tools to be able to recognize hate crimes and to act on them—and not just those that result in people's deaths, but lesser ones that are nonetheless hate crimes. They want the province to urge the federal government to act with swiftness to address online hate, because it is often in the cesspools of the Internet that people's minds are poisoned to believe and act on hateful ideologies.

We could and should be addressing each and every one of these issues with urgency. We should be here in the middle of the night passing legislation with urgency to address each and every one of these issues, the kind that are keeping many, many Ontarians up at night with dread and worry and distress.

We could be here and should be here at 3 and 4 and 5 in the morning addressing hate, and ensuring that schools will be safe; that people will remain housed and fed; that long-term-care homes will be well run and well regulated; that we are doing everything we can to stop hate; that we are acting on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action; that First Nations have clean drinking water; that there is solid, dignified housing on First Nations; that everyone in Ontario is safely housed; and that small businesses can recover from the series of devastating lockdowns to which we've been subjected.

Instead, we're here talking about the "notwithstanding" clause because this Premier doesn't like to be criticized and wants to ensure that families of loved ones in long-term care or whose children are neurologically divergent don't get to tell everyone in the province of their struggles or how he has hurt them. Workers, teachers, parents, kids, tenants, people with disabilities who cannot possibly make rent and still eat on the paltry amount of ODSP they are given every month, First Nations, and communities of people who experience hate on a regular basis will not be able to take out space in a newspaper to tell you how this Premier has hurt them, for a year before the election.

We could be working to make lives better and more equitable for Ontario. We could be acting with urgency to make life better for people in Ontario, to make life more equitable, to make this the province what it has the capacity to be—a place that works for everyone.

We could be addressing that original sin of colonialism and violence that still plays out every day. I see it in homeless encampments. A disproportionate number of people in homeless encampments are Indigenous. A disproportionate number of people in our prison system are Indigenous. A disproportionate number of our homeless population are Black. A disproportionate number of our prison population are Black. That is the residue and that is the result of colonialism, the result of racism, the result of poverty. We could fix all of these things.

Poverty is extraordinarily expensive. It's expensive in terms of lives. It's obviously expensive in terms of the quality of life of every person forced to endure it. But it's also expensive for the treasury. I know that the government professes to care about the treasury, but what it refuses to acknowledge is that it is much more expensive for the state, for the province to deal with what happens when people are desperate and poor than to ensure that they are not desperate and poor; to ensure that they have good schooling and opportunities that are not marred by barriers and racism; that they're not marred by inter-generational trauma; that they're not marred by over-policing; that they're not marred by criminalization; that they're not marred by a flawed justice system that would rather put them in jail than see them on their feet and thriving.

We could be working to make lives better and more equitable for Ontario, but instead we're here because the Premier is trying to ensure he doesn't get booed again. This will be his legacy, and he and his office will be booed and voted right out of office.

I want to talk a little bit more about this question of performativity, because I know that is perhaps a concept that members of this government haven't ever had a chance to think about. I think particularly in this moment that we're living through right now, when we're here in the middle of the night, with some urgency to do this end run around people's charter rights—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please.

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: —and use the "notwithstanding" clause—which was never intended for purposes

that could be addressed in other ways. There are other ways to address an issue if the government didn't like the court decision. It could have appealed it. But, no, we're here in the middle of the night, like thieves in the night. And we're here out of a sense of desperation.

We could and should be addressing any number of the issues I raised that people in my riding are suffering over and that people in the ridings of every member in this House are suffering over.

We could and should be addressing with urgency the issues that the member from Kiiwetinoong has raised again and again.

0450

I want to talk about this question of performativity, because I've noticed that this government is very careful about the way that it listens to the member from Kiiwetinoong. You can always hear a pin drop. A lot of that has to do with the fact that the member, of course, speaks powerfully and quietly and eloquently, but it also has to do with the fact that the government knows that if they don't appear to pay attention carefully, then they will get slammed, that the press will be brutal and that public opinion will be brutal. So they're very careful to listen, and they will often say the right things on given days. On Orange Shirt Day, you will see them wearing orange. The problem with that is that when it's purely performative, when you say the right things—that there is no place in Ontario for hate—when you send your thoughts and prayers after the bodies of children are found or four members of a beautiful family are murdered because of proliferating hate, but then you do nothing, it's actually worse than if you hadn't said those things in the first place. Here's why: It's because you give the illusion that there is both caring and the intention to act. You give the illusion that the fundamental, ugly problems that have been revealed will be solved, so you perpetuate the myth of Ontario as a caring and kind place.

Underneath that myth is another very ugly truth, and it lies in the deaths and it lies in the violence and it lies in the proliferating and growing—not diminishing—hate. It lies in the encampments, in the growing homeless populations, and it lies in prisons of people who should not be there. If we nurtured and we healed and we ensured that people had clean drinking water, mental health supports for trauma, dignified housing, good education, opportunities, no barriers that racism and Islamophobia and anti-Indigeneity create, we wouldn't need to have those prisons in this way.

When you say the words that indicate that you care but then you do nothing, you actually perpetuate the problem.

I hope the government members are actually listening, because what we heard in Ontario this past week is that thoughts and prayers are no longer enough. They're not enough for Indigenous peoples. They're not enough for racialized people. They're not enough for Muslim communities. People are done with thoughts and prayers. People are done with "There's no place for hate in Ontario," especially from a government that effectively obliterated the Anti-Racism Directorate, that came into office and almost immediately obliterated a curriculum

rewrite that would have seen our Indigenous history, Canada's treatment of Indigenous peoples, written properly into the curriculum.

Before we can have reconciliation, we have to have truth. Before we can have, "There's no place for hate in Ontario," we have to act to ensure there is no hate in Ontario. This, my friends, is what we should be working on, with urgency, in the middle of the night, and every day.

All of us have been entrusted with power in this seat of government, in this room. It is an extraordinary privilege to be here. All of us say it is a privilege and an honour to get up to speak to these bills. But the bills that we should be speaking to are the bills that actually help people who are desperate at this point.

Many people who have managed to work from home, who have remained employed, have actually done very well financially during this pandemic. But we should be here doing everything we can for the people who have not done well, for the people who are continuing to suffer. That is what we should be doing, with urgency, in the middle of the night. All of those people's pain is heightened when they watch that the government is capable of acting with urgency, just not for them. Instead, many of them are further silenced by what is happening here over the weekend, and they will remember.

We had been getting nothing but emails about all the issues I've been speaking about—vaccines and schools and the real-life concerns that people have had—until the announcement that we were going to be here pushing through the "notwithstanding" clause. I'll tell you something: All of a sudden, 500 emails came rushing in with people's outrage about what's happening here tonight. People are finding their voices. They are going to ensure that this government only has one more year in power in Ontario. And it can't happen too soon.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Respectfully, to the member from Beaches-East York, I listened to what you had to say, and you talked about urgency. With what this bill is all about—it is about urgency right now. There are so many things we could be talking about, perhaps—and we do talk about that. But right now, there is an urgency to protect democracy in this province.

We cannot have American-style influence and big PACs coming in, spending all kinds of money, and then when it's over—and we may not be in power—suddenly, you have those big powers coming to whoever is in government and looking for those favours. Suddenly, it's those countries, those other big powers that are running this province and not whoever is supposed to be.

My question to the member: Does the opposition support collusion between parties, candidates, third parties, or will they support this bill? Because there's urgency.

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: That is such a problematic presentation of the issue. There is absolutely—and I don't think that anybody disputes it—a reasonable period before an election in order to ensure that there are limits on spending. I don't think that anybody is here arguing

against that. We can have a discussion on what that reasonable period is, but that is actually not why we're here. What the government is trying to do here is to silence criticism a year out from an election, which is actually a completely different issue from the one that the member raised.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I listened quite intently to my colleague from Beaches—East York.

0500

I hope that this government has listened to my colleagues from Kiiwetinoong and St. Paul's, and all the other speakers this morning on this debate.

It's a shame that my colleagues and I have been forced to stand in this House this morning, this day, to debate the heinous decision made by this Premier and by this Conservative government.

My question to my colleague: At a time when Ontarians are continuing to suffer from job loss from the COVID-19 pandemic, small businesses are hanging on by a string, the long-term-care system is underwater, and we're continuing to mourn the horrific tragedies in Kamloops and London that you spoke so eloquently about, can you please explain to the people of Ontario why we should really be here instead of debating this heinous decision?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Thank you so much for that question.

Do you know what I'd really like to be talking about in addition to some of the things that I laid out earlier? I'd love to be talking about what it will take to bring our small businesses back to life, which are the beating heart of all of our communities. That's what we need to be talking about. When I walk down Queen Street or Kingston or the Danforth, that's what small business owners want to talk about. They want to talk about what help they can be given by this government to bring them back to life, because—my goodness—they're suffering. That is what we should be talking about with urgency in the middle of the night.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I want to thank the member from Beaches—East York for her remarks—very thoughtful, very passionate.

It's 5 o'clock in the morning. This is normally when I'd be waking up. What I would like to happen right now is for the government to wake up. We've had this debate. The government has put up one speaker. What you've heard from members on this side of the House is that you've got your priorities all wrong. We've set our legislative hair on fire, having this emergency debate. We've talked about schools and water and long-term care and PSW pay raises, and what I haven't heard at all is the response from the government on any one of those things, defending their record. It's like everybody is asleep over there. I haven't heard a thing.

My question to the member is: If we could vote on something tonight, what would it be?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: I have so many things I'd like us to vote on tonight.

Mr. John Fraser: Sorry.

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: We should be voting on emergency measures on all of the issues that are, really, at one level hurting Ontario—not just individuals, but Ontario—in ways that are existential and run the risk of undercutting who we have the capacity to be and what we have the capacity to be.

I agree with your comment completely that what we're seeing on the other side is a group of people who are very defensive about why they're here tonight but will not actually address any of the issues that everyone on this side of the House has been raising so eloquently. That is a problem.

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

Ms. Christine Hogarth: What an interesting time to be here in the Legislature.

I'm really proud of this government. This weekend, we're slowly, safely opening up this province. Eleven million people are vaccinated. That's great news to celebrate in these early-morning hours.

Today, what we're talking about—and I know the opposition were saying that they didn't hear enough. Well, I actually heard what the Attorney General said earlier this morning—or, I guess, late last night. He had an excellent speech, and it was about democracy. That's what we're here about, and that's why we're here at 5 in the morning. It's about our democracy.

Do we want what's happening in the south, in the United States? Do we want that kind of democracy? No. We want something better for the people of Ontario. We want something that's for everyone and something that's for the people. We want the Protecting Elections and Defending Democracy Act.

Will the member opposite and her party join this side of the House to protect Ontarians' democratic process and prevent it from—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The member from Beaches—East York to respond.

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: What we want is a Constitution and a Charter of Rights and Freedoms that are respected.

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

Mr. Kevin Yarde: It is after 5 o'clock—it's 5:05 right now—and in Ontario, the Delta variant is the dominant variant in Ontario. In Peel region and in my region of Brampton, Brampton North, it is affecting many people. People are getting sick, people are dying, and here we are today, at just after 5 o'clock, speaking about Bill 307, Protecting Elections and Defending Democracy Act.

My question to the member is: On the street, when you speak to your constituents in Beaches—East York, what are their concerns? Is it about elections and election limits? Or is it about protecting Ontarians from this new variant?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: The people of Beaches—East York—and, I would hazard, many, if not, I'm assuming, all other ridings, as well—are desperate not to go into another lockdown, and they are distressed beyond

measure that the government has forced them into lockdown after lockdown after lockdown because of a lack of listening to the science table and the evidence. They are also very distressed about the abuse of power that they see happening here this evening.

What they want to be talking about is how we improve the vaccine rollout so that we don't get floored by the Delta variant and end up back in another lockdown, because I don't think that they can handle that. That's what we should be talking about with urgency here tonight.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question? The Associate Minister of Energy can get a quick question in, if he wants a response.

Hon. Bill Walker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

In 2015, on that side of the House, when I was in opposition, I introduced a private member's bill to limit third-party advertising so every single person had the ability to participate in democracy.

I'm very concerned that there could be very wealthy people who can sway an election. They actually could be looking at one of your colleagues across the road, saying, "I'm going to take them out. I can outspend them, because I have absolutely no limits and no control, no accountability."

Do you support that? Do you support groups being able to take out you or one of your colleagues or anybody who serves their province with prestige and discipline? Do you support third-party groups being able to take someone out—as opposed to any individual serving their province?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): He only left you nine seconds to respond.

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: I think if the member really was concerned about wealthy people not influencing things, they wouldn't have doubled the individual spending limit.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: I'm proud to be here this morning to speak to Bill 307, the Protecting Elections and Defending Democracy Act. It feels like a little bit of an insult to democracy to have a bill that's being rammed through on a weekend, with no chance that it will go to committee.

Usually, when we debate a bill, the goal of it is to create legislation that is the best legislation we can create for the 15 million people who live in Ontario. What that means is that we all individually do our jobs and talk to stakeholders, listen to them. We go to committee and we listen to what experts have to say. We introduce amendments to improve bills that we have developed, so that we can come up with a law that is the best that it can be.

What we're doing tonight and tomorrow and Sunday and Monday—actually, I've got that wrong, because it is now Saturday. What we are doing is, we are ramming through a piece of legislation, and we are not respecting the democratic process. That is a shame.

What also concerns me about this bill is that it is an abuse of power. It is an abuse of power, because the "notwithstanding" clause is being used to override a court decision. We know how there are many lawyers on the

government side. We know the value of having a strong, effective, independent, transparent legal system that makes good and fair decisions and upholds our charter.

0510

It was ruled that the government's election rules, the limits on third-party spending, were a violation of charter rights. This government could have said, "Okay, good point. We agree," or "we disagree." You had different options available to you than to bring us here on a weekend to debate this legislation.

This government could have chosen to appeal the decision. That is your right. That is the process. You chose not to do it. This government could have chosen to say, "Oh, good point. Maybe we'll go back and rewrite the legislation." The election is a year away; we're going back in September. You would have many months to develop, rewrite, introduce, go to committee, and pass legislation that would have set fair limits on third-party spending, just like other provinces have done, that would have upheld and respected the rights of individuals in Ontario. I, for one, fully support fair limits on third-party spending. But this government chose not to do this. It said, "We don't really want to. We're just going to use the 'notwithstanding' clause for the first time in Ontario's history and go back to what we want." That really speaks to this government's arrogance and disinterest in listening to people.

It also reminds me of the last time this government used the "notwithstanding" clause. It was when the Minister of Transportation was the Attorney General, and this government chose to move forward with using the "notwithstanding" clause to change Toronto's election process in the middle of an election period, to change the number of seats from 47 to 25 in the middle of an election period.

So it's a bit rich to be here debating a bill, the Protecting Elections and Defending Democracy Act, introduced by this government, when the last time they threatened to use the "notwithstanding" clause they did it because they just—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Minister of Colleges and Universities, come to order, please.

Ms. Jessica Bell: I can't even hear you.

They did it to override the city of Toronto's election rules. So that is hypocritical. In the end, you didn't have to do it, but the intent was there, and you had every intention of doing it.

What I find—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Excuse me. The member for University–Rosedale will have to withdraw her previous comment.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Yes, withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Back to you.

Ms. Jessica Bell: What I find so frustrating, and what the residents of University–Rosedale find extremely frustrating, is that—they are astonished that we are spending this weekend debating this legislation, when we are in the middle of a global pandemic. There are a whole lot of issues that the people of University–Rosedale would

like us to be debating right now—and not debating legislation that deals with election rules.

I have to wonder why we aren't using this time to address the absolute tragedy that has come up in the last few weeks, where 215 children were found in an unmarked grave near a residential school in Kamloops, BC. Why aren't we debating legislation to address the very real reality that there are unmarked graves in Ontario as well?

Why aren't we debating legislation to think through how we can implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations? The recommendations include searching burial sites, finding children in unmarked graves, communicating with families who have lost loved ones, and working with them to ensure these children can have a new burial process that is respectful and what the families wanted, because they never got that. Why aren't we debating that?

I was, as always, moved by the MPP for Kiiwetinoong, who spoke about the issues—he asked, why aren't we coming forward with a plan for dealing with the reality that most Indigenous reserves in Ontario don't have access to clean drinking water? When I went and visited Grassy Narrows—I've been many times, and I lived there for a period of two months—it's very hard to get drinking water, to buy it, to boil it. It takes up a huge amount of your day to do that. We've forced Indigenous communities across Ontario to be in that situation for decades. But that's not what we're debating tonight.

What we're debating tonight is this government's plan to change the election rules in a way that a judge has found violates the charter. That says a lot about this government's priorities, and it doesn't say very nice things about them.

I want to talk about some of the other issues that residents of University–Rosedale have raised with me over the last few weeks. The obvious question is, why aren't we debating these? These are the issues that University–Rosedale residents are really concerned about.

Some of the issues that I'm hearing about right now are the lack of affordable housing options and the fact that there are many residents in University–Rosedale who are experiencing the risk of eviction or are being evicted.

We recently got a call from Alexi. Alexi was illegally evicted. He actually was getting a vaccine, and when he came home to his rental property, his landlord had locked him out. He called the Rental Housing Enforcement Unit, he called the police, he called the Landlord and Tenant Board, desperate to try to get back into his property, because he has kids; he needs a home. All of them—the police; the Rental Housing Enforcement Unit, which is supposed to deal with lockouts; and the Landlord and Tenant Board—said, "Sorry. We can't help you," which says very loudly and clearly that the system for dealing with illegal lockouts is broken. We could be debating that tonight—how we ensure tenants have proper protection from illegal lockouts—but we're not.

We could be dealing with the fact that there is a rapid rise in illegal renovictions right now. We have tenants at

145 St. George Street whose homes are being demolished. We have residents at 276 St. George Street who are undergoing endless, relentless renovations, which is a typical strategy, driving people out—because that's exactly what happened at 666 Spadina Avenue as well. Why aren't we dealing with that, so that there are some reasonable limits on how long renovations can go for, and so that there are protections for people who are experiencing renovictions? But we're not.

Why aren't we dealing with that—or the fact that above-guideline rent increases being driven by corporate landlords are being introduced at a record rate, even though there is a so-called freeze on rent hikes? This is how corporate landlords are getting around that. This is their loophole. That's what's happening at 103 Avenue Road. We're not dealing with that, even though that's affecting people in a very real way in my riding. We know housing is our number one expense. These people don't know if they're going to make it. They don't know if they'll be able to stay in Toronto. They don't know where they're going to go if they get evicted. They care a lot more about where they're going to live than election rules, but that's what we're debating right now.

Another big issue that I'm hearing a lot about—I'm getting emails and calls about this, and I'm sure you are, too—is around the issues with schools. A lot of parents are absolutely furious that this government did not prioritize them. Schools should be the last to close and the first to open, but that is not what happened. Through a whole series of mismanagement and poor action, this government let COVID-19 spread, especially in workplaces—which it didn't properly inspect and didn't close when there was an outbreak, even though it should have. It led to case counts being so high that this government was forced to make some very difficult decisions that could have been prevented, and schools are now closed. While patios opened yesterday, parents and kids—two million kids—are at home. When we're talking about who is valuable for the economy—women are valuable for the economy, parents are valuable for the economy. It is very difficult when your employer is saying to you, "Businesses are opening now. We need you to come back to work in person," but schools are still closed. That puts parents in a very, very difficult situation. That could have been prevented. That's what parents are talking to me about right now. They're the kinds of emails and calls I'm getting.

0520

Because a decision has been made, a lot of the conversations and a lot of the meetings I'm having are really now focusing on what's going to happen in September. I would be honoured to come here and debate a plan and pass a plan to ensure that schools are safe in September—but we're not. These are the issues that they are raising about September. They want school and I want school to be as close to normal as possible.

I'm hearing parents talk to me about their concerns with the quadmester system, where there are four semesters, because it is putting students in a situation where they might learn one subject but then they don't get to learn it

for another nine months or so. They're concerned that that's interrupting their learning. Those are the kinds of issues that I'm hearing about—and that's actually a ministry decision. We could be debating that.

I'm hearing concerns from parents about the vaccination rollout and when younger kids, five to 11, are going to be vaccinated. That's what I'm hearing about. The vast majority of parents in my riding and, I'm sure, the parents in your riding—we all want our kids vaccinated, because that will reduce the spread of COVID-19 in schools. Why aren't we talking about that? No, we're not talking about that.

Another issue that's really coming up, which really speaks to how bad school can be in September, is that this government is not putting enough funding towards schools, and this government is coming up with, I would say, a bananas plan to create a situation where teachers are doing online learning and in-person learning at the exact same time. That is crazy. That is our plan for September? Parents have concerns about that. I wish we were debating that and talking about the pros and cons and the merits of that.

This is another issue that residents are raising with me right now—it's certainly not election rules: They've got concerns about the vaccine rollout. Many people have had a lot of concerns about the vaccine rollout since it began. I think one of the more shocking points in this process of the vaccine rollout was when people realized that the Ontario government's portal to register for vaccines was not going to be ready in time, even though this government had a year to develop it—forcing all 34 public health units to create their own vaccine portal until this government's vaccine portal was ready. That's pretty shocking. And the chaos and the Hunger Games-like mentality of how this vaccine rollout is happening continue to this day. I've been getting a lot of calls about that.

The latest calls I'm getting are from people who took the AstraZeneca vaccine and are now being told that they have to wait 12 weeks just to book an appointment. They have some very valid questions around, "If we have to wait 12 weeks, can't we just book earlier, so at least we're ready?" They've got some other valid questions around why Ontario isn't following some of the paths that other provinces are doing, where they're shortening the timeline. I get it; these are tough decisions to make. We must listen to public health in these situations. But these are very valid questions, especially if some people are going to choose to have a different vaccine the second time—because there is no clear evidence out there one way or the other whether it's better to wait for 12 weeks or whether people should get it done earlier. With the Delta variant circulating, people who have taken AstraZeneca as their first dose are concerned, and they want a response from this government, and a plan. We could be debating that tonight—it's a fair question—but we're not.

Another big issue that has come up in my riding and in all of your ridings is about small businesses. My riding, I'm so proud to say, has so many little main streets: Kensington, Ossington, Bloor, College Street. It's so

vibrant. It's so dynamic. Last night, when I was walking down College Street, it was like a party, partly because of the soccer game, but also because all the patios were out. It was very exciting. But the challenge that small businesses have had and continue to have is that so many businesses don't know if they're going to make it through and if they're going to survive, even with the staggered opening-up that we're experiencing right now, even though they can start increasing some of the revenue that they've got.

One of the biggest issues that they raise with me is around the Ontario Small Business Support Grant program. What I am hearing, again and again and again, is that the program is broken, that it's not working. Businesses that are so clearly eligible, that meet all the criteria, that have had a drop in revenue, that followed all the public health guidelines—they apply, and sometimes they even get an email saying they've been approved, but they never get their money. Then, when they call the customer service centre and inquire—"Can I appeal? What's happening? Am I going to get my second round of money, because I got the first?"—they don't get an answer. There is no answer. I've had one business tell me that a customer service agent said to them, "Yes, the program is a mess." That's not great.

We did a survey. We contacted all the BIAs in our riding. We did outreach to the 14,000 residents we have contact information for and who want to be part of that newsletter, and we said, "Hey, you, small business. Have you applied for the program?" Of the businesses that were eligible, 85% of them hadn't received their money yet. That is not good.

I would really like it if we were debating how we could fix that small business support grant program tonight. I would like to debate legislation on how we can support small businesses in recovering from this pandemic, because they need more than a grant program to get by—but we're not.

Finally, I want to conclude with the issues that the MPP for Beaches—East York raised around the tragic crimes that took place in London. In a family of five, four of those family members were killed. It was so clearly a hate crime. It was an example of Islamophobia. It is terrible. What I think is so important, and why I say this is because we could be debating a real plan to respond to that today—not just words, but a real plan. The words we say here have consequences in Ontario. There are consequences. My hope is that we can prioritize the issue of Islamophobia and the rise of hate crimes that are happening all across my riding and across your ridings, and come up with a real plan for how we can address them, from the anti-maskers who march through Kensington and who go to Queen's Park and harass residents, to the people who target the Chinese businesses in Chinatown. We can do so much more for them, and I wish we were debating that tonight instead of this bill.

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

Ms. Jane McKenna: The member from Beaches—East York said we're able to do better. Well, you're darn right.

We have to do better, because for 15 years, we came into—the sub-sovereign debt was the highest in the world. And we had 611 beds. We had 700 schools that were closed. We had a responsibility to do what was right for the people of Ontario. That's why we're sitting here right now doing what we're doing. We have a responsibility as MPPs to give the tools to our constituents to succeed in what we're doing right now. That's why we're here right now.

But where I'm confused is, you stand up here and talk, and I'm wondering, why is the opposition aligning themselves with these groups that use their money to have an outsized influence in our elections? I'm just curious.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Burlington for that question. I support fair limits on third-party spending—very clear. The challenge that this government is facing is that the restrictions that you placed on third-party spending—a judge has ruled that they violate the charter. This government has options. They could rewrite the legislation to do what other provinces have done and come up with fair third-party limits. You could appeal the decision.

But what I have concerns with is that this government has decided to use the “notwithstanding” clause for the first time in Ontario’s history to be a bully and get their own way. That’s what I have a problem with tonight.

0530

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Good morning to the residents of St. Catharines and all Ontarians. I’m sure they’ve all tuned in to this great debate this morning.

I want to really thank the member from University–Rosedale. I’m glad you mentioned this government’s horrible past track record of the abuse of power throughout the three years that they have been in. Yes, 15 years—I must comment: Before this, nothing was done for our health care, and now, you’ve had three years to make sure that you would get it right, which you didn’t.

Trying to use the “notwithstanding” clause twice, first to destroy the Niagara region’s democratic right to elect a regional chair at large—that was horrible, that this government did that.

But to the member: Can you please explain to the residents of Ontario how important it is, when we’re debating, what we should really be debating, what the issues are in Ontario—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you very much. Back to the member from University–Rosedale to respond.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for St. Catharines for raising the point that the government did change your region’s election rules as well, just like they’ve done with London, where they stopped ranked ballots; just like they’ve done with Kingston, where they stopped ranked ballots. This government does really like to focus heavily on changing the rules of elections to suit their goals.

What I want to be debating tonight is legislation to make workplaces safe, to increase the minimum wage and

provide workers with better workplace protections, to make schools safe for September, to get profit out of long-term care so we can have a public and non-profit long-term-care system.

We could be dealing with the health care backlog. Right now, the Ontario government has created a situation where we have a massive surgery backlog and a massive cancer screening backlog. I—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Your next question comes from the member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: It’s 5:33, and all those people who are tuning in right now must be wondering what we’re doing. Well, we are too. Look, we’re at this emergency debate. Like I said, we’ve set our legislative hair on fire. We’ve heard about a lot of things that are important for people, but mostly schools.

I said this earlier in debate; I’m going to say it again: Every day, two million children go to school, and they get to go there to learn and to build their future. When they go there, their parents get to work too. Some families can earn two incomes, some only one. Schools are a pillar of our economy because they help full participation in the workforce. Can the member give me any idea why the government wouldn’t have a plan for schools?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Ottawa South for your question. That’s a good question. Why doesn’t this government have a good plan for a return to school, a safe return to schools in September? Because when I look at what the government is planning for the two million kids in Ontario, I am pretty concerned. I am concerned that this government seems fixated with moving forward with a privatized online learning scheme. I’m concerned that this government is very intent on having teachers teach online and in person at the same time—that’s going to affect our kids’ learning—and I’m very concerned that this government is not putting enough funding into schools to ensure that they’re safe in September and that our kids will be able to catch up from the year of learning that they have essentially lost. That’s what I’m concerned about.

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

Mrs. Nina Tangri: I’m very proud of the fact that in June 2018, my colleagues here and our colleagues across this House were democratically elected. I have an immense amount of respect for everyone who sits in this chamber.

But the Chief Electoral Officer has stated that the scale of third-party advertising in Ontario was greater than at the federal level and suggested that third party election ads be monitored between elections, not just in the immediate lead-up to or during the writ. Does the opposition member disagree with the leadership of a non-partisan office of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario responsible for administering and maintaining the integrity of provincial elections in Ontario, yes or no?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member from Mississauga–Streetsville for your question. I support fair

limits on third-party spending. I've made that very, very clear.

The issue this government is facing is that this government is choosing to invoke the "notwithstanding" clause for the first time in Ontario's history in order to get their own way, when you have a range of other reasonable options that you could take to ensure that there is fair third-party spending in Ontario. This government could choose to appeal the decision. This government could choose to rewrite legislation, just like other provinces have done, to come up with fair third-party limits that respect individuals' charter rights. My question to you is, why haven't you done that?

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

Mr. Chris Glover: I've been meeting with small business owners in my community and we've drafted a letter based on their feedback. We're asking for a number of things. We're asking this government to improve the small business grant because the eligibility criteria leaves a lot of businesses out. We're asking for them to fix the appeal process. We're asking them to fix the reopening strategy because it leaves out the personal care industry and it penalizes the theatre and live music industry. We're asking them to fix the insurance policies because a lot of businesses can't get commercial insurance right now.

So my question to the member is, would you be supportive of having this debate around supporting small businesses so that we can reopen our economy and successfully recover from this pandemic?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Spadina–Fort York for your question. I know that we have businesses that are very similar. We have a big art sector industry. We have a big tourism industry. We have a lot of restaurants. The calls that you're getting are very similar to calls that I am getting around businesses that don't know if they're going to make it, and many of them haven't.

I fully support having a conversation debating legislation that looks at how we can support small businesses—small businesses, especially—to help them recover from the pandemic. That should include things like making sure the Ontario Small Business Support Grant program is fast and fair, and there is a good appeal process, and that we expand eligibility, because there are a lot of businesses that have lost revenue that have been locked out of that program. But we're not.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We do not have time for further questions in this round; however, I have been informed that one of our front-row ministers is celebrating a birthday today. I don't know how many ministers are in the front row today—I wouldn't want to name the minister, otherwise she may be kicked out, but happy birthday.

We continue our debate with the member from Cambridge.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good morning. It's such a pleasure to speak on behalf of the residents of Cambridge and Waterloo region this morning.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, like all of the similar bills that control third-party political advertisements that have come before—either at the provincial level or even at the federal level where it all started back in 2002. This is legislation that seeks to clamp down and create burdens on those seeking to engage in political speech. This bill shows how measures to control third-party political speech have become more and more draconian in the last 19 years since they were first created by a federal Liberal government.

All of these third-party laws are, frankly, a sustained and continued attack on freedom of speech and political participation in Ontario, and in this country, that has only served to protect the interests of the establishment political parties by allowing them to control the narrative in every election and allowing them to vastly outspend any other third party seeking to participate in political advertising in the lead-up to an election.

I am not against this bill for the use of the "notwithstanding" clause. That clause is there in the charter for provincial governments to use when deemed necessary. I am against this bill because it is an attack on free speech and political participation.

The government has given us some rhetoric as to their motivation behind the bill. But if we want to look at perhaps the real political motivation, we can look to an article in the Toronto Sun written by the Premier's favourite columnist—as stated in the Premier's own words—Brian Lilley, who defended the government's use of the "notwithstanding" clause by stating that it is necessary to limit the influence of organized labour in our elections from attacking the PC Party and government.

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What's funny about this narrative is that four days before that article justifying the bill to stop those big bad unions, the exact same columnist in the exact same newspaper wrote an article that stated the government had supposedly reached peace with organized labour a year before the next election. The column was full of praise for the Minister of Labour and for the PC Party's change in approach to organized labour. You see, Mr. Speaker, this government, for three years, has been giving everything that the public sector union bosses want—everything—including Bill 288 that politicizes the categories of mandatory trade licensing by putting it into the hands of the minister. And the government wants to go around saying they have finally found peace with organized labour.

It's laughable, Speaker, because a mere four days after that article, claiming this supposed Conservative government had found peace with organized labour leaders, they announced they would use the "notwithstanding" clause to get their way in a dispute with those same labour bosses. What a joke, Mr. Speaker. The truth is this supposed Conservative government doesn't have the backbone to stand up to union bosses on files that would benefit Ontarians, but they are happy to go into battle with public sector union bosses by trampling over the free speech rights of every single Ontarian.

In Ontario electoral discourse, the PC Party of Ontario likes to complain that they lost four elections in a row

because of union ads. It wasn't until the government party gave Ontario voters an Axe the Carbon Tax campaign, and Ontarians thought they were voting for Rob Ford, did the PC Party finally figure out how to win for once. They didn't lose four elections in a row because of public sector union ads. They lost four elections in a row because their leaders and political strategists are terrible at campaigning.

But since then, they have needed a scapegoat. The truth is, if this government was a little Conservative and had any backbone at all, and if they really wanted to do anything to solve the problem they claim they are afraid of—unions using compulsory fees to wage campaign-style ads against them—they would do something about that without trampling all over freedom-of-speech rights.

The government could have presented a bill that would say that unions can only spend money on campaign ads that are raised from voluntary union dues, and compulsory union dues would not be used for lobbying or political activity. But they won't do that, because they want to make it burdensome for everyone in Ontario to influence the narrative of an election campaign, not just unions, but everyone: private businesses, small business owners, individuals, those raising money from others.

Let me clarify, Mr. Speaker: We already had in Ontario draconian rules against third-party spending that stretched six months before an election, rules that said if you spent over \$500 on even a boosted post on social media, you came under intense rules you had to follow from Elections Ontario, including reporting. But that wasn't good enough for this supposed Conservative government. They wanted to stretch those rules out for 12 months, and they wanted the rules to be even more burdensome so that every time some small third party—somebody sitting in front of a computer doing a Facebook boosted post, or a group getting together to raise money—spent \$1,000, they had to file a report to Elections Ontario. How ridiculous.

Furthermore, they want the spending limits to extend for 12 months so that a full 13 months before election day, private actors seeking to influence political discourse for an election would only be able to do so at a level that was much less than what the establishment political parties could do. Such rules make it burdensome to raise money and conduct advertising because of the reporting requirements, and it requires a professional infrastructure of lawyers and accountants to participate in politics.

So what do these rules actually do? They ensure the establishment political parties get to dominate the narrative for a full year before election time.

And let's not forget, in the same bill that these measures were initially introduced, the government decided that the establishment political parties should get millions of dollars in taxpayer money to fund their political advertisements and their operations—so a taxpayer welfare subsidy for the establishment political parties, and only the establishment political parties.

While the governing party will be receiving over \$5 million annually in taxpayer subsidies and will be able to spend all it wants in the next six months on ads, and then another million dollars on ads in the six months before the

next election, and millions more in the 30-day campaign period, third parties will be able to spend a fraction of that, and individuals will have to report to Elections Ontario if they spend \$1,000 criticizing the Premier.

That is what is really going on with such third-party spending laws. They are an attack on free speech that makes the strong that much stronger and tilts the scales in favour of the establishment parties, to control the narrative for a full year before election day by making it harder for third-party voices to raise money and challenge the narrative dominated by the establishment political parties.

This government likes to pretend they're trying to prevent outside influence in our elections. That is how this government thinks of Ontarians donating to third-party causes—as outsiders. They claim they want to avoid American-style elections, but it begs the question, what style of elections do they like? Cuban-style? Venezuelan-style? Or perhaps North Korean?

If they were concerned with making elections fair, they would pass my private member's bill, Bill 150, which would make electoral fraud in party elections illegal, and they would get rid of the taxpayer welfare subsidy to establishment political parties.

In Ontario, there are no laws preventing someone from stuffing ballots in a party election, no consequences, but 12 months before an election, if you decide to spend \$1,000 on Facebook criticizing this thin-skinned Premier or any of his cabinet, you have to run to Elections Ontario to file a report. That is right out of the land of the absurd—a government that doesn't think we should have a law against voter fraud but thinks democracy requires a \$1,000 Facebook post be reported to Elections Ontario. I guess that is how scared they are of campaigns like Take Back Our PC Party or Axe the Carbon Tax.

As for the government's claim that they want our elections to not be adversarial, let's look at the history of this party when it comes to free speech and political participation. It is a record of outright hostility, not just one that is adversarial.

In 2017, New Blue Party leader Jim Karahalios had a third-party campaign to axe the carbon tax and take back our PC Party, opposing a carbon tax and opposing voter fraud occurring in the PC Party elections. What did that governing party do? They sued him. Of course, they lost in court. But that sounds pretty adversarial to me. That is what they think of third-party actors—that they should be silenced and sued.

In 2016-17, they held nominations that resulted in reports of ballot box stuffing. Some of these MPPs in the government may have even benefited from some of those methods.

In 2018, under the watch of the Premier's staff and party staff, a convention election was held that ended up in court for more ballots being cast than voters who voted. That doesn't sound like a fair election to me. It sounds like pretty adversarial history.

And of course, because I voted against the government once, they kicked me out of their caucus and then punished 19 others, volunteers on a riding association board, by kicking them out too.

These seem to be pretty adversarial moves to me. But now they want us to believe that they're the doves of Ontario politics, trying to make the system friendly with this law. What a joke.

In closing, I'd like to say, the origins of these third-party spending laws are from Liberal governments—federally, in the early 2000s, and then provincially, in Ontario.

It was former Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper—before he was Prime Minister—who challenged the original third-party spending rules, introduced by a Liberal federal government, all the way to the Supreme Court. I lament that he lost that decision, because ever since that decision, we have seen these rules in place, creating a chill in political participation and allowing our political discourse to be dominated by establishment political parties.

The fact that these laws were created by Liberal governments is yet more proof that the governing Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario has a desire to just be a copy of the Liberal parties in Canada.

This bill is another example of this government just taking a Liberal legislative idea and amplifying it a bit more.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I just want to say I respect the courage of the member. It's always interesting to hear what she has to say here in the chamber. She certainly provides the inside scoop.

0550

My question is, isn't it true that this is a government that loves third-party advertising so much that they actually create their own, and one of them is in court right now?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the member for Humber River–Black Creek. Thank you for the compliment as well.

This government doesn't know what it's doing, so I couldn't tell you what they're doing. It would appear that they are doing things that would be favourable for them—again, the taxpayer-funded subsidies that would clearly benefit them; using taxpayer money at a time when hundreds of thousands of people have been forced out of work; using hard-earned taxpayer dollars to fund their political party so that they can pay for political advertisements. We've really got to question what's going on here. It doesn't seem democratic at all. It seems very unfair.

I know hundreds of thousands, maybe millions, of Ontarians are very displeased with this current Conservative government.

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

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Thank you to the member for your presentation.

I'm wondering what the member would like to be discussing here in an overnight session.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the member for Beaches–East York.

There are many other things we could be discussing tonight.

If we are bringing the House back urgently, we could be talking about ways to reopen our province. How about that? How about all of the people who contact me from all the ridings on the government benches saying, "Please, my MPP doesn't respond to me. I want to get back to work. I don't want my taxpayer dollars being re funnelled back to me so I can just scrape by. I want to open my business." We have businesses that are going out of business, that won't be able to reopen. We have people who are feeling discriminated against. We have reopenings tied to vaccination percentages of the population.

There are so many other things that could be discussed this evening or this weekend, and they've chosen this bill—to push through something that the court has claimed is something that they won't stand for.

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

Mr. John Fraser: It's just about 6 o'clock in the morning, and I've been listening closely to the government—*Interjection.*

Mr. John Fraser: I've been sleeping; that's right, I have. No. I think they have been on the other side.

I just have to say, I've been trying to think—if this was a movie, what would we call it? I think we would call it *The Silence of the Lambs 2*.

We've had one speaker, the Attorney General, get up for half his time to speak. We had the Premier, whose bill it is, who we're doing this all for, not even give us, "Hey champs, this is the greatest bill ever."

Given that we should be debating other things tonight in this emergency debate, this five-alarm fire, what does the member think would be a good thing to debate tonight?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the member for Ottawa South.

It's interesting, actually, that no one on the government benches has spoken to this tonight, aside from the Attorney General. They've filled up the benches, but they're not speaking to it. Is it because they don't want to be on record about something like this? Are they concerned that it's going to come back and bite them on June 2 of next year? If you feel so strongly about it, get up, put your name on the record, say something positive, talk about the bill—because as other members have said, there are other things we could be debating.

The bill is titled about democracy. Let's talk about Bill 150. Let's push that through. That's democratic. That's asking for transparency. Don't the people of Ontario deserve to see us, as elected representatives, use our time here to fight for democracy, to fight for transparency, especially when we're dealing with our internal party members who are paying money for memberships with our parties? Talk about that.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Cambridge for your presentation.

I also find it surprising that the PC MPPs have not put up any speakers tonight. I also notice that they didn't ask you any questions. Why do you think they're not putting up any speakers tonight or asking you any questions?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the member for University–Rosedale. That is a great question.

It's because they know I'm right. It's because they can't defend their record on this. What are they going to talk about? Barack Obama? American PAC-style politics? Is that what they're going to do? Is that your pre-fed question that you're going to throw at me tonight? We've already talked about the type of politics that the PC Party seems to be admiring—Cuba, Venezuela, North Korea.

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

Hon. Ross Romano: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to raise a question to the member opposite.

I have a background in law. As a former lawyer, I did a lot of constitutional-type work.

Instead of speaking about the legalese, I'd like to pose a question based on the member's statement. She suggested—her own spouse has a couple of different PACs.

Perhaps you could help us understand what the difference is in terms of the regulation—or maybe you could just confirm, as a candidate yourself, knowing all the regulations, all the rules, all the reporting requirements, all the stuff that you have to do as a candidate to make sure that people's interests are measured properly, to ensure that there's fairness and equity in the process.

The question I'm asking is, as somebody who knows the PAC process, can you please comment on the total lack of any of those reporting metrics, any types of reporting for fairness and all those types of things?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thanks to the member for Sault Ste. Marie.

How about putting this into a labour bill, instead of attacking free speech—which seems to be the new modus operandi for the PC Party: "Let's attack free speech. We're going to ticket politicians for going to protests, make sure people can't rally about things unless it's a politicized rally." Labour, Ministry of Labour—try it like that instead of putting it into your own elections bill with the Attorney General and then having to deal with all these things.

You are against free speech. Everything you've done for the last 15 months has been an attack on free speech.

It's an embarrassment. They should be embarrassed. This is not a conservative party. I'm not sure what they are anymore.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Humber River–Black Creek has a question.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: This is more of a hypothetical question for this middle-of-the-night bill that we're debating here. This thing is never going to committee. We know that. It's coming back at lightning speed.

If it did go to committee, would you support an amendment to change the name of this bill to "Protecting and defending PC candidates in the 2022 election?"

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you once again to the member from Humber River–Black Creek.

You're right; this bill is not going to committee. They don't want it to go to committee. It's so urgent that we have to make sure we continue to attack free speech among Ontarians.

Yes, I would accept an amendment like that. Other good titles would be, "We don't care about democracy"; "North Korea, here we come." Things like that might work.

It's just unfortunate—and I don't want to say it's surprising anymore, because it's really not. After the way everything has been handled for the first 16 months, where we have stadiums in the States full of people unmasked, and we're still here struggling to get our restaurants to open their doors, gyms are still closed, people can't get a haircut—really and truly, we are in wacky land right now.

Nothing makes sense, and this bill is just further to that point.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Ottawa South has the final question.

Mr. John Fraser: I've listened intently to the member's speech with regard to people's rights to freedom of expression.

The Attorney General has reached into his tool kit and grabbed the biggest thing he could find, which was a hammer, instead of getting a stay or trying for an appeal.

Here's the thing: The government has spent—all of us have spent—a year infringing on people's rights because we had to do that to protect each other. Right now, people are up to here—they're fed up. So why would you come out and take more rights away now?

Can you explain why you think the government would do that?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): You have 30 seconds to respond.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you again to the member for Ottawa South.

It's because they're afraid. They know that the teachers' unions, whatever unions—they're going to come out and they're going to blast them, for the last three years, for the last 15 months. So they're trying everything they can to muzzle people, because that's the only way they can try to push their messaging—using taxpayer dollars, might I add.

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

0600

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Here we are in the middle of the night debating a new government bill.

I want to take us back to Wednesday afternoon. I was at a local vaccination clinic, where incredible health teams were going door to door in an apartment building, making people feel safe, bringing them vaccines right to their doors, and I get this text—it was one of those just one-sentence texts: "House is being recalled." There were no further details. I thought, "What's going on?"

I had this vision of whoever it is who pulls the strings behind this party—Montgomery Burns or whoever that

person is—and the House has just risen, and he couldn't sleep for days. Montgomery couldn't sleep. He was tossing and turning in bed because there was so much unfinished business here, so many terrible things that needed fixing, and so he had an epiphany: He was going to do something about it, and he was calling the House back.

There are a lot of things that need fixing right now. The revelation of hundreds of dead children buried at a residential school. How about reconciliation and truth? Maybe, finally, something could be done and that action could happen now. No, it wasn't that.

A horrific attack—Islamophobia, pure and unadulterated. That's what happened. There is legislation before us we could support to do something. Maybe put money back in the Anti-Racism Directorate? No.

Support for small businesses: We've heard from so many that this has been the worst government in the history of Ontario in terms of small business. Maybe some relief? No.

Maybe the couple of measly sick days they provide—how about the full 10 that people are talking about? Medical experts are saying, "Let's give it to them." No.

Insurance: How about reform on insurance? We're in the midst of a pandemic. Businesses are closed, and the insurance rates for small businesses are going up by factors of two, three, four, five times. When you guys are out on the golf course this summer with these guys, I hope you guys talk to them about that. No, no action on insurance.

Auto insurance: Auto insurance companies have collected \$2.7 billion in profits. You could play hockey on the Allen Expressway in the middle of rush hour during parts of this pandemic. These guys don't even let us know what's going on with auto insurance rates. They keep the lid on it. We're waiting half a year, sitting on the edge of our seats: "What's going on with insurance rates?" Then people in my area are coming to me and they're saying—wait for this—that the insurance rates went up. People are playing road hockey on the Allen Expressway, and insurance rates are going up. Could it be action on auto insurance? No.

There's so much stuff that could be done here.

Investment into schools: Across the whole province, schools are crumbling. Could they be investing in education? Is that what Montgomery was thinking? He's thinking of his grandkids or his great-grandkids or great-great-grandkids? You've all seen him on The Simpsons, right? He's rolling in bed. He can't sleep. He wants to fix the school system. I thought, "I can't wait to get back in the chamber to do that." No, it wasn't that.

Why are we here?

I'm just picturing what it was like for government members. A nameless one—and I've spoken to many of them in the hallways. There are a lot of great people over there, and great conversations—so we'll just take a hypothetical, nameless PC government member. They're out on the golf course with a Walmart executive. That Walmart executive is pretty happy, because while small

businesses and regular Ontarians are suffering, these guys are raking in billions of dollars. Imagine the emails coming in: "Oh, my God. Thank you so much. You've got to check out the new yacht I was able to buy over the course of the pandemic. I've been doing great." These insurance companies are rolling in cash.

So this average PC member is out there, on a yacht. It's kicking up a couple of knots. There's a lot of background noise, and they get the phone call saying, "You've got to come back in. It's going to be night sittings. Get back in here."

"What's going on? What do you mean? What, really? I'm out here on a yacht. I'm on a private island right now. I can't get back. It was hard to leave the country in the first place. Now you've got to get me back? People are going to know. What do I have to do? I've got to come back in here."

"Well, it's got to do with the 'notwithstanding' clause."

"What? The 'notwithstanding' clause? We were back here in the middle of the night last time. It was bad. It was all over the news. I don't want to get that hate mail anymore. What's going on? What's so urgent? People are asking urgently for a lot of stuff. Families with autism are asking for support. So many people have been calling us. It's embarrassing to refuse them. It's hard. I've got to toe the line all the time. You're making it so hard for me to get re-elected. What do you want me to come back in for?"

"Third-party advertising."

"Oh, no. We rely on those. Didn't we create a couple of those? One of them is in court right now, right? I took money from them. It's embarrassing. What do you mean?"

"Yes, it's third-party advertising. Remember how our calendars—June 2, 2021—we circled that date because we couldn't get attacked from a whole bunch of people from that one-year period? Remember that bill we did?"

"Yeah, yeah."

"Well, I don't know if you've been paying attention, because you've been on the private island, but the judge once again said our legislation isn't cool. We weren't able to defend it. We're not getting rid of third-party—we just don't want criticism for the next election. That's all."

"I know. But doesn't it seem a little"—I wouldn't say "hypocritical" here, but that's what the hypothetical person said. "How do we do that?"

"Don't worry. I've got this paper. We're not going to put up speakers, because it's embarrassing to get up and talk about that. We're just going to talk about at length—we've got a piece of paper here and it's got catchphrases. It says 'American-style.'"

"Don't bring up American. The last time I said 'American,' I was in tears watching Fox News after the last election. American-style? Didn't we just have a secret meeting to try to figure out how to introduce privatized health care in Canada? We always want that, as Conservatives. We just don't know how to introduce it and be open about it."

"Yeah, but we'll put it in there. Don't worry. We'll spin it: 'attack on democracy.'"

"Oh, yeah, that sounds good. But wait, didn't we do that a couple of years ago, right after we took office, on a

vendetta? Didn't we go after democracy in the middle of municipal elections across the province of Ontario? Didn't we try to overturn results?"

"Yeah, but don't worry. We can sell it."

"Yeah. I think we could sell that one."

It went on and on.

So here they are—and I'm imagining PC members filing in at 12 a.m. I'm sure the water cooler got shoved down in the back. Water was all over the floor. People were mad. They had to come back, I told you, from the private island, the golf course—whatever it is—to come in here and do this.

Here's the reality: Make no mistake, they don't want to take money out of elections. They've doubled the spending limit. What they don't want is criticism from all the people who are so angry at them. These guys could teach a master class—they could do a TED Talk on pissing people off. And they don't want to hear it—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I would ask you to withdraw that remark, please.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Withdrawn.

They could do a TED Talk on upsetting and disappointing Ontarians. They don't want to catch flak for that; I get it. So what do they do? They up the spending limit so all their super-rich friends, who they're out on the golf course with, can just give more money to the campaigns—take the money out from everybody else, just find the richest Ontarians, and funnel it directly into their coffers at their \$1,500-a-plate spaghetti dinners. Is the spaghetti made out of gold? You've got rubies for meatballs? What's going on? We're sitting here working, trying to get vaccinations into the arms of people, helping people. They're on Zoom calls raising \$1,500 from the wealthiest Ontarians.

Let's be honest. I asked the question before—just change the name of the bill. Put up speakers and just be honest. Come out with it and say, "We're trying to protect our seats, because people are angry at us and we know what's going to happen in a year's time. We're done."

Speaker, it's disappointing. We're back here debating something that helps a government that's only interested in one thing: saving their bacon and nothing more.

0610

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I want to thank my colleague for those wonderful speaking notes on how, really, the Conservative government is operating. I'm sure the people in St. Catharines and across Ontario who are tuning in this morning got a chuckle. They're probably spitting their coffee out right now, actually; I'm sure my husband is—because he's probably the only Ontarian who really cares about focusing in in the middle of the night, when we should be debating so many special things that the residents of all of our ridings have brought forward.

I was just wondering if I could ask the member: What do you think is the number one thing that you have gotten phone calls for, besides this "notwithstanding" clause that has been brought forward to us this evening? What do you

think the number one thing your residents would like to hear you debate in full depth, without—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. We'll go to the member from Humber River–Black Creek to respond.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you very much for the question.

One thing? There's not one thing; there are so many. It depends on who's calling. It could be a family where there's a child with autism and they're looking for the supports that they need. It could be a small business that's telling me, "We're closed forever if we don't get proper supports." It could be a tenant who's on the verge of being thrown out of their unit and they're hoping for relief. The list goes on and on and on. You're not just hearing it; I'm hearing it, everybody's hearing it in this chamber—and I'm hoping that we could help these people.

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

Hon. Bill Walker: It's truly a pleasure to listen to my friend from Humber River–Black Creek and a great little comedy hour. But do you know what? Standing up for democracy is not a laughing matter. If you're going to stand over there, as a member, and mock what we're doing—to make sure that we don't have people who have over-privilege and over-affluence, to actually fix elections, so we can never do that—then I'm actually very concerned, because I have a great deal of respect for you, and I'm worried.

You talked about the underprivileged. You talked about the little guy. What if you can't have a vote because there are groups coming in with all that wealth that you talk about—and you seem to be so concerned about people with wealth. Who gives money to our hospitals? Who ensures that cancer treatment is actually getting funded? You continually deride those people.

Are you going to stand here today and tell me that you do not defend that there should be limits—so that we can spend \$100,000 on an election and somebody can't spend \$1 million and put us out of our roles? Are you going to defend those people, so there isn't fairness in elections?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: With due respect to my friend on the other side, watch out you don't fall out of your chair when you sit back down.

Look, this is rich. We have seen, and I've talked about it in the chamber—

Interjections.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: By the way, that wasn't a real insult, all right? Take it easy over there.

The reality is this: We've seen MZOs get issued and then donations are coming in within a 24-hour period right before or after. So don't act like you guys aren't taking in tons and tons of money from the wealthiest of Ontarians. Come on. Seriously.

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

Mr. John Fraser: It's 6:15. The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound spoke up. I know they've been defending democracy, but it was only the Attorney

General who really did that today. As I said, the Premier didn't even give us a, "Hey, we're all champs. This is great." So I don't really understand all this anger about that.

If there's so much passion, why do you put up one speaker? Almost six and a half hours of debate—one speaker. If this is the most important thing that you need to do—and it's not schools, and it's not raises for PSWs, and it's not the long-term-care commission—why are you so damned quiet over there?

Can you answer that question for me?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Why are they angry? Why are they frustrated? I think I illustrated in my short talk here why they're frustrated. They're back in here being fed some Coles Notes to talk about democracy in this chamber when everybody—and they're fooling nobody—knows why we're here: It's about protecting their seats. They know it looks bad on them. They're put in a Catch-22.

I respect the frustration on your side, and I sympathize with you, as fellow human beings. It can't be easy having to be here in the middle of the night reading out these catchphrases.

I think that's really why they're frustrated.

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

Mrs. Nina Tangri: I just want to go back a little bit in history, to 1990 to 1995, the one and only time we had an NDP government—never again, thankfully—a time when Bob Rae got elected on saying that he was going to have public insurance. The member opposite has talked a lot about insurance this morning. But it's very critical that we understand: Back in those days, we had what we call Rae Days, the most time when the public sector—all of those people who worked in hospitals, long-term-care homes and across the board have never, ever been so demoralized as they were during that period.

I'd like the member to let me know—Ontario is the only province in Canada—

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

Mrs. Nina Tangri: —where third-party spending limits have counted in the millions. The legislation proposes to put reasonable guardrails on that spending—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): You had your opportunity. Thank you.

I'll ask the member from Humber River–Black Creek to respond.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I'd like to remind the member: The member is part of a majority Conservative government. You want to talk about things that happened a generation ago? If you want to make change on anything, you could do it right now. You have that unlimited power, as the government. In fact, you're willing to go beyond the power you have by invoking the "notwithstanding" clause. So the power you have is not even enough.

All the stuff that you're going to say—let's be honest. You want to have a conversation? You want an honest answer? This is being done to protect PC seats, because

they know everybody out there is angry, because they did lots of questionable things during the pandemic.

Vaccines: Instead of delivering them to the hot spot communities, you sent them with priority to the people who had the least incidence of COVID-19, the people who are working at home, while front-line workers are out there.

Think about how many people are angry about so many different things in which this pandemic was handled.

They don't want to hear it. That's what this is about. Just be honest about it.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: I listened intently to the member's speech, and he touched on one issue I'd like him to elaborate on.

Several of the government members have said that this is the Wild West and there are no guardrails. But actually, we had legislation that this legislation replaced that dealt with pop-ups—and one of those is before court, as we speak: Vaughan Working Families.

Could the member elaborate a bit on how we actually did have legislation and how that's the legislation that should come back, as opposed to using the "notwithstanding" clause?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thanks for the question.

Look, I said it earlier; we all know this: This government embraces third-party advertising. They absolutely embrace that stuff. They're not getting rid of it; they're just trying to silence it, because they can't control it for the next year. That's all they're doing. That's what this is about. At the end of the day, if they really wanted to take action on third-party advertising, they would take action on it. But all they're doing is trying to protect themselves, because there are a lot of people who are very critical of the way in which they handled this pandemic. That's why we're here, debating in the middle of the night: to protect PC seats.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for one more question.

Mr. John Fraser: Why do you think the government only put up one speaker?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Because they've taken a very difficult-to-defend position. They were probably drawing straws in the back, and only one little straw they had to actually get up and talk to this thing. That's the person who drew it. They got up, and they had to speak to this. Everybody else got dragged out in the middle of the night to defend this, and only one speaker had to do it. I suspect it had to do with the straws that were drawn.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We do have time for another question, a quick one.

Mr. Chris Glover: You've mentioned a couple of times about this bill being misnamed—"defending democracy." It's absolutely the wrong name. It's very Orwellian.

Can you just speak to what the name of this bill should be?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I put it forth, and we even had support from an independent member—I would like to see the name be changed to “protecting and defending PC candidates in the 2022 election.” I think that’s more appropriate for the bill. I hope that the government will actually rename it, because they’re going to pass it anyway. At least be honest about what’s going on.

0620

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the opportunity to rise. I especially appreciate the opportunity to rise after that speech, Mr. Speaker, because what you saw there really highlights just why it is that the NDP never received the support, the respect or the confidence of the people of the province of Ontario. It really highlights why the NDP has become nothing more than a joke and a laughingstock of Ontario politics.

This is a very serious debate. Why are the NDP so opposed to this debate tonight? Because they don’t actually want rules when it comes to third-party spending. One would have to wonder why it is that the NDP don’t want rules when it comes to third-party spending. We can talk about that in a little bit, but for now let’s talk about what it is that this bill does.

Obviously, as the Attorney General talked about, this bill confirms what the courts have said is important. The judgment that was brought forward highlighted the fact that spending limits before an election were important in helping to maintain and ensure healthy, vibrant and fair elections. That was confirmed by the courts. The courts confirmed, of course, that those limits leading up to an election were constitutional—but there is a disagreement with respect to how long that should be.

The NDP want as little as three months when it comes to protecting Ontario elections—as little as three months. They have sat here all night, with the support of the Liberal Party—who we’ll get to in a bit; don’t worry, we’ll get to them—pretending that they care about democracy, but we all know that they don’t. The reason that they don’t, and I’m sure you’ll agree, Mr. Speaker, is because they know they’ll never sit on this side of the House. It’s very easy, when you’re the perennial losers of Ontario elections, to get up in your place and do like the member just did, and make a joke out of the province of Ontario, out of elections, out of keeping elections fair. It’s easy to do that, and we’ve heard that all night.

Mr. Speaker, all night, we’ve not heard about the bill from the members opposite; we’ve heard about everything but the bill. So one can only conclude, because they’re not talking about the bill on such a historic night, that they must obviously agree with it—but they don’t, because they don’t want limits. They are sitting here all night to force us to try to avoid limits. They don’t want to talk about it.

They know, of course, the judgment; they ask about appealing it. They know that there is no law in place right now. That suits the NDP fine, because they can’t win an election fairly, so they want to seize on anything that they can do to try to win an election, even if it’s unfair.

How did the NDP get this way? It’s obvious to me how they got this way. It’s not because they keep losing elections time after time after time. Obviously, with that coalition they had with the Liberals between 2011 and 2014, the only thing they took away from that is that the only way you can win is if you do it unfairly. That’s what the NDP are fighting for here for tonight.

What an ironic circumstance that the NDP have now become the party of big money.

On this side of the House, we’re the party of protecting the people of Ontario, protecting the people who are coming home from work right now. We’re not just doing it by trying to keep elections fair. We’re doing it, of course, by cutting taxes for those very same people who are coming home tonight.

Taxes—when we reduce them, who votes against it? The NDP vote against it all the time. The Liberals vote against it as well because, while the NDP would like to have it for them, the Liberals would like to do who knows what with it.

But we’ll get to the Liberals very soon. We’re going to get to the Liberals soon. I don’t want the Liberals to think that I have forgotten about them, because I haven’t forgotten about the Liberals, Mr. Speaker. I know that you’re saying to yourself, “Why would anybody waste any time with the NDP?” You know they’re not going to win an election. You know the people of the province of Ontario think that they’re a joke. You know that the speeches they’ve given tonight have highlighted it. Their very last speaker spent 10 minutes making a mockery and a joke out of elections in the province of Ontario. Thousands of people fought and died to give us free and fair elections, and he gets up in his place and makes a joke out of it. Why? Because they don’t like spending limits or controls, because they think that the only way they can win—the one lesson they learned from the Liberals is that if it’s not fair, then maybe they stand a chance.

But I’ll tell you what: It’s amazing that the only party in this House that cares about free and fair elections, accountable elections, is the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, the only ones who are prepared to come into this House and fight for those protections, protections that the judgment said were needed, that the judge said were needed and said were constitutional. “No, we don’t agree with the judge,” is what the NDP and the Liberals are saying here tonight. They don’t agree with the judge, because while the judge said that there have to be limits, these two are fighting for no limits.

Look at how frustrated they’re getting because they’ve been caught. They’ve been caught yet again, Mr. Speaker. They say one thing, but they mean something completely different.

Now, the Liberals—let’s talk about the Liberals just for a second, Mr. Speaker. The House leader for the Liberal party wants to know why the Premier didn’t stay. Where the heck is the Liberal leader, Mr. Speaker? Why did the Liberal leader not stand in his place and give a speech in this House against this motion? Do you know why? Because he lost his seat in the last election and doesn’t

have a seat here. That's why the Liberal leader was not here.

What's Steven Del Duca doing, Mr. Speaker? I'll tell you what he's doing. He's sitting in his pool maybe right now, having a pina colada—

Interjection: His illegal pool.

Hon. Paul Calandra: In his illegal pool, a pool that he built in his—colleagues, let's think for a second, if you may. The Liberal leader recently—a vignette came to my head; I hope you don't mind. The Liberal leader's first announcement as Liberal leader, the big daycare plan—you all remember this. He's sitting in his multi-million-dollar mansion in Vaughan, and who comes to the door in the middle of his announcement? "What's going on?" The poor Liberal leader. He's trying to make an announcement on daycare in his multi-million home in Woodbridge. It's the pool guy, coming to clean the Liberal leader's pool in the middle of his first announcement. The very first time he gets to make an announcement, the pool guy happens to come to clean his illegal pool. It's amazing to me.

And this is who the NDP are saddling up next to. This is what has become of the NDP of today. So you ask me, why would anybody pay any attention to them? I don't know, Mr. Speaker, but it's not just me who doesn't pay any attention to them; it is the people of the province of Ontario, the electorate of the province of Ontario, who pay no attention to them. It's almost like they don't exist.

But they do exist when the Liberals need them, Mr. Speaker. They do exist when the Liberals need them. That wonderful coalition you saw here tonight of parties that are obsessed with finding any way of winning an election—is our party focused on protecting Conservative seats? Yes, of course we are, because we want to be on this side of the House and do good things for the people of the province of Ontario. So do you know what we do? We work hard. We campaign. Do you know why? Because the people of Ontario—do you know what they do? It's a fascinating thing.

Interjection.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'm going to help you over there, the member for St. Catharines. It's a fascinating thing. Here's what happens when you campaign and people trust you and they want to have a better province. Here's what happens: They vote for you. And when you get more votes, more trust from the people of the province of Ontario, guess what happens? You win an election and you get to govern.

0630

Now, I know it's a sensation you have never felt. None of you over there have ever felt the sensation of winning an election. It is a wonderful thing when you win an election and you get to govern. It's an awesome responsibility. It is a wonderful responsibility. It's something you have to take seriously. Don't worry; you're never going to have that responsibility. None of you over there will ever have that responsibility. It's more likely that that corrupt party will be sitting over there after the next election than you. It's because the NDP have become more like Liberals than the Liberals. In a million years, I never thought I

would be sitting in this House—in a House; in any House—and the NDP would be the party of big money and big spending in elections.

Look, as a candidate, I can tell you this: As a candidate, I wish the party of big spending and big money maybe had a candidate who could run an election in my riding, an NDP candidate who might actually show up and do something, maybe put up a sign or two or something like that, because when candidates show up it's a good thing for democracy. It doesn't really happen in my riding, so I'm not sure why—well, I guess that is why, colleagues. I guess now we know why they are so interested in protecting big money in elections, why they're so interested in skewing elections in their favour: again, because they've learned the lesson from the Liberals, so good job on the Liberals.

That time between 2011 and 2014—you know that time that I'm talking about. We were on what we would have hoped would have been the tail end of one of the most horrid Liberal governments in the history of the province, but the NDP supported and kept them in power. They were enjoying the fruits of a stretch goal in auto insurance.

Now, we've heard the opposite members talk about auto insurance. Did they hold the Liberals accountable for auto insurance when they had the balance of power? No, no, no. It was a stretch goal. That's all they cared—did they hold the Liberals accountable for the lowest health care spend in the country? No, they did not, Mr. Speaker. Did the NDP hold them accountable for not building long-term-care homes? No, they didn't. What exactly did the NDP accomplish when they held the balance of power between 2011 and 2014?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Higher hydro rates.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes. Yes, you're right. The member is right. So the NDP actually were successful, because we had the highest hydro rates. Taxes went up. Services actually went down, because that's a hallmark of a Liberal-NDP government when they work together.

But what have we said? We have said something completely different. We said, "Look, we have to have fair elections," and we're going to fight to have fair elections.

It's remarkable to hear the Liberals trot out the charter. When I was a federal member, I had to answer questions from Liberals because we didn't celebrate the charter. It was an anniversary of the charter of rights, and they were upset we didn't celebrate it. But what are they here doing today? They're talking down the charter. All of a sudden, the section of the charter that we're actually using today to protect elections in the province of Ontario, they're embarrassed about. They're embarrassed, but they don't want to talk about that—not a chance. And where is the Liberal leader, Mr. Speaker? Where is the Liberal leader? Nowhere to be found.

But I tell you what, Mr. Speaker: We respect the charter. That's why we're here today. We respect elections. That's why we're here today: because we understand how important it is to have fair elections in the province of Ontario; because for 15 years, when these two

worked together, we saw what happens when elections are not fair in the province of Ontario. There is a reason why more money was spent by third parties in the province of Ontario than all other provinces and the federal government combined. We are going to fix that once and for all.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I apologize to the government House leader for interrupting. However, 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 turn back to the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: As much as I'm enjoying listening to myself, I think we can adjourn the debate.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Orders of the day? Government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: No further business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): There being no further business at this time, this House stands in recess until 10:15, when we'll pick up with members' statements prior to question period.

The House recessed from 0635 to 1015.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Good morning, again.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Ms. Jessica Bell: In the early hours of this morning, I spoke to Bill 307. This is the government's bill to invoke the "notwithstanding" clause to override a court decision because it doesn't help them. This government could have chosen a more democratic option and passed new legislation to decide how much third parties can spend before an election, just like every other province—but no, this government chose to reopen the Legislature, debate over the weekend and violate our charter rights by using the "notwithstanding" clause for the first time in Ontario's history.

Residents have told me loud and clear that this should not be the government's priority. Our priority should be about coming up with a safe plan for schools in September, with schools that are as close to normal as possible so our kids can recover the year of learning they have lost; it should be about keeping people housed in safe and affordable homes. In my riding, there are people living in streets, living in parks, and they need homes instead. We should be debating that. We should be helping people who have fallen behind on their rent because they followed public health guidelines and they've lost their job, or their hours have been reduced. We could be reforming the Landlord and Tenant Board right now.

We could be doing a lot of things, but we're not. Instead, we are debating Bill 307, because this bill helps you.

ELECTORAL REFORM

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: We have a responsibility to ensure that our elections remain accessible for everyone who lives in our province and free of outsized influence of big money and special interests.

As much as we admire our American neighbours, I don't want to see this style of election funding in Ontario. That's why we have reconvened the Legislature to debate the Protecting Elections and Defending Democracy Act—so our democracy cannot be held hostage by external forces, special interests, single-issue groups or pop-up organizations who want to use money to manipulate votes.

Section 33 is a clause in the charter and, as such, is embedded in our Constitution. Its inclusion allowed for our Constitution to be repatriated. The charter wouldn't exist without it.

Here is what one Canadian said about the clause:

"It is a way that Legislatures, federal and provincial, have of ensuring that the last word is held by the elected representatives of the people rather than by the courts," and, "I don't fear the notwithstanding clause very much.... I don't think the notwithstanding clause deters very significantly from the excellence of the charter."

Who said those words about section 33? One Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

The people should be the ones who decide the outcomes of elections, in a fair, transparent process.

RÉPONSE À LA COVID-19

M. Guy Bourgouin: Je me lève aujourd'hui pour parler d'une situation inquiétante et urgente qui se passe dans la région de Baie James.

Monsieur le Président, la semaine passée, je m'adressais à la ministre de la Santé sur l'élosion des cas de COVID dans les communautés de la baie James. Une semaine passée, la situation était déjà alarmante, avec 100 cas actifs de COVID dans ces communautés. Moosonee déclarait l'état d'urgence. Quelques jours plus tard, la communauté de Fort Albany suivait les mêmes pas.

Aujourd'hui, je me penche sur la communauté de Kashechewan qui, une semaine passée, voyait seulement un cas positif. Une semaine plus tard, cette communauté compte 133 cas actifs. Kashechewan fait maintenant face à une élosion et à une crise humanitaire.

La communauté de Kashechewan a demandé de l'aide du gouvernement fédéral mais attend toujours cette aide. Cette communauté est en état d'urgence. Elle a besoin d'aide aujourd'hui. Ils n'ont plus le temps d'attendre, monsieur le Président.

Je demande à la ministre de la Santé et au ministre des Affaires autochtones de travailler avec la communauté, de fournir le soutien et les ressources nécessaires, de travailler avec la WAHA. Nous devons nous assurer que

Kashechewan puisse vaincre cette crise et sortir de cette pandémie sans tragédie.

1020

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mrs. Nina Tangri: Vaccines are our ticket out of this pandemic, and religious centres in my riding of Mississauga—Streetsville are stepping up in a big way to ensure that those who want to be vaccinated can get a vaccine as soon as possible.

Last week, the Ismaili community at the Meadowvale Jamatkhana and the Dawoodi Bohras community of the Anjuman-e-Fakhri masjid hosted pop-up clinics at their congregations. First doses were administered to anyone 12-plus, and second doses were administered to those 70-plus or those who had received their first vaccine before April 18. Between these two clinics, nearly 2,000 vaccines were administered, providing additional protection from COVID-19.

Today and tomorrow, the Hindu Heritage Centre of Mississauga is hosting a pop-up clinic at their congregation, and appointments are available for anyone 12-plus to get a first vaccine, or for anyone 70-plus or who had their first dose of the Pfizer vaccine before April 18.

We're making significant progress in vaccinating Ontarians, and hope is on the horizon, in large part due to these organizations stepping up to the plate and volunteering time and resources.

Thank you to all communities showing the true meaning of the Ontario spirit.

I'd also like to take a moment to thank all of our constituents, the Premier, Minister of Health, Solicitor General and our health table for their ongoing work as we safely reopen our province.

GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Mr. Faisal Hassan: The government called us for a midnight sitting, and it has been a long shift for many of us.

But at 2 a.m. in the morning, a personal support worker is making their rounds in a long-term-care home; a taxi driver is picking fares up; a factory worker is trying to stay alert, operating machinery after looking after their children during the day; and a homeless person is praying for their safety and trying to sleep while hungry.

Lots of life happens outside of 9 to 5. In fact, essential front-line workers who have been keeping this province operating during the pandemic work around the clock, seven days a week.

We have found ourselves in a rare night sitting, and I have absolutely no problem with that. My problem—and, clearly, by the public reaction, Ontario's problem—is that this government, under the cover of darkness, like a thief in the night, is trying to take a sledgehammer to our democracy and our Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The hard-working folks of York South—Weston and Ontario want a government that provides real paid sick days, vaccine priorities for hot spots and not just favoured

ridings, real change to the horrors that our elders face in for-profit care, along with health care, and our front line essential workers not having to work two part-time jobs with no benefits to make ends meet.

There are a number of good reasons to debate at this time of night, and I would respectfully suggest to the government that overriding the charter to silence opposing voices is not the urgent, emergency priority needed by the hard-working people of Ontario.

NATURAL GAS

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My riding of Niagara West has one of the greatest value-added agricultural industries in our province, and it is also a rapidly growing area that many people are choosing to make home.

I'm very pleased to announce that, earlier this week, I was able to announce, on behalf of the Minister of Energy, that approximately \$4.295 million has been allocated through phase 2 of the natural gas expansion program to ensure that access to new connections to the natural gas distribution system helps make life more affordable in Niagara West.

Our government is making good on our promise to deliver affordable energy and expand natural gas pipelines to more communities across this province, including in Niagara West. It was a commitment that I promised to work hard on when I ran for election in 2016 as well as re-election in 2018.

Access to natural gas helps more families and businesses find energy savings, while also promoting economic development and job creation across Niagara West.

This particular expansion will account for an estimated 660 new jobs in the region of Niagara.

As part of our government's plan to make life more affordable, I know this government has prioritized distribution across Ontario. This announcement is part of the phase 2 expansion that allocates \$234 million to support approximately 8,750 connections in 43 rural, northern and Indigenous communities.

I'm proud of a government that's making the investments necessary to keep life affordable and ensure that we can move forward together.

GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: We are here because this government has recalled the Legislature to overturn a court order, to silence their many critics.

Overnight, I took part in the debate and suggested much unfinished business here for the government to take on.

The province is still in mourning after the horrific murder of a Muslim family in London in an act of pure hatred. We need real action to stop Islamophobia and all forms of hate, and we need to properly invest in the Anti-Racism Directorate.

Not only do many Indigenous communities in Ontario still lack access to clean drinking water, but the revelation

of a mass grave in BC of 215 Indigenous children at a residential school is beyond words. There must be truth and reconciliation now.

Long-term care is still broken.

We still do not have adequate sick days.

Small businesses are still struggling and need real support.

So many tenants and small landlords need help so people don't lose their homes.

Our schools need adequate investments and a real plan for a safe return to class.

The most at-risk communities need better access to vaccines for second doses.

Real action on insurance is needed, because commercial and auto insurance rates keep going up even though so many businesses have been closed and accidents have been way down.

We need better operational funding for public transit so people don't have to pack on to crowded buses, especially in a pandemic. The list goes on.

We have urgent priorities, but the government overriding the Constitution in a desperate attempt to silence its critics is not one of them.

ORLÉANS BENGALS FOOTBALL CLUB

Mr. Stephen Blais: It would be an understatement to say that the pandemic has wreaked havoc on our society, especially for children. However, in my community of Orléans, a number of individuals have stepped up to help kids in the Orléans Bengals football club get back to normal.

In memory of her late husband, Aldège Sr., who loved watching his grandsons play football for the Orléans Bengals, Bonnie Bellefeuille and her family have made a substantial donation which will ensure that every child can play tackle football for free in 2022.

Christos and Chrysavgi Zigoumis have paid all the operational costs for touch football this year, allowing any boy or girl wishing to play and develop the love for the game that they share to do so without needing to worry about the cost.

Tammy Copp, who has over the years shown that she'll do anything to help kids, is cutting off all of her COVID-19 hair to raise money to purchase footballs and medical supplies.

On learning of these donations, Wendy Charbonneau leapt into action. She immediately purchased over 150 mouthguards for the kids.

In addition to these members of the Orléans Bengals football club, I'd like to also highlight individuals from my alma mater, the University of Ottawa: Geoff Frigon and Guy Levesque. Mr. Frigon launched the Maroons BIPOC bursary, and Mr. Levesque has launched the Samuel de Champlain bursary for graduating Orléans Bengals student athletes.

Because of these caring and generous individuals, this not-for-profit club will survive the pandemic, and more importantly, any child will be able to participate and play

football no matter how COVID-19 has impacted their families.

At times, it takes a village, and I'm proud to rise in the House to express my sincerest thanks and heartfelt gratitude to these individuals.

ECONOMIC REOPENING AND RECOVERY

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Restaurants have been one of the hardest-hit during pandemic. I have spoken to local business owners in my riding of Scarborough–Rouge Park, and most are struggling.

Recently, I visited Eggsmart on Rylander Boulevard in Scarborough–Rouge Park and met with owner Naazir. COVID-19 has impacted businesses, but Naazir and his team stepped up and have been supporting the community during these difficult times.

There is cautious optimism of better days ahead. The province has entered step 1 of its reopening plan. The return of dining out and in-store retail come as Ontario eases its COVID-19 measures, which now allow up to four people per table or entire households to eat together on outdoor patios.

Before the pandemic, Ontario was leading the nation in job creation and made it a priority to reduce red tape for businesses. Now, thanks to the hard work of front-line health care workers and essential workers, we can start rebuilding our beautiful province. Almost 12 million Ontarians have been vaccinated, and more continue to be vaccinated each and every day.

Nothing is more important than the health and well-being of all Ontarians.

To the residents of Scarborough–Rouge Park: Better days are ahead.

1030

UNITY IN THE COMMUNITY

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: I want to take a moment to highlight and honour an organization that is very close to my heart. The Mississauga chapter of Unity in the Community has been holding an annual food drive to support vulnerable individuals and families for many years. Even though this year was much more challenging than previous years, UIC's members and supporters came together to collect several tons of food items to be distributed around Mississauga to those who needed it.

Charity is at the heart of Unity in the Community's mandate, and their mission statement to feed the hungry is a perfect example of what Ontario spirit really means.

In addition to their charitable work, Unity in the Community also provides support to seniors, women and youth, and the people who rely on their services always have a place to go for help.

I want to congratulate Unity in the Community on their exceptional service in Mississauga, and I encourage everyone to learn more about such organizations in their areas

and to even consider joining and helping out if and when you can.

QUESTION PERIOD

ELECTORAL REFORM

Ms. Sara Singh: My question is for the Attorney General.

Speaker, we're here today because the Premier would rather silence his critics than actually listen to them—people like the parents of children with autism, families of long-term-care residents, working people, or even educators.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Where's your leader?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock.

You can't make reference to the absence of any member, for obvious reasons.

I apologize to the member for Brampton Centre.

Please restart the clock.

Ms. Sara Singh: Thank you, Speaker.

The Premier would rather silence his critics than actually listen to them—and as I was saying, this is people like parents of children with autism, families of long-term-care residents, working people in this province, and our educators.

Reasonable governments in Canada have election financing laws that clearly spell out expectations for how third parties will speak out—and every other reasonable government would have sat down with opposition members, worked out reasonable legislation and have been ready to pass that.

My question to the Attorney General: Why is this government so afraid of working together to write normal election financing legislation instead of using the “notwithstanding” clause to silence their critics?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Well, to be clear, we obviously fundamentally disagree with the NDP on this. We know that if the NDP had their way, there would be no rules whatsoever. That is why they worked so hard overnight to try to ensure that there were no rules, no measures of accountability in this system as it is.

They believe—in fact, they made amendments at committee when this bill came before it—that the maximum amount of time should be three months, but we don't. We think that to ensure fair elections in the province of Ontario, we have struck the correct balance, 12 months, with the highest limits in the country. We think it's the appropriate balance.

That is why we're here today—because we think accountability and fairness in our elections is one of the key things that a government can do, and we will stand up for that.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: It isn't just members of the opposition who disagree with what the government is doing; the courts were pretty clear that what they're doing is unconstitutional and undemocratic. We get it; they don't want to respect the courts, nor do they want to respect the people of this province.

But the Attorney General should at least have the decency to explain to the people of this province just what he's doing. After he introduced this legislation on Thursday, he actually hid from the media and didn't answer any questions. He doesn't want to justify to Ontarians why he'll be the first Attorney General in the history of this province to rip up charter rights and muzzle people's freedoms.

Why won't this Attorney General do the right thing and introduce reasonable election financing legislation that respects the courts, respects Ontarians and respects everyone's freedoms and rights?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, to be clear, Mr. Speaker, I think we all know what the judge said in his ruling, that limits with respect to the third-party advertising are important to ensure fair elections in the province of Ontario. The judge confirmed that. The judge also confirmed that putting limits on third-party advertising in the lead-up to an election is constitutional and not against the fundamental rights as guaranteed in the charter.

What we disagree with is with the opposition, who would seem to suggest that having no rules, no limitations and no accountability measures is what's appropriate for the province of Ontario. We saw how damaging that can be in the past, and that is why we are working so hard to ensure that there is accountability in our elections. We think that we have struck the appropriate balance. We know already what the NDP position is because they made that very clear when this bill came to committee. They believe that the maximum amount of time should be three months. We fundamentally disagree with that. We think that we have reached a good balance, and that is why we are here today fighting to ensure those accountability measures, in spite of the fact that the opposition wants no accountability.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: The government has heard from civil liberties experts, from former officials at Elections Ontario through the court case they lost, and from Ontarians that this is simply the wrong thing to do. The judge found that the government couldn't even defend their own arguments, Speaker. So their response is to rip up people's rights during a pandemic and in the dead of the night.

Speaker, it really didn't have to be this way. Instead of silencing their critics leading up to an election, why did this Attorney General not just do his job and actually write better legislation to help protect the people of this province?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Of course, Mr. Speaker, we believe we have done just that. That is why, when the justice made his ruling, he confirmed the fact that monitoring and of course ensuring that there are controls in place

for pre-election spending is justifiable, is important, Mr. Speaker. We were happy with that. That is why, when the justice also confirmed that it is constitutional to do that, we agree with that.

We also heard from the Chief Electoral Officer of the province of Ontario, who insisted that this type of legislation was important. We saw what happened in the years prior to legislation like this coming into place, Mr. Speaker. We just fundamentally disagree with the opposition, who would have no controls in place. That is what they were fighting for last night. To be clear, they were fighting for the system as it is right now, today in the province of Ontario. Our bill will rectify that. We believe in controls; they don't. We believe in limits; they don't. We believe in fairness; they don't. We will always stand up for fair and free elections in the province of Ontario.

PERSONAL SUPPORT WORKERS

Ms. Sara Singh: Just to be clear, what New Democrats have been fighting for is hard-working Ontarians and protecting people's freedom of expression and their charter rights. That's what New Democrats have been fighting for.

Speaker, my next question is to the Premier. On Friday, this government made it clear that they are not going to give PSWs a permanent pay increase. Permanent pay increases are necessary for our front-line heroes, like our PSWs, who have done incredible work throughout this pandemic to protect and care for our loved ones. Speaker, they should be paid fair wages to do that work.

Why is this Premier so unwilling to permanently increase the wages of personal support workers rather than just provide them temporary pay bumps?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Of course, Mr. Speaker, we know how important our PSWs have been to the province of Ontario—not only during the pandemic, but before the pandemic—and how important they will be after the pandemic. That is why we are hiring some 27,000 additional PSWs. We have of course increased the wages for our PSWs. Of course, we're the first government to do that, but we recognized even prior to the pandemic how important this sector was, how important it would be if we were to tackle hallway health care in the province of Ontario. That's why we began the staffing study. That's why we are continuing to make important progress.

I'm very proud of the fact that this government has put in place additional supports for our PSWs. I am somewhat concerned that the opposition has consistently voted against those measures. But despite the opposition voting against those measures, despite them voting against the increases in health care spending, despite them voting against the increases in long-term care, we'll continue to do the right thing for the people of the province of Ontario and invest in those people who have made such a difference in the province of Ontario.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: Personal support workers serve on the front lines of this pandemic. Everyone in this House and in the province knows that this government failed to create an iron ring and protect seniors and workers in long-term care. And for far too long, under both Liberal and Conservative governments, these workers have been overworked and underpaid.

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The Premier has a clear choice. He could be helping to fix our broken home care and long-term-care system, but instead he would rather that we be debating changes to the Election Finances Act.

Speaker, my question to the Premier is, why isn't he ensuring that our front-line health care workers receive a permanent pay increase rather than these temporary band-aid solutions that this government thinks is enough?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Of course, Mr. Speaker, we began reforming the system the day that we took office. As you know, actually, even before we took office, we were seized on the fact that hallway health care had to end in the province of Ontario. We knew that we had to do something with long-term care. Despite the fact that the NDP failed to hold the Liberals accountable when they were in a coalition with them between 2011 and 2014, we knew that we had to do something about it.

That's why we are hiring 28,000 additional PSWs. That's why we are hiring 2,000 new nurses. That's why we are building 30,000 long-term-care beds in the province of Ontario. That is why we were moving to the new system of Ontario health teams, reforming our health care system so that it could work better for the people of the province of Ontario. That is why we have the leading, record levels of investment in health care.

There is more work to be done, for sure, but we are well on our way to fixing the wrongs that were left to us by the previous Liberal government. I'm quite proud of that. There is more work to be done, and I hope the opposition will finally join us.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: We're here today because this government can't get its priorities straight. As millennials like to say, it's pretty suspect that this government would rather use the nuclear option on the Constitution than do what's right and fix working conditions for personal support workers in the province of Ontario.

Our long-term-care homes are still facing staffing shortages. Speaker, 46% of those homes don't actually even provide air conditioning to residents in their rooms. That is a crisis that we should be discussing here.

And we know the part-time hours that these PSWs are receiving are simply not enough for them to build a full-time career. What they need is a permanent pay increase and better wages, to ensure that we can retain them in our long-term-care sector.

Again to the Premier: When is this government going to start doing what's right and give our front-line heroes in health care the permanent pay increase that they deserve?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, Mr. Speaker, I think the only thing that is suspect is that the honourable member and her party, along with the Liberals, have voted against every single one of these measures that we have done to improve working conditions for our PSWs. When we said we were going to increase the amount of PSWs in the system by 28,000, what did they do? They said no. When we said we wanted to hire 2,000 more nurses, what did they do? They said no. When we said we wanted to build 30,000 new long-term-care beds, before the pandemic, during the pandemic and after the pandemic, they said no. When we said we wanted to transition the Ontario health care system to one of Ontario health teams, a blanket of care, what did they say? They said no.

This is typical of the NDP, typical of the Liberal Party. They talk a good game, but when it comes to actually getting things done for the people of the province of Ontario, it has always been a Progressive Conservative government that gets things done for the people of the province of Ontario. I'm proud of that, and we'll continue that.

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier.

Speaker, in the aftermath of the London terror attack, the London Muslim Mosque, the National Council of Canadian Muslims, and Muslim community leaders in London and across the country called for a national action summit on Islamophobia to engage the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal levels of government in dismantling both violent forms of Islamophobia as well as systemic Islamophobia. The leader of the Ontario NDP wrote to the Prime Minister and the Premier to urge support for the summit, and yesterday the federal government announced that the summit would be convened before the end of July.

Aside from passing a non-binding motion early this morning, what concrete and immediate actions will this government take to begin the difficult work of ending Islamophobia in Ontario?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Let me just say that, first and foremost, today, in particular, our thoughts are, of course, with the family and friends of the victims and certainly with the young boy who has suffered an enormous tragedy. And while I can, Mr. Speaker, I thank all the members who paid a truly wonderful tribute yesterday when we returned to this place.

Clearly, there's more work that needs to be done, and I don't think anybody would disagree with that, but we will take our time. We will work with our partners at the federal and municipal levels. We will work with our police forces across the province, as we have been doing since we took office, and quite frankly, as governments in the province of Ontario have been doing for a long time. This is not something that is a Conservative issue, an NDP issue, a Liberal issue; this is something that is a Legislative

Assembly of Ontario issue. This is an issue that is important to all of us, and we will all have to work together to get it right.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, this is a moment of incredible grief and pain for my community. Muslim families are afraid to walk in our streets. Muslim parents are struggling to explain to their children why people hate them and why their families are targeted with anti-Muslim violence. The Muslim community has waited long enough. They need action, not just words.

The motion passed by this Legislature this morning expressed support for the Anti-Racism Directorate. Will this government commit today to restoring the funding that was cut from the Anti-Racism Directorate, and will they commit the additional funding that London organizations like the Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration will urgently require to respond to the long-term trauma that the London Muslim community has experienced?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Solicitor General.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I think all of us were shocked, appalled, frustrated, angry when we heard what happened in London last Sunday. But for this member to continue to suggest that the Anti-Racism Directorate has been cut in any way is completely and utterly false. I want to reassure the members opposite, the members listening and the people of Ontario that the Anti-Racism Directorate continues to do excellent work, continues to offer grants for individuals and organizations who are building exactly what you are asking for, which is to ensure that we get rid of all of this hatred that continues to build in our community, whether it's Islamophobia, whether it's anti-Asian.

The work is happening, the funding has not been cut, and we will continue that work as a government and, I hope, as parliamentarians.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Stan Cho: Good morning. My question this morning is for the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction. Speaker, we know that small businesses are the backbone of our economy, but we also know that they're the beating hearts of our communities. That's the case in thousands of communities throughout our province. And they've been hit hard; however, we have taken our first step on the Roadmap to Reopen.

Yesterday, it was encouraging to see that small businesses were opening and welcoming back patrons in their communities. The feeling of joy, of relief, of hope was palpable in Willowdale, and I know that was the case throughout the rest of our province, Speaker.

With this period being a real struggle for small businesses in Willowdale, it has been a fight, and our government has been there to be with those businesses, in step from the beginning of the pandemic, to help them in

this fight. So I'm hoping, Speaker, through you to the minister—can the minister remind this House the ways the government has supported and continues to support small businesses throughout this very difficult period?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I want to take the opportunity to thank the member for Willowdale not only for his question but also for being a steadfast supporter of small businesses, and working day and night to support the recovery and ensure that they have the supports available.

Since the start of the pandemic, our government has provided supports to small businesses, whether that be in the form of rent relief; whether that be in the form of the main street relief grant, which gave businesses an opportunity to expense the rising costs of PPE that they've faced; whether it be the small business support grant that provides now up to \$40,000 grants to these businesses to help them get back open and help them weather the storm. We've put forward over \$2.9 billion in direct supports to small businesses across the province through this period. We have put forward property tax relief and the energy rebates that total 100% of their costs, to also support them during these very difficult times.

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The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you to the minister for that. It's encouraging to hear that those supports have been there for small businesses. I know it's not just about weathering the storm that is COVID-19, but positioning these businesses for success in the future as well.

That's why our government has also introduced a series of permanent reductions to doing business in the province of Ontario: because we know that when we do reopen this economy, it won't be Ontario against Quebec or Ontario against New York; it will be Ontario against the rest of the world, who will also be competing for that edge, to have job creators root here in our great province.

One of the hardest-hit sectors in this province and in Willowdale has been the restaurant sector. I know that Patrick Lee of Nomé has been incredibly hard hit. We've heard from members opposite: Mustang Sally's in London was very hard hit. We know that Barbara Stevens, who owns a restaurant in Willowdale, has been very hard hit. Speaker, I'm wondering if the minister can explain how this government has helped local businesses, restaurants, during these challenging times and how they can continue to serve our communities.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Once again, thank you to the member opposite. Frankly, I remember the conversation with the member opposite and Barbara Stevens from his riding, who brought up the specific issue with her restaurant with respect to delivery fee costs related to her business through third-party food delivery services.

Mr. Speaker, we were the first government in all of North America to introduce legislation to cap those fees. Not only that, we allowed, through regulation, third-party delivery apps to work with small-business restaurant owners to deliver alcohol through their platforms. That also gave support to this much-needed sector. We allowed

for allowing restaurants and bars to expand outdoor patios for use, to be able to follow public health guidance as well. We're going to do everything we can to support these businesses through this very difficult time, and in the future as well.

EDUCATION

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Premier. Speaker, Ontario's students have been shut out of schools for longer than in any other province. Regional medical officers of health, the Chief Medical Officer of Health, leading experts and now 400 doctors who have signed an open letter all called for the government to prioritize safely reopening schools, yet they remain closed. Worse, the Legislature adjourned without ever seeing a plan for a safe return to schools in September.

Speaker, why is the Premier willing to move heaven and earth to save his own political bacon, but won't lift a finger to ensure our kids get back where they belong, in the classrooms?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Our Premier's commitment is to ensure students return in class in September, where they belong. We're doing so with a plan to get every student 12 and up vaccinated—a double dose—ahead of September; likewise for every education worker in the province of Ontario, from a bus driver to a teacher, an EA and an ECE.

We are firmly committed to ensuring kids return. We know how consequential it is for their development and for their education. It's why we have renewed a \$1.6-billion investment renewing the public health nurses, ensuring asymptomatic testing is in place and, likewise, the enhancement of cleaning of our schools. There's \$1.6 billion allocated, of which \$300 million is to hire more staff and do everything humanly possible, following the best public health advice, to ensure students and staff remain safe. The Chief Medical Officer of Health of this province today has affirmed they have been safe throughout this past year.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Actually, Speaker, the so-called plan that the government talks about is just another attempt to look like they're doing the most, while actually they're doing the least. The independent Financial Accountability Office found that education spending is down \$800,000 from last year. The COVID funding isn't even guaranteed past December, and once again, school boards are being forced to deplete their reserves to make up that difference.

Last year's school plan led to shuttered classrooms, growing case numbers and closed schools. We can't afford more of the same this fall.

This is a Premier who would invoke the "notwithstanding" clause to fight a parking ticket, for goodness' sake.

Again, why won't this Premier use his powers to support students getting safely back to school instead of running roughshod over our charter rights?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The Premier and our government have been firmly committed to ensuring students remain safe. It is why we have put in place a plan with \$1.6 billion of resources, following the best advice of pediatric experts and the Chief Medical Officer of Health throughout this past year. The consequence of that plan is that Ontario has one of the lowest case rates for youth under 20 in Canada. That is not a coincidence; it is because we have put in place a plan which Dr. Jüni, the head of the science table, said is strong and, compared to jurisdictions like the United Kingdom, is actually a very good plan that has kept kids safe.

Looking to September: vaccinations for every student 12 and up, vaccinations—two of them—for every staffer, investments for asymptomatic testing, enhanced screening as well as better cleaning of our schools. We have 96% of schools in Ontario that have realized improvements in air ventilation.

We're going to continue over the summer to get the job done, keep kids safe and get them back to class.

EDUCATION

Mr. Mike Schreiner: My question is for the Premier.

No one is contacting my office about asking the government to use the “notwithstanding” clause to violate their charter rights. But thousands of people are contacting my office, demanding that the government make the necessary investments so children can return safely to in-person learning. Students, parents and educators are especially upset that the Premier's reopening plan said nothing—nothing, Speaker—about reopening schools, and here we are, weeks later, and schools are still not open.

Speaker, through you: Can the Premier explain to the people of this province why the Legislature is having an emergency debate about using the “notwithstanding” clause to undermine their charter rights and the Premier has still not delivered a clear and comprehensive plan to reopen schools safely for everyone?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: This government can do both: We can protect our democracy while investing in quality public education. That is exactly what the government is doing, with a \$1.6-billion allocation for September. It's why we have renewed every resource we've put in place this year, which has helped us lead to having one of the lowest case rates in Canada, right here in Ontario.

We're proud of that, but we know we can continue to improve, which is why we're expanding the efforts to improve air ventilation within our schools over the summer—\$450 million specifically targeting improving over 2,000 projects in Ontario. Over 1,000 schools will realize that benefit.

We're going to continue to support asymptomatic testing—the only province in this country that has that capacity province-wide to deploy wherever it is needed.

We have doubled the public health nurse allocation.

We have a plan for learning loss.

Mental health funding is four times the increase—when compared to the former Liberal government.

We appreciate the learning loss challenges that have arisen, which is why we have an \$85-million plan targeting reading and math, to lift those scores and support students in Ontario.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: With all due respect to the minister, Justice Morgan said that the government's election financing bill is unreasonable and unconstitutional.

The bottom line is, we have two months to go until we need students back in the classroom, and parents want to know, what is the plan? The one thing they have made very clear, along with educators, is that the hybrid model does not work, period. It might save the Premier some money, but it doesn't deliver the quality education our students deserve and our province needs.

Speaker, at the very least, can the minister reassure parents, students and educators today that the hybrid model will not be used in the next year's educational year?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: What we can assure parents is that, unlike the members opposite, we will ensure parents have a choice this September for in-class learning and virtual learning, which we believe, given the unknown nature of this pandemic, is prudent in the coming school year. It should be clear: There are no members in this Legislature other than the Progressive Conservatives who believe in that principle of choice for parents, given the lack of predictability in the context of the pandemic. We think parents benefit from that choice. Almost 25% of parents exercised that choice this year, and they may into the future.

With that said, our commitment is to ensure the in-class experience is safe, stable and more normal for children, which is why we have prioritized students, prioritized education workers—all of them to get double-dosed ahead of September, to maximize the safety of schools. We didn't have that last year, but we provisioned for that this year.

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We made students and staff a priority by giving them expedited access to the vaccine—\$1.6 billion in COVID-19 research, \$85 million in learning loss, and a \$500-million increase in the Grants for Student Needs to ensure school boards are well-resourced to protect students and keep them learning in September.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Stan Cho: Yesterday was a really encouraging day in Willowdale, just driving up and down Yonge Street, seeing the businesses reopen. You could really sense that positive vibe, that people get that hope is really here and that we're finally about to get through this terrible period in our history. It was really nice to see families enjoying meals and drinks on patios.

We're heading in that right direction, but Willowdalers are still anxious to get their second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. I know that our government is working around the clock to find—the most effective vaccination campaign in our history and administer that campaign.

My question is to the Solicitor General. Would the minister please provide an update to this House on the progress our province is making on the COVID-19 vaccine rollout?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you to the member from Willowdale.

It has been a very exciting couple of weeks on the vaccine rollout.

Our government has said from the beginning that we are committed to having one of the most effective immunization campaigns in the country.

By the end of day yesterday, we had surpassed 11 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine given to Ontarians all across Ontario. This success is yet another sign of how effective our government's vaccine plan continues to be as we receive more doses from the federal government.

In order to build off this success, we recently announced the next phase of the vaccine rollout is ahead of schedule. Starting on Monday, which is two days from now, we will be launching accelerated second doses for individuals in public health units where the spread of the Delta variant is a concern.

Our government will continue to work with our partners around the province to ensure Ontarians who want to get fully vaccinated have an opportunity to book that second dose.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Stan Cho: It's very encouraging to hear that over 11 million doses have been administered in our province and we're heading in the right direction.

I still hear from people, not just in Willowdale, but all throughout the province, who have concerns about these new variants. Certainly, the last thing that anybody wants is to have a fourth wave upon us. That's why we know that vaccinations are crucial—because if you're fully vaccinated, you are likely not to need hospitalization, you are likely not to need an ICU bed.

Can the minister provide further details about the impact of Ontario's vaccine rollout?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: It would be my pleasure.

Together with the Ministry of Health and the vaccine task force, we are well on our way to achieving our goal of over 70% of Ontarians vaccinated with at least a first dose and 20% with a second dose.

This important milestone could not have been achieved without the tremendous efforts of our vaccine task force, the Ministry of Health and front-line health care workers coming together to stop the spread of COVID-19. This truly was a Team Ontario effort. We are grateful to all the hard-working public health units, mobile vaccination centres, health care practitioners, community partners—it goes on and on—who are working together to ensure Ontario is vaccinated.

With a consistent supply of vaccines, we are well-positioned for the next phase of our rollout, to make sure that every Ontarian who wants to get a vaccination will have an opportunity to do so.

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Good morning, Speaker. Meegwetch. My question is to the Premier.

Our hearts and our prayers are still with the families and nations of the children found at Kamloops residential school who did not get to return home.

We also heard this week of 104 more children's remains found on the site of a residential school in Brandon, Manitoba.

In light of Ontario's commitment to locate the burial sites of Indigenous children around the province, we have to listen to residential school survivors, family members of those who went to residential schools, and our community members.

Will this government commit to a plan to locate these sites that is Indigenous-led?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Indigenous Affairs.

Hon. Greg Rickford: I appreciate the member's question. I also acknowledge his letter that he sent. While we've generated a response to it, it's important to understand, for the benefit of the member opposite, that many of his ideas, in fact—it's work well under way.

We look forward to supporting, with the full resources of this province in technical expertise and mental health supports—to identify, repatriate and commemorate this horrific tragedy, one of the darkest chapters in the history of this country.

Canadians and the people of Ontario stand shoulder to shoulder with survivors, with their families, and with their communities. We're committed to do this important work with them.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Back to the Premier: Finding and locating our lost children at residential schools is a sacred responsibility for our peoples. This process must be led by First Nation communities and leaders. The approach by Ontario on this matter must be Indigenous-led, community-based, survivor-centric and culturally sensitive. We have experts who can do this.

We must begin immediate and decisive action for the children who are still missing from residential schools across Ontario.

Will Ontario commit to making sure there are resources to locate these burial sites at residential schools across the province?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Again, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the member has acknowledged that Ontario is working towards this. We have done some work with recommendations 71 through 77 that pertain to burial sites.

Truly, I think there is consensus across this country, in every Legislature—speaking to many of my colleagues across the country—that we have to redouble our efforts

to make sure that there are sufficient resources, that this is an Indigenous-led process, that the technical experts will be there to support Indigenous survivors, communities and their families in their efforts to identify, repatriate and commemorate.

There is no question: It is unimaginable in my mind, as a father of two school-aged children, this tragedy.

I can assure the member opposite and all members of this House that as the Minister of Indigenous Affairs and a former signatory to the Indian residential school agreement that we will work with survivors, their families and their communities to make every effort to work through this process.

ELECTORAL REFORM

Mr. Stephen Blais: The government has callously decided to invoke the “notwithstanding” clause to override the courts and restrict fundamental rights protected in the charter. This is now the second time the government has threatened to use the “notwithstanding” clause after losing a court case.

Mr. Speaker, it’s important to remember that the charter protects our rights to speech. It protects our rights to organize and to demonstrate. The charter protects our freedom to pray to whatever god we choose or to not pray at all. It’s these fundamental protections that differentiate Canada from so many other countries around the world.

The government has said that they believe they’ve found a balance in overriding our fundamental rights.

When so many people are under attack for who they are—for their gender, for their sexual orientation, for their religion—why does the government believe that now is the right time to overrule our fundamental rights in the charter?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, I think the reason why we’re so passionate about ensuring that our elections are fair in this province is because it is fundamental to how we progress as a society. Generations of Ontarians, generations of Canadians, have sacrificed so much to make sure that we have the freest country in the world, and it is our job as parliamentarians to ensure that that continues.

I fail to understand how the members opposite cannot appreciate how important it is to ensure that we have fair elections. It is something that the Chief Electoral Officer has asked us to do. The judge, in his ruling, suggested and confirmed that these restrictions are needed. The judge also confirmed that these types of restrictions are not against people’s charter rights.

So what we have done is confirmed a 12-month program, which we think is balanced off by the highest spending limits in the country, which includes the federal spending limits. I think we’ve hit the right balance, and we will continue to do all we can to ensure and improve our electoral system to make it even fairer for the people.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: Mr. Speaker, if the government truly believed in the independence of the court and the ruling of the court, they would not have moved so quickly to overrule the charter. They would have worked to amend our legislation, to find restrictions that would fit within the judicial ruling. But once again, this government has lost a court case, and once again, they’ve moved quickly to undo our rights by implementing the “notwithstanding” clause.

There was a time when Conservatives believed in the authority and respect of an independent judicial system. Prime Minister Mulroney said, “For me, the backbone of our democracy, the strength of our democracy is the independence and confidence of the court system in Canada.” And, “We have one that would rival any in the world.”

If the government truly believes that we have a strong and authoritative and independent court system, why are they choosing to overrule our fundamental rights so quickly after losing their court case?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I don’t think anybody is surprised to hear a member of the Liberal Party trying to seize on an opportunity, on a loophole, on anything to get back to a system that they took so much advantage of beforehand. What is clear to me today, and what has been clear all night by the members of the Liberal Party, is that words simply do not matter and actions do not matter to them. The very instant that they had to set aside the controls that were put in place, they wanted to seize on it, because the Liberals do not want controls; they do not want fair elections. They wanted to try to use every advantage that they could, the way they did for 15 years. So it doesn’t surprise me that the member opposite is voting against and talking against these types of controls.

We will continue to ensure that the elections in Ontario are held fairly, Mr. Speaker, that they are fair to everybody. We will act on the recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario and we will put in place those recommendations that the justice in his ruling confirmed, Mr. Speaker. We will not stop working to make elections fair just because the Liberals can’t win when they are.

CURRICULUM

Mr. Stan Cho: Under the former Liberal government, too many students were failing to meet the provincial math standard. Discovery math was a failed approach that set students back. The curriculum is outdated: 16 years old and disconnected from the skills that young people need today.

This was true until the past week, when the Minister of Education revealed the new grade 9 math curriculum, beginning this September. This builds off the modernized grade 1 to 8 math curriculum he introduced last year. For over a decade, students in Ontario have not been prepared for the jobs of today and for the jobs of the future.

Through you, Speaker, can the minister please share with this Legislature why implementing this curriculum will make a difference for many students in Ontario?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to thank the member from Willowdale for his advocacy for financial literacy and

curriculum modernization in this province. He is absolutely right. For 16 years, the math curriculum in elementary school, grade 1 to 8, and in grade 9, had not been updated, which is, I think, an abdication of leadership for the former government, where they should have ensured the curriculum was aligned with the life and the job skills that young people need. It's no coincidence we have twice the rate of youth unemployment.

We have to ensure that they learn real-life application. It's why Ontario is proud to be the first province in Canada to mandate coding from grade 1 to grade 9. We're very proud to have strengthened financial literacy, creating mandatory learning within the grade 9 curriculum which actually builds upon the knowledge that is now in the grade 1 to 8 curriculum. We are ensuring practical skills. The student learns about the concept of interest, of debt, of savings, of personal budgeting, of paying taxes, of potentially taking a mortgage and paying tuition for life after high school.

Mr. Speaker, this is about ensuring we give young people competitive advantage to seize the potential, get the jobs of tomorrow and ultimately deliver on our commitment to end the former Liberal government's discovery math curriculum.

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

Mr. Stan Cho: As the minister knows, one of the best benefits of this new curriculum is the beginning of the end of streaming in Ontario secondary schools. Streaming is the practice that consistently had adverse impacts on students from historically disadvantaged groups and communities. Youth and families have been making decisions in grade 8 that will determine the career prospects that are open to them in the future—grade 8, Speaker. That sounds entirely unfair to me. This immediately created a divide between students, further disadvantaging them in the applied stream.

With this in mind, Speaker, through you to the minister, can the minister please share with the Legislature how this new math curriculum will be beneficial to all students in our province?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I think it is fair to conclude that the streaming practice in this province had a disproportionate impact on Black, racialized and Indigenous students in the province. Students enrolled in applied courses are four times more likely not to graduate; 33% of students in applied transition to post-secondary education, when compared to 73% in academic. In the Toronto District School Board, Black students represent roughly 12% of the student population, yet they have twice the rate likely to drop out. This is unacceptable.

It is this Progressive Conservative government that is committed to ensuring every single young person is able to achieve their full, God-given potential. That's why we're ending early destreaming to open up the doors for more careers, to create pathways to the skilled trades, to college and university and to good-paying jobs that we know young people can achieve.

We're also ensuring there's additional equity support to support Black, Indigenous and racialized students,

additional access to tutoring, to leadership and graduation and mentorship coaches. We're doing everything possible to ensure they succeed and that we continue to have a modern curriculum that leads young people to success in the economy.

SMALL BUSINESS ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING

Ms. Jill Andrew: My question is to the Premier. Last night, we fought back against the government's plan to use the "notwithstanding" clause to essentially silence critics, silence the very people this government's bills and inaction have hurt the most during this pandemic. Rather than supporting our communities—our small businesses, for instance—the government is prioritizing elections and wealthy donors—wrong priorities.

We're in our first weekend of the step 1 reopening, and many businesses didn't make it, quite frankly, last year, because the government wouldn't fund them. Some businesses, like our Oakwood Hardware run by Anne Sorrenti—that business is hanging on by a thread. Frankly, she has applied for the Ontario small business grant and is waiting and waiting and waiting to get a response. A quote from Anne: Does "the government understand the fear and stress that vague answers like 'Maybe you don't qualify' and 'I can't help you' causes" people?

The question is, will this government ensure she gets her Ontario Small Business Support Grant application so she doesn't have a mental health breakdown and lose her business and we lose a pillar in our community of St. Paul's?

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

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you to the member opposite. Every eligible business that has applied to the small business support grant will receive their funding. We have tripled the support staff on the back end to ensure that we can get through these applications as quick as possible. I would ask the member—and I'm happy to work with the member to look into this specific case as well, to see how we can get the businesses the support that they need.

We understand that this has been a very challenging time. But at the same time, this program has delivered over \$2.9 billion in direct support to those small businesses that have been impacted—up to \$40,000 in a grant, along with the other supports that we asked other businesses to apply for, like the property tax rebate of up to 100%; the energy cost rebates of up to 100%; the Digital Main Street program, the largest investment to help businesses go digital in the history of this country.

I continue to look forward to working with the member opposite to help that business.

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

Ms. Jill Andrew: For the record, Oakwood Hardware absolutely is eligible for the Ontario Small Business

Support Grant, so I look forward to working with the government to ensure that Anne gets her funding ASAP.

Its cousin, the Ontario Tourism and Travel Small Business Support Grant, also leaves out our community museums, our art galleries, among many other integral parts of our community's wellness, business, economy, arts and heritage. The Conservative government's Roadmap to Reopen has left out our art galleries and museum spaces from the Ontario Tourism and Travel Small Business Support Grant. Our art galleries, our museums employ thousands of people, and I'm wondering, isn't safe job creation critical to reopening our economy?

Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Will this government support visual arts in Ontario and outline precise percentage-based capacities for art galleries and museums indoors, and social-distance-based capacities for outdoors, so they can get on with it and reopen and bring great joy and inspiration to our communities? Will the government also properly fund the Community Museum Operating Grant, CMOG, which has not been increased in nearly two decades—

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

Government House leader.

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Hon. Paul Calandra: Honestly, there's a lot to unpack in that question. I think it's a good question. I'll tell you why it's a good question, Mr. Speaker: because the arts and culture sector is responsible for billions of dollars in economic activity in the province of Ontario and is responsible for hundreds of thousands of jobs. It is one of our most important sectors, and that is why, I know, the minister of culture has been working flat out to ensure that as we come out of this pandemic, all of our cultural institutions and our tourism sector are supported.

We learned a lot from the impact of SARS across the province. As Minister MacLeod has said on a number of occasions, those sectors were the first to be hit and they will take the longest to come back. That is why we are initially putting in resources to help that sector. But of course, there's going to be more work to do, because it is such an important sector to our economy. We cannot have a growing economy without a vibrant arts and culture sector. We understand that, so we are going to make sure that it comes back bigger and better and stronger than ever before.

GOVERNMENT FISCAL POLICIES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The next question: the member for Cambridge.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Good morning. My question is for the Premier. A couple of days ago, the Financial Accountability Office released a report on this government's economic and budget outlook from the spring. The report stated that even though the government claimed in its budget that it would be balancing the books by 2030, they are unlikely to do so. The report claims that even in 2030, Ontario will be \$17.8 billion short of a balanced budget as a result of permanent spending that

was created by this government. Does the government have any plan to balance the budget, ever?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance and member for Willowdale.

Mr. Stan Cho: I appreciate that question from the member opposite. It is very important to take the finances here in Ontario seriously and to have a path to balance. I want to start by thanking the Financial Accountability Office for their hard work.

There are two important points here. The first one is to note that both the 2021 budget and the FAO's report take a very long-term view to 2029 and 2030. There is great variability and risk in that long-term fiscal planning, and the 2021 budget recognizes this. I'm going to quote the FAO, who said that the 2021 budget had "sufficient prudence in planned contingency funds combined with the reserve, to keep program spending in line with demand for services over the medium term."

The second point I want to make is that this government has made a commitment to be transparent with the people of this province. We have not missed a single financial reporting period, unlike the past Liberal government, who missed eight of their last 14 reporting periods. We're going to continue to head towards balance and be transparent with the people we serve.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: So it sounds like there is no plan to balance the budget.

Speaker, it wasn't only the Financial Accountability Office who had concerns with this government's budget. Earlier this week, the Fraser Institute released an analysis of this government's most recent budget whereby, even excluding the government spending on COVID-related measures, the report concluded that (1) "Despite criticisms of past governments, the Ford government has generally continued the fiscal policies of the McGuinty and Wynne governments with respect to spending and debt," and (2) "When it comes to spending, deficits, and debt, the evidence clearly shows there's been no significant policy shift accompanying the change in government in Ontario."

Is the Premier proud that he has finally achieved his goal of his government and party becoming an extension of the Liberal governments of the preceding 15 years?

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

Mr. Stan Cho: I remember when the member opposite sat next to me on this side of the House that we talked about the importance of fiscal transparency. I'll remind the member that in our first two years in this government, we cut the Liberal deficit in half, in a very short amount of time, through prudence in spending.

But then, of course, COVID-19 hit us, and the right time to spend is when the people you serve are in harm's way, so I will not apologize for making sure we protect the health and safety of the people of this province.

We will return to balance. We will be transparent with the people of this province, unlike the last Liberal government, who seem to be offended by that very comment of transparency. Speaker, we are returning to

balance. We will communicate with the people of this province every single step of the way.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: My question is for the Premier. In my community, there are significant backlogs in surgeries at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre. Not only that, but the hospital predicts that there will be many additional surgeries needed for all of the people who put off seeing their doctor during the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the need for more health care investment in northern Ontario. Yet this weekend, we aren't talking about health care.

Why is this government invoking the "notwithstanding" clause and hurting our democracy instead of investing in our hospitals?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member will know all of the investments that we've made in health care. When we announced that we were going to increase ICU capacity in the province of Ontario and we started to fund that, she voted against that. When we announced that we were going to move to Ontario health teams and put significant resources and investments into that to make that happen, that member voted against that. When we announced that we were going to hire 28,000 additional PSWs, the member voted against that. When we announced 2,000 new nurses, the member, of course, voted against that as well. When we announced 30,000 long-term-care beds, the member voted against that.

Despite the voting record of the member opposite, we will continue to make important investments in health care in the province of Ontario to really rebuild the system that we inherited from the Liberals that was an absolute disaster, Mr. Speaker. We're making great progress—

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

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Again, my question is for the Premier. For decades, the north has needed more health care investment. Over 100,000 people across northern Ontario do not have a doctor. There was a problem before the pandemic; now the problems are getting worse, not just in northern Ontario but across the province. The Financial Accountability Officer estimated there was a cumulative backlog of elective surgical procedures of nearly 250,000 in March 2021, and this will rise to 420,000 by this September. In their most recent report, they also estimated a cumulative backlog of non-emergent diagnostic procedures of 1.6 million in March 2021, and that it will rise to 2.5 million by September.

These are big numbers. These are big problems. Yet this government has other priorities. Why is this government focused on silencing its own critics instead of doing more to solve Ontario's health care crisis?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, again, I guess I'm surprised because when we came to office, we said we had a commitment to end hallway health care, and we started making important investments before the pandemic. The

member, of course, voted against that. I know the NDP can only focus on one thing at a time, but when you have the responsibility of governing the largest province in the country, one of the largest economies in the country, often you're asked to focus on more than one thing at a time.

When she talks about the surgical backlog, she will of course remember that in the budget tabled by the Minister of Finance, on the recommendation of the Minister of Health and of the Premier, significant resources were put in place to deal with the surgical backlog—significant resources. Now, Mr. Speaker, you may ask me, given that investment, how did the member vote? Well, she joined the rest of her NDP and Liberal colleagues in voting against those recommendations.

But despite that resistance of the opposition, we're going to make those investments and take care of that surgical backlog.

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

Mr. Michael Coteau: This past week has been very overwhelming for Ontarians, particularly people of the Muslim faith. Today marks a week since the tragic event that took place in London, where four people were killed by a terrorist, and we know that today is the funeral.

You talk to people in my community and people across the province—and I'm sure members in this Legislature have had some pretty tough conversations—there's a real sense of fear out there, of sadness; there's anxiety. People are looking at this government and all members of this Legislature for answers.

My question to the minister responsible for anti-racism is this: What plan is the minister going to put in place to address Islamophobia, and what plan is the minister going to put in place to ease some of that fear that people have here in Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Solicitor General.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I must say, I appreciate the member opposite's approach, because I think that collectively we need to deal with this head-on, and we will continue to do that, as a government and, as I've said previously, as parliamentarians and in our communities.

The Anti-Racism Directorate has been doing some excellent work. We have already, in the past years, invested over \$1.6 million over two years to create a new Anti-Racism and Anti-Hate Grant program, and it is to support the government's commitment to collaborate with communities, because we know that this must be community- and organization-led. The Anti-Racism Directorate and our government will support that work through grant programs.

But at the core, we know, and I know you know, that this has to be something that all of us collectively agree must be dealt with as a community, as a government, and as a society.

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

Mr. Michael Coteau: I appreciate the minister's answer, and I'm committed to working with this minister to look for ways to find solutions; I think all of us in the Legislature are.

But five years ago, we put forward a plan here in Ontario, and it was produced by the people of Ontario, because we had a consultation to address Islamophobia, which continues to be the fastest-growing form of hate here in Ontario.

On page 32 of the plan, it does suggest that we engage with community organizations to get ideas, a public education campaign, funding resources, but also to put together an advisory committee, which did exist under the old government and was removed—an advisory committee, five of them to be exact, and one of them to address Islamophobia, which this government removed.

So my question back to the minister is this: Will the minister commit to just taking a look at page 32 of the old directorate plan and commit to putting back the advisory committee to address Islamophobia here in Ontario?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Even during the pandemic, I have to say, the work that the Anti-Racism Directorate has been able to do—to your point—working with communities has been very heartening, because it has been more challenging to engage with those individuals and work with people face to face.

As I've said, even during the pandemic, we've worked with CivicAction, we've worked with the Network for the Advancement of Black Communities, we've worked with the Toronto District School Board, we've worked with the Children's Aid Society of Toronto, we've worked with the Durham District School Board. That work will continue.

What we have done is, we've expanded to ensure that agencies, community organizations that are working on the ground can partner with our government to make sure that we deal with the anti-racism, the Islamophobia—everything that at its core is not what Ontarians and Canadians stand for. We will continue that work, and I know that the member opposite is passionate about it and will assist in that program.

HOUSE Sittings

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader has a point of order; I've already been informed of it.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you, Speaker. Just in accordance with standing order 59, I hope the Speaker will appreciate that although the Speaker will announce when the House does adjourn that we will stay adjourned until Monday, it is our intention to recall the House tomorrow at 1 p.m.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Davenport, I believe, has a point of order.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to correct the record. During my question to the Minister of Education, I mistakenly said that the independent Financial Accountability Office found that education spending is down \$800,000 from last year—of course, I meant \$800 million.

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

There being no further business this morning, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1134 to 1300.

PETITIONS

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I have a petition titled "Fix the Northern Health Travel Grant."

"Whereas the Northern Health Travel Grant is supposed to even the playing field so all Ontarians can get the medical care they need, but it is failing too many northern families;

"Whereas successive Conservative and Liberal governments have let northerners down by failing to make health care accessible in the north;

"Whereas not all costs are covered, and reimbursement amounts are small compared to the actual costs, northern families are forced to pay out of pocket to access health care, which is a barrier for seniors and low-income working families;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fix the Northern Health Travel Grant so we can ensure more people get the care they need, when they need it."

I'll happily sign this petition and send it to the table.

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Faisal Hassan: "Stop Ford's Power Grab.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Premier's use of the 'notwithstanding' clause is a power grab, and a desperate attempt to muzzle families of long-term-care residents, parents of children with autism, teachers and school communities, working people, environmental advocates, and front-line health care workers; and

"Whereas the Premier's priorities are all wrong—he should be focused on long-term care, our children's schools and our struggling hospitals; and

"Whereas people have the right to criticize the Premier's big cuts and bad choices;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to stop the government's attempt to muzzle and silence people."

I agree with this. I want to thank a member of my community, Sam from York South-Weston, and sign it and then send it to the table.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Petitions? Petitions? Orders of the day? The government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: No further business.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There being no further business this afternoon, unless I receive further

official notice, this House stands adjourned until Monday, June 14, at 10:15 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1303.

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Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffier: Trevor Day

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Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports

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Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associé délégué au dossier des Petites Entreprises et de la Réduction des formalités administratives Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
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Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
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