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Mercredi
23 février 2022

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Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 23 February 2022

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 23 février 2022

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FEWER FEES, BETTER SERVICES
ACT, 2022

LOI DE 2022

POUR DE MEILLEURS SERVICES
ET MOINS DE FRAIS

Mrs. Tangri moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 84, An Act to enact two Acts and amend various other Acts / Projet de loi 84, Loi visant à édicter deux lois et à modifier diverses autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the minister care to lead off the debate.

Hon. Nina Tangri: It is my honour to speak in support of the proposed Fewer Fees, Better Services Act, 2022. As the centrepiece of our spring red tape reduction package, this proposed act covers many different areas.

Today's second reading will be shared with the Honourable Vic Fedeli, the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, and the Honourable Kaleed Rasheed, the Associate Minister of Digital Government.

But first, Mr. Speaker, as the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many Ontario small business owners and their staff who have worked so tirelessly these past two years during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Small businesses account for 98% of the more than 400,000 businesses in Ontario, employing nearly 2.4 million people across our province. This government is proud of the hard work they do each and every day. We know you are more than just businesses—you are anchors of your community, providing jobs and creating better futures. We're grateful for the hard work that you have done during these difficult times and we're proud to have provided support and programs to help Ontario small businesses through this challenging period.

I'd like to touch on a few of these programs, Mr. Speaker. One of the ways we are helping small businesses is through the Ontario COVID-19 Small Business Relief Grant. Building on the \$3 billion this government provided last year through the Ontario Small Business Support

Grant, which helped more than 110,000 small businesses across Ontario, we are providing \$10,000 to eligible businesses that were subject to closures under the modified step 2 of the Roadmap to Reopen in January of this year. This grant money is targeted relief for businesses and people impacted by public health measures that were aimed at blunting the spread of the Omicron variant.

A number of eligible businesses have already started receiving their funds, as many applicants from last year's grant program have been pre-screened and did not need to reapply to the new program. Mr. Speaker, we've done this because we don't want to add unnecessary red tape. And on February 9 we opened the portal for newly established and newly eligible small businesses to apply, and it remains open until March 11. I would like to add, Mr. Speaker, that businesses receiving grants can use the funds in whatever way makes the most sense for them, such as paying wages or maintaining inventory.

Mr. Speaker, the pandemic has changed the way many Ontarians now make their purchases. Due to the necessary public health measures put in place to keep people safe and healthy, many people have shifted their buying habits to purchasing more products online. Across Ontario, businesses recognized the importance of having an online presence to remain competitive and expand their reach to new customers in and beyond Ontario.

So, to help small businesses create and enhance their online presence, our government worked with partners to expand the Digital Main Street program dramatically. To date, we have committed more than \$57 million and leveraged over \$56 million from the federal government, bringing the total commitment of this program to over \$114 million. This program has supported more than 21,000 businesses in increasing their online presence, including more than 14,000 businesses and artists to create online stores. Over the next two years, we're extending and enhancing Digital Main Street help an additional 36,000 Ontario businesses.

I'd like to touch on one final example, Mr. Speaker. The COVID pandemic has been particularly hard on our hospitality industry. So, to help support jobs at local restaurants, bars, breweries, wineries and distilleries, we expanded opportunities for alcohol sales across the province. We initially introduced several temporary policy changes, including the sale of alcohol with takeout and delivery orders. We also allowed businesses to extend their patios so that parking spaces could be transformed into additional space used for outdoor dining. I've seen first-hand how this has helped restaurants. A constituent of mine, Maryam Khaleghi, was able to extend her patio, helping her offer

service to customers during a time when patrons could only dine outdoors.

Later, we made it possible for app-based delivery services to work with alcohol retailers to deliver their products. The changes also allowed licensed liquor delivery services to deliver to any private place. And to help these restaurants, bars and other hospitality businesses rebuild and recover, we made these reforms permanent.

I think we can all agree, Mr. Speaker, that these small businesses enrich their local communities, and our government is proud to continue supporting them. Those are just a few of the supports that we have put in place for small businesses in the past few years, Mr. Speaker.

Now I would like to speak about what our government has already accomplished to reduce red tape in our province and how we propose to continue to eliminate unnecessary burdens for businesses and open doors to economic activity under the Fewer Fees, Better Services Act.

The introduction of our bill is timely, as this week marks Red Tape Awareness Week across Canada. When this government first took office, costly and burdensome regulations were squeezing businesses in every economic sector, driving jobs and investment out of Ontario. That's why we made it an urgent priority to remove regulatory roadblocks for businesses and reduce their costs.

Mr. Speaker, I'm so proud to report that across our government, we have taken over 400 actions to cut red tape for businesses. We've made steady progress in our efforts to cut red tape and help Ontario businesses. Over a three-year period, we've managed to reduce the number of regulatory compliance requirements on business by 6.5%. And this government made a commitment to provide Ontario businesses, including not-for-profit organizations and the broader public sector, with a net \$400 million in ongoing savings on their compliance costs by March 2022. So far, we have delivered \$373 million in net annual regulatory compliance cost-savings to businesses, not-for-profits, municipalities, universities and colleges, school boards and hospitals. With the proposed Fewer Fees, Better Services Act, our work continues.

0910

We know Ontario's entrepreneurial spirit will play a vital role in the province's economic recovery, so we're eager to help Ontario entrepreneurs navigate government as they start their new businesses. To help create an environment that will give Ontario entrepreneurs the best conditions to succeed, we have consulted extensively with businesses. They've told us about their frustrations with navigating through many dispersed and disjointed sources of government information. This places an unfair burden on businesses, requiring them to dedicate more time than they can really afford on finding the information and services that they need. Many of these businesses have said they don't know where to begin, and too much information from too many sources can often be overwhelming. They want a business starter pack, a simple, easy place to navigate through the various steps required to open a business.

Businesses have also told us that they want to receive updates from government when relevant information becomes available, because, right now, they don't have time to sort through the endless waves of information out there trying to figure out what is relevant to them.

Businesses have said that when it comes to navigating business requirements for starting and running a business, they often get more help from the business community than they do from government. In short, when we should be helpful, we have put barriers for business to operate in this province, and rather than being seen as a partner in growth, we are often viewed solely as an enforcer. The At Your Service Act, 2022 would, if passed, help us turn into a true partner for business growth.

Right now, businesses, as well as the general public, are not clear on what they can expect from our government from permits and the licensing processes. They may not know how long approvals take and the customer experience isn't always great. The act we're discussing today would give government the authority to create a business service standard list, and this would provide businesses with realistic service standards for some approvals, permits and licences. We would start with a small list and add more services to the single window on a regular basis, with a long-term goal of making all service standards public. The act would also require ministries to comply with service standards and/or guarantees as defined by the legislation.

Service commitments would support job creators starting new businesses by allowing them to open their doors faster. It would create a mechanism for redress, where appropriate, in cases where service guarantees have not been met, and the legislation would set out the framework for ministry reporting requirements because, as businesses know, you can't manage what you can't measure.

Once the legislation is in place to establish the business service standard, its exact content would be determined through regulatory drafting and be based on significant consultations with stakeholder groups, businesses and the general public.

How would we put this into practice? The Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, Vic Fedeli, and myself, with the incredible support of the Ministry of Finance's Ontario Digital Service and my colleague Minister Rasheed, together with Minister Romano from the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services, are proposing to improve and build on existing service standards that impact businesses. We intend to improve service standards and deliver a better online user experience.

As promised in the 2021 Ontario budget, we are proposing to provide a single window for business, an online portal that would make it easier for businesses to access the information and services they need to get up and running, create jobs and grow. An integrated digital experience would make it easier for businesses to access the information and services that they need. This would include a single web portal so they could easily see where in the approval process their applications are. This is a

multi-step process that Minister Rasheed will tell us more about, but I'd like to thank the minister and Minister Fedeli for their incredible work in driving this initiative forward.

This government has always focused on the pocketbook issues of everyday Ontarians. Helping Ontario families further supports Ontario businesses. That attention to the bottom line for families has never been more important as we come out of this pandemic and as we grapple with inflation.

That is why the Ontario government is proposing to eliminate the annual licence plate sticker renewal fee as well as the requirement to have a physical licence plate sticker for passenger vehicles, light-duty trucks, motor-cycles and mopeds. If passed, this will provide financial relief to millions of vehicle owners in Ontario. They would still be required to validate their registration every one or two years, at no cost, to confirm that their automobile insurance is valid. They would also be required to pay any outstanding tolls and other municipal fines.

For vehicles owned by individuals, those people who have already paid their licence plate renewal fees would be refunded for fees paid, retroactive to March of 2020.

I want to thank Minister Mulroney and the Ministry of Transportation for their work on this initiative. This will no doubt put money back into the pockets of Ontarians.

Speaker, after careful consideration, our government is proposing amendments to the Highway 407 East Act, 2012, to remove tolls on highways 412 and 418. If passed, these amendments will bring fairness and financial relief for Durham residents and provide drivers on these highways with travel savings and more predictable travel times. Minister Mulroney, Minister Bethlenfalvy and MPP Lorne Coe have advocated for this for quite some time.

It is also part of the province's plan to help alleviate gridlock across the Durham region and beyond. This plan would offer an alternative transportation route for individuals and businesses in the greater Toronto area, in particular in the Durham region, as well as in Peterborough and adjacent areas.

Drivers may also observe lower vehicle operating costs as their vehicles may move more smoothly at higher speeds with less stop-and-go traffic.

In this era of just-in-time inventory systems, reducing travel times would mean added savings for businesses, and that's good news for the Ontario economy.

When the Towing and Storage Safety and Enforcement Act is proclaimed into force, it will require tow truck operators, tow truck drivers and vehicle storage operators to have a certificate to operate. An amendment to the Licence Appeal Tribunal Act would allow them to appeal decisions about certification through the existing Licence Appeal Tribunal and it would provide for the ability to further appeal Licence Appeal Tribunal decisions to the Divisional Court.

Mr. Speaker, through this bill our government is taking concrete steps to recognize the vital roles of Indigenous communities and service providers much more meaningfully. By modernizing legislation, we propose to remove

barriers and make it easier for government-funded services and supports to be accessed and delivered.

We are proposing amendments to the Child, Youth and Family Services Act to help transform the child and family services sector. Our goal is to provide children, youth and families with services that are community-based, high-quality, culturally appropriate and responsive.

The proposed changes would help address systemic disparities experienced by First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and youth who are involved with the provincial child welfare system. They would enhance access to customary care. They would improve access to culturally appropriate, prevention-focused services, such as circles of supportive persons and other holistic supports, and they would strengthen the role of prevention-focused Indigenous service providers.

Providing access to supports and services that integrate Indigenous cultures, heritages and traditions is a key part of our work to achieve better opportunities and outcomes for First Nations, Inuit and Métis families. Keeping Indigenous children connected to their culture and communities also contributes to community well-being. It grows the economy and reduces costs to government over time. I'd really like to thank Minister McKenna and her entire team for their efforts on this important initiative.

0920

Mr. Speaker, our government is proud to support the mining industry in Ontario. Ontario's mineral production has shown solid growth over the past 10 years, with a total value of \$10.1 billion in 2018 and is forecasted to keep growing a lot in the long term. With the largest value of mineral production in Canada, Ontario offers a wealth of opportunities for producers, suppliers and service providers. In 2018, mining companies in Ontario spent \$583 million on over 200 exploration projects, ranging from prospecting to advanced exploration. In Ontario, we attract more exploration spending and produce more minerals by value than any other jurisdiction in Canada. And on a global level, Ontario ranks among the top 10 regions for exploration spending and production for platinum group metals and nickel.

We want to help this vital industry grow further. That's why this government is working to create further business certainty for the mining industry and improve the timelines related to approvals and authorizations to undertake mining activities. Our government has committed to finding efficiencies for the mining sector to attract global investment, expand the industry and create new jobs.

As part of this commitment, the ministry is proposing to make administrative amendments to fix incorrect or outdated provisions in the Mining Act. These proposed amendments would address gaps that have been identified since the Mining Act was amended through the Supporting People and Businesses Act.

We're also proposing to give renters and owners of mining lands the ability to claim costs reasonably related to Aboriginal consultation efforts when testing for mineral content, ensuring a consistent approach, with eligible costs considered for other programs administered under the

Mining Act. Costs associated with these consultations have been highlighted by the Ontario Mining Association as significant expenditures during exploration activities.

Additional proceeds from the sale of materials for testing could generate revenue that could be used to offset other costs, thereby increasing business certainty. This change would reduce regulatory barriers while maintaining public health and safety and respecting the environment and, of course, treaty rights. Additional proceeds from the sale of these minerals could generate revenue that could be used to offset other costs.

I really want to thank Minister Rickford, our Minister of Indigenous Affairs and Minister of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry, for his advocacy and dedication on both of these proposals.

We are also proposing amendments to The Laurentian University of Sudbury Act that, if passed, would reduce the size of Laurentian University's board of governors from 25 to 16 members. Reducing the board size would create a more efficient and nimble board. It would be better equipped to respond to the immediate challenges that Laurentian is facing and to drive necessary and timely challenges to LU's operations—including the important task ahead of transforming the university.

Mr. Speaker, while real estate is one of the government's greatest resources, we don't always get the greatest possible value from our properties. Taking a government-wide approach would help drive leaner processes and greater efficiencies—and allow the government to realize greater value from government real estate, maximizing the value for taxpayers. This is why we are proposing to establish a centre of realty excellence, or CORE. This would be a single body across the public sector to ensure prudent management of government property and to determine priority surplus properties aligned with key programs, including affordable housing and long-term care.

In addition, while real estate data is currently dispersed and not readily available to the public, our government is proposing to create an online realty portal as a central repository for real estate data for the Ontario public service and broader public service. The portal would be used by both the public and government to identify potential opportunities for collaboration and strategic projects, and to provide more comprehensive options for government on their realty decisions. Although the portal is not included as part of the proposed legislative amendments in this bill, its implementation will help support the objectives of CORE. This government-wide initiative would not be possible without Minister Romano's efforts and leadership on this file.

After two difficult years, the people of Ontario deserve a credible plan for recovery that is based on sound fiscal planning and considers the most recent available information. That's why the government is proposing to amend the Fiscal Sustainability, Transparency and Accountability Act to extend the deadline to release the 2022 budget from March 31, 2022, to April 30, 2022. This would allow the government to introduce the budget at a time when we can assess the effects of the reopening of the economy and

ensure our 2022 budget best reflects the priorities of the people of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide some clarity on several aspects of the proposed Fewer Fees, Better Services Act, 2022. It is my pleasure to invite the Honourable Vic Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, to share more about this important act. He's also going to talk to you about our efforts to eliminate unnecessary red tape and burdens and open doors to economic activity, to ensure that this province is one of the best places in North America to raise a family, work and operate a business.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Thank you very much, Minister. It was absolutely great to see you launch the bill yesterday, and your description of it today was just absolutely perfect. Thank you very much for all the work you've done to bring this red tape bill to the floor of this Legislature for debate. On a personal note, it has been absolutely wonderful to work with you.

Our government here, through this Fewer Fees, Better Services Act, is laying the foundation for certainty and stability in our economy for people, communities and businesses all across the province. Cutting red tape and putting money back into the pockets of families remains a hallmark of our government's mandate. It has since the very beginning. Since day one, we've been relentless in finding ways to make it easier for people and businesses to interact with the government. With this legislation, we will create a business-ready environment for investment, put money back in peoples' pockets and make Ontario the number one choice in North America to raise a family and to operate a business.

The transformative actions taken by this minister to date have resulted in almost \$400 million in net annual savings to businesses. If passed, this act will further support businesses and entrepreneurs, ease the financial burden on people and remove overly complex processes that only serve to frustrate and thwart investment.

As I had the privilege of saying in Minister Tangri's release yesterday, cutting red tape and modernizing our regulatory system remains a top priority for this government. Making it easier to follow the rules and hold the government to clear service standards encourages our incredible entrepreneurs to invest in Ontario and create good jobs.

Some of the proposed changes in the act include cutting costs for millions of Ontario vehicle owners by refunding licence plate sticker renewals paid since March 1, 2020. This puts over a billion dollars back into families and, quite frankly, back into our economy. That's where it belongs.

This bill will provide more flexibility related to provincial assets by creating a centre of realty excellence. This holistic approach across all government-owned properties will ensure priority surplus properties align with key programs, including affordable housing and long-term care. I'll talk about that one in a second.

0930

This will establish a single window for business, which will require service standard guarantees so businesses can track the information they need from this government—more on that one in a minute as well—and it will help to level the playing field for Ontario businesses by changing the government's approach to procurement. The change will strengthen the province's supply chain and help domestic businesses grow and create good-paying jobs. The changes Ontario has made to date are helping us deliver clear and effective rules that promote public health and safeguard the environment, without sacrificing innovation, growth and opportunity.

Speaker, for this centre of realty excellence, I'm going to give you a real example. You've heard me in this Legislature speak about the former OPP station in the city of North Bay—a great example. When I was mayor of the city of North Bay, I joined the previous provincial government in opening a new OPP centre. It's a beautiful, beautiful building. I get to visit it frequently and see the command centre. But I would drive back to my office by the empty OPP building and wonder, "I wonder what they're going to do with that." A couple of years went by and the next thing you know 10 years went by. It cost the government \$1.4 million to leave that building empty. The lawn was cut every summer. The leaves were raked every fall. The driveways were plowed all winter. It's an empty building with smoke coming out of the chimney, empty 24/7, 365 days a year. It turns out there are about 800 buildings like that in the province of Ontario.

What happened? If you go today to that building you will see the former OPP centre is now a 16-unit apartment for formerly homeless people and right beside it, which will open this April, is a \$3-million building attached to it. Down the street is another multi-million-dollar building. Together, those two will have room for 100 low-rent formerly homeless who will be now housed in this. What we say with having this centre of realty excellence is all government-owned properties will make sure that the use is aligned with our key programs, including affordable housing and long-term care. We're not just saying that; in North Bay, we've done that. You can go there today. I met the 16 people who are living in the former OPP station. I met with them just a few weeks ago. And the new multi-million-dollar building that's attached, as I say, will open this spring. It is happening. It's in action. It's not just talk, and that's the beauty of it.

There are a couple of things I wanted to talk about in this. There is not enough time to go through all of it, but I'll talk about three points. The mining amendments: I'm from northern Ontario. I've had a prospector's licence since the 1970s. I can't stand in this Legislature and not talk about mining. Every single red tape act that has come to this Legislature from this government includes mining—every single one. It's beautiful.

This one has a real tie-in for First Nations consultation, that whole important aspect of doing business in the north. We're making First Nations consultation-related costs an eligible expense. We're allowing proponents to recover

additional costs related to the testing of mineral content which were not previously eligible.

Look, we have a transformation happening here in the province of Ontario where an auto industry that was in decline—it was in a drought for 10-plus years, 15 years, and now it is resurging all because of our push into electric vehicles, with our cash behind us, as the people of Ontario are supporting Ford and others, with hundreds of millions of dollars to save those jobs and to put people back at work. This is 100,000 people, and it's all going to now need the minerals of northern Ontario. For the first time in 120 years, the people of northern Ontario are part of the auto sector, and it is absolutely spectacular to have that happen. These few amendments will just help along the way.

Speaker, I could talk about that for the rest of the day, but we're going to talk about the At Your Service Act for a few minutes. We are committed to improving government services for Ontario taxpayers after years of inaction and increased regulation. Right now, businesses as well as the general public are just not clear on what they can expect from government permits and all of these licensing processes. They have no idea how long it's going to take, where they are in the system. And the customer experience, quite frankly, ain't always that great. The act we're discussing today would give government the authority to create a business service standard list. Now you know what you're going to get.

My staff will be upset that I used this word, but it's like Domino's 30 minutes or it's free: You know; you've got some certainty about what you're going to get. This is going to provide business with a realistic service standard for some approvals, permits and licences. We're going to start with a small list, add more services to the single window on a regular basis, with the long-term goal of making all service standards public. Minister Tangri outlined that process. She talked about the ministries that will be involved.

Many have told us that they don't know where to begin, and they get too much information from too many sources and it's overwhelming for them. They want a business starter pack. That's what they want. It's a simple, easy place to navigate through the various steps required to open a business. And that's what we're going to deliver.

Speaker, I want to spend the rest of my time talking about BOBI. BOBI is the building Ontario businesses initiative. BOBI is what people in business in Ontario have been asking for, for a very long time. One of the things we learned throughout this global pandemic was just how very important our domestic supply chain is to the success of our province and to our economy. We need to ensure that local businesses can succeed. The building Ontario business initiative, BOBI—that's all I'm going to call it from now on—will provide companies in Ontario with greater business opportunities through the public procurements, helping them to sell more services, more goods and create jobs in their local communities.

Let me give you a bit of an example of what this is all about, Speaker. Think about where we were at the beginning of the pandemic. We needed masks and gowns, and

all of a sudden we realized we don't make any of this in Ontario anymore. The previous government—I read this in one of my answers yesterday, and I'll paraphrase. In their final—thank God it turned out to be their final—economic report was an announcement. In the first six pages, they said it six times. Basically, they'd thrown the towel in on manufacturing. They gave up on manufacturing. It's there in black and white in their economic report, saying, "We're not going to have much manufacturing in Ontario, but we're really going to beef up the service sector." That's it? The economic engine of Canada all of a sudden is snuffed out? You're turning off the ignition on that engine? You gave up on manufacturing.

We come into a pandemic and we realize, "Wow, we don't make anything." We don't make these masks. We don't make gowns. We don't make face shields. We don't make ventilators. We don't make wipes. We don't make alcohol to make the disinfectant. It turns out we didn't make very much of that at all, if any of it. Then, we learned very shortly, other foreign jurisdictions said, "No, you're not getting our masks either. No, we're not sending our sanitizer to you." All of a sudden, we were looking at a supply chain shortage.

Premier Ford stood up and he called it the Ontario spirit. It was a call to arms. He said to the manufacturers in Ontario, "We need you. Sorry we let you down as a government—the previous government let you down over all of those years and abandoned you—but we need you and we're there to support you." We put \$50 million in the Ontario Together Fund, which helped these manufacturers pivot to make PPE, our protective equipment. So we saw companies make ventilators. We made 10,000 ventilators from scratch in Ontario. Auto companies pivoted to make ventilators to save our lives. Auto companies, again, and auto parts makers and other companies pivoted to make masks, to make gowns, to make face shields, to make the alcohol to make sanitizer, to make the alcohol to make the wipes.

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The very first Ontario Together Fund we did was a company called Virox in Oakville. I remember going down there that morning, driving there from North Bay, making that announcement and driving home. They make a sanitary wipe, a disinfectant wipe. We weren't making them in Ontario. All of these places that we went to—Clorox now makes their disinfectant in Windsor. I toured that plant a couple of weeks ago. If you imagine, we went from zero domestic PPE purchased by the province of Ontario—today, 74% of the PPE the province of Ontario buys is now made domestically, most of it right here in Ontario.

BOBI would require public sector entities to give our Ontario businesses preference when conducting procurement processes for goods and services under the trade thresholds, so we will keep that. We're allowed to do this under our trade agreements around the world. We're allowed; we just have not enacted that. We, this government, will enact BOBI. We've taken a cautious approach that respects all our trade agreements, but we're going to

level the playing field for our Ontario businesses for the first time.

So you're going to see subsequent regulations to be implemented. They're going to outline which businesses are considered to be Ontario businesses—you can't just call yourself an Ontario business; you're going to be making things here—and how those businesses are giving preference. You'll see this soon: which goods and services we're talking about, what is going to be affected and what threshold amount. You're going to see those details. But BOBI is going to encourage the use of local subcontractors, training programs, research and development, and opportunities that will benefit all Ontario businesses, including in the small towns and rural areas of the province.

I've got to tell you, Speaker, it has been a real privilege being Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. Every second I have, we go somewhere. Our team goes somewhere. We tour places. And when I talked about using local subcontractors, we were at a place just a couple of weeks ago that was making a pharmaceutical product. I saw the plastic jugs there that they were loading and filling with their pharmaceuticals. I saw the lids that were getting screwed on, all through this automated system. I said, "Where do you buy the bottles?" "Oh, they come from Ohio."

Well, hang on a second. We have seven companies in Ontario that I have toured alone that make that bottle. Here we go. We're matchmaking with them. "See that lid that you're screwing on? There are companies in Kitchener, Cambridge and Barrie that make that lid. They injection-mould that very lid. You don't need to buy it in the States anymore. You're going to buy it here, and here's their contact."

The other day, we were touring a company that was using a million plastic trays of a certain configuration a year, buying them from the States. We toured a place in Minister Jones's riding that has injection-moulded plastics, that makes that product. In fact, not only do they make the product, they make a biodegradable version of that product. We're doing matchmaking.

So it's not just the province of Ontario, through BOBI, that's going to have a preferential treatment. We're also matchmaking these companies for the subcontractors. It is just a work of art to watch this machine roll, and BOBI is going to help make that happen in a big way.

Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity, I congratulate the minister on an excellent bill, and I hope that we have support across the aisle for this.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I now recognize the Associate Minister of Digital Government.

Hon. Kaleed Rasheed: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of the Fewer Fees, Better Services Act. I also want to thank my colleagues Minister Tangri and Minister Fedeli for bringing this bill forward.

We know that the people of Ontario want to get things done, but we also know that the government can sometimes get in the way. It can slow things down and frustrate progress. I'm proud to support this bill because it will help

aspiring entrepreneurs start businesses and create jobs. With this bill we are revitalizing how the government provides information to job creators. We are building mechanisms to hold the bureaucracy accountable to their service delivery, and we are streamlining processes to empower the people of Ontario and help them succeed.

Minister Fedeli and Minister Tangri have already spoken to how this bill fits into our commitment to make Ontario North America's most business-friendly jurisdiction, but this is so important that I must say something about it too. I want to remind my colleagues that the previous Liberal government passed regulation after regulation year after year for 15 years. They added red tape that hurt people trying to build Ontario. Our province was not open for business. Almost four years ago, our government inherited those problems. We have made steady progress undoing the damage, and this bill is another step in the right direction.

The people of Ontario are ambitious. They work hard and they do what they can to succeed, but for far too long, they had to succeed without the help of their government. That was wrong. That is unacceptable.

Under the leadership of Premier Ford, our government has worked tirelessly to fix the Liberals' mess. From building new roads, hospitals, schools and public transit to protecting our progress combatting COVID-19 and continuing our support of local businesses, we have established a strong track record of building an Ontario that puts people first.

Unlike the former government, who failed to invest in important infrastructure and actually cancelled the infrastructure our province needed—like that gas plant—our government is building the future. Look no further than the nearly \$4 billion we have committed to invest so that people all over Ontario will have access to reliable high-speed Internet by the end of 2025; the \$1.3 billion invested in highway infrastructure to rebuild and restore highways in this province; or, in my riding of Mississauga East–Cooksville, the use of an MZO to enable construction on much-needed long-term-care homes, residential single-detached homes, semi-detached homes, townhouses and apartments to help tackle our province's housing crisis. These are just a few examples of how we are building back Ontario.

We are a government that says yes—yes to building a better future. We want to build a better future for our children, grandchildren and generations to come so they all can thrive right here in this province we all call home.

Above all else, our government is making life easier for the people of Ontario. As the Associate Minister of Digital Government, it is my job to improve customer service across government. The impact of this work cannot be overstated. For example, earlier this month, Minister Calandra and I launched the Long-Term Care Homefinder. The website was developed in-house by my talented team at the Ontario Digital Service alongside the Ministry of Long-Term Care. Together, we are making it easier for prospective residents and their families to find information on long-term-care homes in Ontario. This resource is

something that Ontarians expect and deserve, and we are making it happen. Although this work is only in its first stages, it is already helping drive accountability across the sector.

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As another example, last year the government launched the Verify Ontario app, which made it easier for businesses to check proof of vaccination. Before we launched the app, businesses had to check paper documents, which took almost three times longer to do. By focusing on customer service and user convenience, my team at the Ontario Digital Service made checking vaccination status easier—and it wasn't just the Verify Ontario app. Our COVID screening tools for workers made it easier for businesses to check for COVID symptoms and fulfill mandatory screening requirements. Since its launch in December 2020, there have been over 16 million screenings completed. Mr. Speaker, by not losing sight of those who will be using government services, by focusing on the user's experience and emphasizing customer service, I am absolutely confident that we have increased the success of those health measures.

This approach extends well beyond the government's COVID response. This past November, Minister Romano announced that the people would now get digital reminders to renew their driver's licences and health cards. By expanding renewal reminders to text and email, we are expecting to save nearly \$29 million over the next five years and reducing paper waste. But this work was only possible because of the Ontario Digital Service Notify program which, again, was developed because we understand that getting text or email reminders is more convenient. It's what people want.

Better customer service is saving people time and money, and reducing government waste. Mr. Speaker, Premier Ford is right to remind us that we cannot lose sight of how important customer service is, and I'm honoured to be at the centre of this work. But improving customer service across the Ontario government has not been easy, Mr. Speaker. There are no quick fixes. And that is why the Fewer Fees, Better Services Act is so important, because it is going to make the government more responsive to what people want and what they deserve.

Let me explain. At the core of it, we are doing two things. First, we are requiring that all relevant ministries develop service guarantees and commit to abide by them. This can cover everything from how long it takes for paperwork to be processed after it has been submitted, to letting people know that the government has received their paperwork in the first place.

Second, we are going to hold the government—both ours and future governments—to account. If passed, this bill will require that all ministries with service guarantees track how often they fail to meet those guarantees. And if passed, this bill will also require that those results are posted publicly so the people of Ontario will know where their government needs to do better.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind everyone that this approach is foundational to Premier Ford's way of doing

business. You cannot take the customer, you cannot take the taxpayer and you cannot take the citizen for granted. The people of Ontario have a right to know if the government isn't serving them well, if the government is holding up its end of the bargain. With these new transparency requirements, we are helping citizens stay informed and empowering them to hold the government accountable. And I can't think of anything more Conservative, more on brand for this government than making it easier to hold government to account.

If passed, the single window for business will allow us to do things like create a central hub, taking thousands of pages of content and making them easier to access through a single entry point. Those wanting to start a business wouldn't have to sift through thousands of pages of content across different websites. The single window for business would act as the new front door for entrepreneurs looking to start a business. There will be important features that stakeholders have long asked for, including a start-a-business tool, where budding entrepreneurs can answer just a few questions about the kind of business they are opening and we'll provide them with a customized checklist and steps they need, including permits and what supports are available to them.

I understand how unresponsive government can be, and this is where my team at the Ontario Digital Service comes in. They have been working across government to make life easier for the people of Ontario. They have helped support our pandemic response and create tools for businesses to succeed. I'm extremely proud of my team at the Ontario Digital Service, who have been working around the clock for the last two-plus years, especially during COVID times. I just want to say thank you to my team at the Ontario Digital Service for doing such a great job in making sure that we come out of this pandemic stronger than ever before. So thank you to my team.

Mr. Speaker, in a tech-linked world, people expect connection and convenience to government services. This government understands that need, and my team at the Ontario Digital Service is helping make that happen.

This bill is essential to accomplishing our task of putting the people first and making Ontario the best place possible to do business and a place where government leads by example in offering incredible customer service. Let me be clear about this: With the passage and implementation of this bill, there will be no more mysteries for businesses, but transparency, efficiency and accountability. That is what the entrepreneurial people of Ontario need and deserve.

Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize again that with this act we responded to what we heard from our consultation with the businesses and people of Ontario. To the people of Ontario, I say: We hear you. You said that you wanted faster, better services, and this act delivers.

The service guarantee is just that: A guarantee that the long waits are over, with accountability if delays continue. Customers can't wait for their services, and businesses shouldn't have to wait to bring forward those services.

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Mr. Speaker, the people of Ontario are entrepreneurial. We only need to show them that starting a new career or new service is easy and straightforward, and they will do it. Ontarians want to work and grow their businesses, and we as a government must continue to make it our top priority to build an economy that rewards them for their initiatives and hard work. My team at the Ontario Digital Service is working tirelessly to help make this a reality with best-in-class technology. When this act is fully realized, Ontario will be open for business in a way that it has never been before, and that is why I am proud to speak in support of this Fewer Fees, Better Services Act. Again, I want to thank Minister Tangri and Minister Fedeli for the incredible work they have done, especially in bringing these red tape reduction bills forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): It is now time for a question and response. I look to the member from Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It is really interesting to hear the government spin this bill. One thing that they didn't mention is they have quietly changed the date that the budget has to be tabled. Now remember, Mr. Speaker, it was this government that said they were fully committed to fiscal transparency, fiscal responsibility and making sure that Ontarians have the resources that they needed in a provincial budget by March 31. What did they do in this bill? They changed it to April 30. Why? Because there is an election.

What you are doing to the very people of this province by changing this date arbitrarily in this budget, in this bill is that you are leaving the not-for-profit sector, the public service agencies in the lurch. Once again, this government is showing your true colours. How are you going to support the vulnerable Ontarians who are supported by the not-for-profit sector, ensuring that they have the resources that they need to follow their mandate?

Hon. Nina Tangri: I do want to thank the member opposite for her question, and she's right. The government needs to be transparent, it needs to be responsible and it needs to be fiscally responsible. Ontario has continued to put transparency and accountability to taxpayers first. Even through the height of the pandemic, our government has provided regular fiscal updates. The government is proposing to amend the Fiscal Sustainability, Transparency and Accountability Act to extend this deadline, yes, to April 30, 2022, because this now allows the government to introduce the budget at a time when we can assess the effects of the reopening of the economy and ensure that our 2022 budget really does best reflect all of the priorities for the people of Ontario, and much more accurately.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Kitchener-Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: I want to thank everyone for their presentations through this morning. One of the things that I'm really excited about, to the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction, is this new one-window approach. One thing that I've heard so many times from businesses across the province—I'll use the

commercial fishing sector as a bit of an example just because I know it very well. They fill out six carbon copies—carbon copies, Mr. Speaker—that have to go to all of these different ministries when they unload their catch from the docks. You know, it's 2022. I would assume that the government over the years would have been smart enough to upgrade that, but hasn't until now. So I'd like to hear a little bit about what is being envisioned with this, and how this is actually going to help businesses save time and money to reinvest back into their businesses and their employees.

Hon. Nina Tangri: Once again, I'd like to thank the member from Kitchener–Conestoga. He brings up a very, very good point. Decades of governments past have really just stayed in the past and not looked towards the future on ensuring and making sure that we have a government that's there to serve the people of Ontario. We are committed to being a leader in North America for how easily and quickly businesses can get up and running; they can access all of the tools they need to run their businesses.

It's extremely overwhelming. That was a term we heard time and time again from our businesses. When they want to open a business, when they want to find information, it's just so overwhelming for them to navigate all the different systems and tools, the different ministries, the different permits, the different licences. This is finally coming together to make sure we can make it so much easier for the people of Ontario to get up and running for their business and support our economy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Question and response?

Mr. Gurratan Singh: We know that businesses and people across Ontario are struggling with the rising unaffordability across our province and across our country, and one of the highest costs for both people and businesses is auto insurance. Whether it's the worker who needs their car to get to work every day to put food on their table or whether it's the trucker who goes to work every single day—putting food on our table—car, personal, truck and commercial insurance is devastating people across our province. There are some families who pay more for auto insurance than for their own mortgage. There are some trucking companies who have to shut down because they can't afford the rising cost of car insurance.

Why is the Conservative government siding with billionaire insurance companies instead of standing up for the people of Ontario?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I return to the associate minister for small business and red tape.

Hon. Nina Tangri: I do want to thank the member opposite for his question and concerns regarding insurance right across this province. As somebody who comes from the industry, I understand it extremely well, and it is a very, very complicated product. When we understand insurance, it's where all of us together put money into a pool and pay the claims to those who need it. The unfortunate thing is that auto insurance, over the years—every single part that goes towards making that premium is put together based on the costs associated to pay out claims. The unfortunate thing is costs of claims have risen

significantly. Having said that, there are options that we are looking at, that we're taking. We'll have more coming up in the coming months to make sure that we can find ways to make things much more affordable for the people of Ontario in the insurance sector.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I'll correct my record and add the words “red tape reduction” to make sure that I'm complete and appropriate.

I now turn to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mrs. Robin Martin: I want to thank everyone for their presentations this morning.

While real estate is one of our government's greatest resources, we don't always get the greatest possible value from our properties and, as this government has maintained since the beginning of our mandate, surplus government lands can be better used to serve Ontarians and our communities.

Through you, Speaker, can the minister please explain what steps she is taking—and that the government and consumer services minister, as well, is taking—to leverage Ontario's real estate portfolio?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I return to the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction.

Hon. Nina Tangri: I do want to thank the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for her question. She's absolutely right. While there is value that could be unlocked from upcycling surplus public assets, such as long-term care and affordable housing, the process is really mired in red tape and unnecessary bureaucracy.

The bill will require the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services to create a centre of realty excellence, what we're calling CORE. Within MGCS, CORE will create one holistic sightline right across our public sector so that we have prudent management of government property and to determine priority surplus properties that are aligned, so that we can get that affordable housing that Minister Fedeli spoke about earlier, so we can get the long-term-care homes that Minister Calandra has spoken about so many times in this House. We are getting them built, and this will be another tool to do it much faster for the people of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from York South–Weston.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I would like to thank the government presentation here with regard to Bill 84, entitled Fewer Fees, Better Services Act. We know, Mr. Speaker, that this government has been cutting services when it comes to small businesses, and small businesses have been struggling. In my community, many of them are closing down, like Wiff, like Perfect Blend. These are businesses run by women and racialized folks, and they haven't been receiving any support.

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My colleague from Brampton East talked about the impact of auto insurance on families and issues of affordability. I want to ask how this bill is going to help those folks, especially in those communities that are affected because of their postal codes when it comes to auto

insurance. Will it be reduced 50% or are you going to ban it altogether?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I return to the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction.

Hon. Nina Tangri: Well done, Speaker. Thank you. I'd like to thank the member opposite for his question.

It is so understandable that across the province, in many communities more so than others, insurance has become extremely expensive. I do want to take a moment to thank the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, who is sitting here, and the previous parliamentary assistants, who have worked diligently since the day we were elected to make sure that we can find ways to make it more affordable for the people of Ontario.

Just through the pandemic, we were able to change a regulation within the industry to ensure that insurance companies refunded policy holders' premiums, because they were not driving the way they did in the past. We made sure that they did that, because they were using that as an excuse to not have to refund. But do you know what? They also stepped up. They made sure that they were—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Thank you.

Further debate? For the lead for the official opposition, I recognize the member for Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I realize I only have a couple of minutes to set the tone for our critique of this bill. I want to thank the government for giving me so much material to work with in that regard.

I want to say very clearly to the government that the affordability language and the costs that are happening right now for folks in Ontario—those cost pressures are so very real. If you are a strong caseworker MPP, if you're in touch with the people who are coming into your office on housing, on child care, on energy costs or on transit costs, you will see very clearly that this bill is yet another missed opportunity for this government, particularly on the issue of tolls.

I just want to raise this quickly, because I know I have so little time—I will expand on it this afternoon when I have a full hour. But what the government said yesterday, that they were removing tolls, is ironic, Mr. Speaker, because contained within the legislation, the tolls are only removed until May 2023. Had the government really done your due diligence, done your work in recognition of this collaboration that you sometimes talk about, you would have employed and put into play the member from Oshawa's bill, which truly removes those tolls.

There's a little bit of a shell game happening here with the government. You've really exposed yourselves, which obviously is going to be a lot of fun for me later on this afternoon, especially with regard to changing the budget date. "Fiscal transparency," "fiscal responsibility" and all these buzz words that the Premier in particular likes to use really are exposed fully for the people of this province to see your true colours: red tape, blue tape, and for some of us we like to call it yellow tape, around a caution.

I do want to say, particularly for those public agencies that are really counting on the budget, really counting on

funding from the government, that, as the FAO has reported, you have underfunded services. You have stockpiled money that was given to this government to use for pandemic purposes. The Financial Accountability Officer's report that you underspent by \$1 billion in a health and economic crisis truly exposes your real priorities. Changing the budget bill and employing pandemic money for an election is probably one of the lowest things that I have ever seen in this House, because at the end of the day, people's lives were in play.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Seeing the clock is at 10:15, it is now time for members' statements.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): The member from Waterloo will be able to resume her debate at a later time.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

KINGSTON INTEGRATED CARE HUB

Mr. Ian Arthur: I wish today to draw attention to the combined tragedy of the housing and opioid crises that are unfolding in Kingston right now, each made more acute by the pandemic. We have few lines of defence against the outcomes of these epidemics, but one of them that is particularly important is the integrated care hub.

This hub, although stretched for resources, provides essential support for our most vulnerable. It is, though, provincially funded, and we are awaiting the announcement from the province of funding that will allow it to continue its essential work—and it is essential work, Speaker. It serves those who have the most complex needs, and its services alleviate our already threadbare emergency services in Kingston.

I would like to share parts of a letter from a harm reduction worker who works at the ICH. They say, "From March to December 2020 the rate of opioid-related deaths in KFL&A ... averaged" 20 "per 100,000, exceeding the" provincial average of 17. These figures are with the ICH open and operating 23 hours a day, seven days a week, for almost two years. Without the ICH, we can expect overdose deaths to explode and overtake the rates reported by every other public health unit in Ontario.

The ICH was never intended to be a permanent solution, but it is underfunded and precarious and we need it supported. We need the province to step up, support the most vulnerable and provide permanent funding for the integrated care hub.

THE MIKEY NETWORK

Mr. Deepak Anand: Mr. Speaker, every year 35,000 Canadians experience cardiac arrest in public spaces and in their homes. Unfortunately, some do not survive. It is important to note that if they had access to an automated external defibrillator—an AED—or CPR, their survival rate would have been doubled.

In 2002, Mikey Salem, a family man cherished by many, was enjoying golf in beautiful Muskoka when his heart skipped a beat. Far away from help, Mikey passed away. To ensure similar people affected by sudden cardiac arrests have a second chance at life, Heathwood and Herity launched the Mikey Network organization.

Since 2003, the Mikey Network has installed 2,700 AEDs in high-risk locations in Ontario, including schools, police stations and GO trains, and has provided CPR training to over 1,300 people. By using AEDs, or “Mikeys,” survival rates are increased by up to 50% and, as a result, 47 lives have been saved to date.

I want to say thank you to the management of Malton Masjid for informing me about the organization and for your hard work to arrange an AED for the safety and well-being of our community. I’d also like to extend my sincere gratitude and thanks to Hugh Heron, Morty Henkle and the entire Mikey Network team for your determination, compassion and contributions. Your organization exemplifies the true Ontario spirit. Thank you for saving lives.

To learn more, my colleagues can visit www.mikeynetwork.com—because when hearts stop beating, Mikeys save lives.

GOVERNMENT’S RECORD

Mr. Wayne Gates: I rise today with a question for the people of Niagara and all Ontario: Is life more affordable today than it was four years ago?

Four years ago, we heard the newly elected Conservative government make lots of promises regarding affordability. What happened?

Four years ago, the government said that they would lower hydro rates by 12%. They’ve actually gone up 5%.

This government promised to cut gas prices by ten cents a litre. In Niagara Falls this weekend, it was over \$1.50 a litre. That’s a 30- to 50-cent increase per litre over four years.

Buying a home in Ontario and Niagara is out of reach for most people. The median price for a home in Niagara has increased by 33% in four years. What cost \$381,000 is now \$717,000. The rental market has skyrocketed. The average cost of a one-bedroom in Niagara Falls is \$1,400 a month, a 17% increase in one year—and this government cut rent control measures.

Child care in Toronto is upwards of \$2,000 a month, yet this government won’t sign the deal for \$10-a-day child care.

While inflation rose 6% this month alone, the Conservatives refused to repeal Bill 124, which caps the wages of nurses and other workers at 1%.

But you know who the Conservatives made sure were taken care of? Multinational corporations; billionaires who made record profits during the pandemic; companies like Walmart, Amazon, Loblaws. For-profit long-term-care operators were taken care of while 4,000 seniors died from COVID in their facilities.

In 100 days from today we can change this. There’s a provincial election. We can elect a government that will

make decisions that make life more affordable for all of us, not just the Conservative government’s wealthy friends.
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SCHOOL EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Mr. Aris Babikian: On November 30, 2021, I joined Ms. Lee Soda, Agincourt Community Services Association’s—ACSA for short—executive director and the staff to make a \$369,600 funding announcement to Scarborough–Agincourt students for the after-school programs to support safe and supervised activities for students during the school year in priority neighborhoods across our community.

The program helps kids stay active and engaged, improves academic performance and encourages leadership skills through activities such as sports, recreation and physical activities, personal wellness, anti-bullying, nutrition education and Internet safety. Students in 10 Scarborough–Agincourt schools will benefit from this timely funding.

This funding announcement for Scarborough–Agincourt schools is part of our government investment of \$13.5 million through Ontario’s After-School Program to support 110 organizations that provide activities for children living in high-priority neighbourhoods across the province.

ACSA is the worthy recipient of this funding, which helps 45 families in each school to fulfill their potential and live a healthy life. ACSA has been a pioneer in serving our community, especially during these challenging times. Their staff have been at the forefront of reaching out to our most needy families, residents and seniors. We are fortunate to have such a dedicated organization and team to make our community a better place to live, work and raise a family.

INJURED WORKERS

Mr. Jamie West: Speaker, today I want to talk about Jim Hobbs. Jim was a steelworker and a hard-rock miner. Mining helped Jim provide for his family. It helped him to ensure that his four kids could finish post-secondary.

Unfortunately for Jim, like 25,000 Ontario mine workers, he was forced to breathe finely ground aluminum dust known as McIntyre Powder. It wasn’t optional; this was a condition of Jim’s employment. It was, “Breathe it or get fired.”

Before each shift, they would seal the doors of the dry room, the change room, closed. They would turn off the ventilation and they would pump a grey mist of fine aluminum into the air and encourage the miners: “Breathe deep, boys. This will coat your lungs. This will protect you from harm.”

McIntyre Powder was an unproven medical treatment. As early as 1946, international medical and scientific communities warned of potential harm to miners’ health. Despite those warnings, it was forced on Ontario miners

until 1990. It was used with the full knowledge and sanctioning of the government of Ontario. It was supported by the Ontario Department of Health and the Workers' Compensation Board. The only Ontario study completed on these miners found statistically significant cognitive decline in McIntyre Powder-exposed miners.

In 2001, Jim was diagnosed with Parkinson's. He died May 24, 2017.

But Jim wasn't the only miner forced to walk into a cloud of aluminum dust. Jim wasn't the only miner told to breathe deeply. Jim was one of 25,000 Ontario mine workers forced to breathe aluminum dust, and no one has ever officially acknowledged or apologized for locking miners in rooms and forcing them to inhale metal or lose their jobs.

The remaining miners are elderly and they're health-compromised. Many are dying. Many, like Jim, are already deceased. But all of them deserve an apology for what happened to them.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Roman Baber: Speaker, I first saw the charter, a few months after we immigrated to Canada, on a wall, hanging by the elevator in the North York Central Library. I loved it from day one, which is why I'm blessed to guest-lecture on it and defend it in this House.

Canada's charter is magnificent—because it doesn't just enshrine our rights subject to reasonable limits. The charter is all-Canadian because it protects Canada's pluralism, Canada's diversity and Canada's freedom of choice.

That's why I and many Canadians condemn the blatant assault on our charter by Justin Trudeau's declaration of emergency. One may disagree with the protesters' opinions, but the charter says they have the right to assemble. The alleged infractions may be dealt with by municipal, traffic or criminal laws.

Canadians are frightened that they may be doxxed or financially ruined. Canada is the talk of the world. Our country is not recognizable. The declaration of the emergency is not rooted in fact, since the situation is resolved. It's not supported in law, since there is no danger to lives and safety, since it could be resolved by the province and may be dealt with by other laws of Canada. This is about Justin Trudeau's ego in politics, because the science does not support him on the mandates. And no one even talks about the virus anymore.

This is all a distraction: a distraction from the failure of lockdowns, passports and mandates; a distraction from the mental health pandemic; a distraction from the last two years at the expense of our democracy. It must be condemned, and it must be opposed.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Will Bouma: I am absolutely thrilled to announce that recently, in my riding of Brantford–Brant, Minister Calandra and I were able to announce that our government is adding 59 new and 69 upgraded long-term-care beds to

modernize and expand Hardy Terrace in Mount Pleasant, and adding 83 new and 45 upgraded long-term-care beds to a new building for Telfer Place in Paris. This is part of the government's \$6.4-billion commitment to build more than 30,000 net new long-term-care beds by 2028 and 28,000 upgraded long-term-care beds across the province.

The project at Hardy Terrace in Mount Pleasant adds new and upgraded long-term-care beds through a renovation to the existing home. The home will have a total of 160 long-term-care beds after the renovation is complete. Hardy Terrace will continue to offer specialized services, be part of a campus of care, and has proposed to provide cultural services to the Sikh community.

The project at Telfer Place in Paris involves a brand new building for the existing home. Telfer Place will have a total of 128 long-term-care beds once the new building is complete. The home has proposed to continue current volunteer-based partnerships and collaborations with social, emotional, spiritual and physical service groups to continue supporting resident needs.

Construction of both homes is expected to start by spring 2024. There are now 266 new and 318 long-term-care beds in development, under construction, or completed in Brantford–Brant. Speaker, this is welcome news for my residents.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Kevin Yarde: It's an honour to rise here on behalf of the great people of Brampton North—as a matter of fact, of the great people of all of Ontario—as we continue to celebrate Black History Month.

I was honoured to be a guest speaker at one of the events in Brampton, the 21st annual Black History Month Concert. I want to thank the United Achievers' Club and the Congress of Black Women, Brampton chapter. In particular, I want to thank Marjorie Taylor, who organized the event. While we missed the opportunity to be together in person because of COVID, we still had a great time enjoying and learning all about the great achievements of Black people, not just in Brampton but right across Ontario and Canada.

Our province, as we all know, is home to many vibrant Black people in Ontario and many communities that are vibrant in Ontario. Ontario could not be the province it is today without the strong, dynamic Black leadership at the provincial and municipal levels. To our Black communities across the province, I want you to know that the Black caucus and the official opposition, we see you, we hear you and we'll continue to fight for justice for you. From education to health care to justice, we will be looking at every aspect of political life through the Black lens.

This year's theme for Black History Month is "February and Forever." What does that mean? It means that we're going to celebrate Black history not just today, not tomorrow, but every single day of the year.

And of course, Mr. Speaker, I have to talk quickly about the elephant in the room: We still have anti-Black racism. We'll continue to fight anti-Black racism in all its forms,

and I ask everyone to join me, regardless of what colour we are.

HIGHWAY TOLLS

Mr. Lorne Coe: There's more good news for region of Durham residents. Last Friday, our government announced that it's restoring fairness and cutting costs for drivers and businesses in Durham by permanently removing the tolls on Highways 412 and 418, effective April 5, 2022.

We've heard the people of Durham loud and clear, and we agree that the tolls imposed on Highways 412 and 418 by the previous government are wrong and unfair. That's why we're removing the tolls on these highways, so that people and businesses have more travel options and hard-earned money in their pockets.

Speaker, the previous government unfairly targeted drivers and businesses in Durham region by imposing tolls on Highways 412 and 418, leaving them underutilized while local streets became increasingly gridlocked. When the previous government imposed these unjust road tolls, they placed a financial burden on drivers and families in Durham region, including my riding of Whitby. By delivering on our commitment to remove these tolls, our government is fighting gridlock while supporting, once again, hard-working families in the region of Durham.

1030

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

REPORT, FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that the following document has been tabled: a report entitled Ontario's Labour Market in 2021, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I will now ask our legislative pages to assemble.

It is my honour and pleasure to introduce this group of legislative pages: from the riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, Leah Elder; from the riding of Barrie-Innisfil, Pania Ghaneian; from the riding of Kitchener-Conestoga, Maverick Harris; from the riding of Hamilton Mountain, Daunte Hillen; from the riding of Scarborough Southwest, Tanisha Hossain; from the riding of York Centre, Elya Keren-Sagiv; from the riding of Etobicoke-Lakeshore, Julia Markson; from the riding of Waterloo, Zane McKinnon; from the riding of Dufferin-Caledon, Morgan Scholz; from the riding of Essex, Benjamin Selmi; from the riding of Willowdale, Owen Shen; from the riding of Etobicoke Centre, Kristian Tanuwidjaja; and from the riding of Richmond Hill, Lucia Wei. Thank you very much.

Applause.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Before I invite oral questions, I am also pleased to inform the House that page Julia Markson, from the riding of Etobicoke-Lakeshore, is today's page captain. We have with us today in the House her parents: her mother, Alicia Markson, and her father, Joseph Markson. Welcome to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. We are delighted to have you here.

It is now time for oral questions.

QUESTION PERIOD

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question this morning is for the Premier. Thunder Bay got some pretty devastating news yesterday. Alstom is laying off the bulk of the 400 remaining workers at that plant, just as the cost of living is skyrocketing and folks are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet. At its peak, this manufacturing plant was employing more than 1,200 workers. Those were good, Unifor union jobs, manufacturing jobs, jobs that paid the bills, jobs that supported families and put food on the table.

The Premier was there in August. He was there in Thunder Bay just six months ago and made empty promises to those workers about future jobs. The layoffs mean that this plant is now downsizing to just 75 workers, Speaker. These Unifor members will be out of work for—four months? Six months? A year? Who knows?

My question is, why is this Premier doing nothing—nothing at all—to save these good, Unifor manufacturing jobs in Thunder Bay?

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

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition is correct. I was there, unlike herself, who hasn't showed up there. I was there a few times, actually, speaking to the front-line workers, speaking to the CEO of Alstom, making sure that they're going to secure those jobs.

I'll tell you what we have done as a province, Mr. Speaker. We have invested in transit. We invested \$171 million to refurbish 94 GO Transit bi-level rail cars. On top of that, we invested \$180 million to help fund the purchase of 60 new TTC streetcars.

Mr. Speaker, there's no government in the history of this province that invested more into infrastructure, more into transit than this government has. For the first time ever, we're putting \$29 billion into the largest transit project in North America, making sure that we build subways.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The workers in Thunder Bay need action, not talk, from this Premier. The government knew, this Premier knew that those layoffs were coming. Unifor president Dominic Pasqualino wrote the PCs just

last weekend with a plan to save these jobs: “Management and the union have worked together harmoniously through some very challenging times. Some of these challenges are completely out of our hands, such as COVID, but the lack of orders”—that’s orders from this government, Speaker—“is something that the provincial government does have a say in.”

The Unifor workers are asking the province to step up with much-needed passenger rail vehicles to be manufactured here in Ontario, in Thunder Bay. Why won’t this Premier commit to Thunder Bay and save these good manufacturing jobs? Why will he not?

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

Hon. Stan Cho: This pandemic has been very hard on all Ontarians, and this of course includes the great people of Thunder Bay. We understand that these layoffs are temporary in nature and the result of a massive work order being completed at the facility.

We are proud to sustain jobs at the Thunder Bay plant for the next several years—a series of measures that the Premier just outlined. And if it weren’t for Ontario’s order to Alstom in the Thunder Bay facility, those doors would have been shuttered permanently.

This is the tip of the iceberg on what we are going to see in Toronto in terms of growth, however—a population that is booming, unprecedented investments into transportation and transit. We’re going make sure that we keep those work orders flowing as well as the good order work repairs of \$5 billion with the city of Toronto. We are positive that we will see days of prosperity in Ontario and Thunder Bay shortly.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: These workers need these jobs to pay their bills now, to feed their families now, to pay their mortgages right now. But they are not going to be able to keep their jobs because this government refuses to step up. And more than that: More than just their jobs, they know that Thunder Bay needs to have solid manufacturing facilities in their community for the future and the well-being of that community writ large. In fact, Unifor Local president Pasqualino said this: “If we lose this Alstom facility it becomes harder to attract new manufacturing industries to the district.”

Now, this is an old story for northern communities like Thunder Bay. This Premier might not know it, but we saw what happened when the forestry industry went for a dive. It really impacted Thunder Bay. We need to save these manufacturing jobs, Speaker. Six months ago the Premier was there, and he said he was going to “make sure anything bought in Ontario should be produced in Ontario.” Why is this Premier so unwilling to make sure that happens in Thunder Bay?

Hon. Stan Cho: I want to remind the people of Ontario that it was the opposition, with the Liberals, that saw hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs leave this province to other jurisdictions. This government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, is bringing those jobs back.

And how are we doing it? By unprecedented growth, by investments into transit—\$5 billion to flow to the existing TTC network in state of good repair. We signed a deal with the city of Toronto in 2019 that set the stage for the city to build more orders in Thunder Bay. Some \$29 billion in investments into transit expansion: This is the first time that’s happened in decades, Speaker.

Thunder Bay will be busy. We understand these temporary layoffs of the workers are done for work to be completed at the facility, to retool, to keep up with that unprecedented demand. We are going to get on the path to prosperity in the province of Ontario, and it’s no thanks to the opposition and the leader of the NDP.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier.

Ontarians know very well that we need to fix our health care system, our hospital system. Surgical backlogs have grown significantly. In fact, the FAO estimated quite some time ago—before the Omicron wave, as a matter of fact—that there was a 400,000-person wait-list for surgeries. Now, the numbers are such that it’s up to a million; up to a million people are waiting for surgeries in our province with stress, with anxiety, with their physical well-being deteriorating day by day. This government has not invested in our hospitals to clear these wait-lists and these substantial backlogs.

1040

The Ontario Hospital Association and others have some solutions. My question is, will this Premier start listening to the solutions that the Ontario Hospital Association and others are bringing to the table and take action on the million backlogged surgeries that people are waiting for in Ontario?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member opposite for the question, because I know this is something that many Ontarians are very concerned about, and I really appreciate the opportunity to reply.

We know that because of directive 2, where we had to postpone surgeries, many Ontarians have been waiting for orthopaedic surgeries, some cancer surgeries, some cardiac surgeries. And we are responding. We have made an investment of over \$5.1 billion to create over 3,100 more beds in our system, which was left lacking by the previous government. We have built those beds not just to deal with COVID, but to deal with the surgeries that have been postponed or delayed as a result of directive 2.

We’ve also invested, from our \$1.8-billion investment into the hospital sector, \$300 million, added to \$200 million from last fall—\$500 million—to allow for more surgeries to happen both in the evenings and on weekends so that we can catch up.

That is what we’re doing to create the scenario necessary. We’ve also lifted directive 2 so that hospitals

can now go up to 90% of their surgeries that went back to 2019. We are working on—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In fact, the Ontario Hospital Association has some pretty solid recommendations that will fix our hospital system, and New Democrats support those solutions. I'm going to mention a few of them: hiring tens of thousands of nurses, that's one of the solutions; resources to reduce massive surgery backlogs; turning additional bed capacity that was built up in COVID into permanent spaces for patients in Ontario.

There's no doubt that this government hasn't been listening. In fact, the Financial Accountability Officer revealed that Premier Ford is planning to axe thousands of beds that we put in place for the pandemic.

The question I have for this Premier is, will he reverse course? Will he listen to the Ontario Hospital Association and so many others and fix the mess he's made in our hospital system?

Hon. Christine Elliott: We have been speaking with the Ontario Hospital Association, and we are already taking all of the actions that the member opposite has just mentioned. All of those are being done. We also have a multi-phase plan to increase our health human resources in order to deal with these backlogs. We've created those 3,100 extra beds to deal with COVID. Now we are dealing with them to deal with the surgeries. They will remain in our system because we know we need them.

As for the number of people who are waiting for these procedures, we are actually calculating that right now, because on a regular basis, there are already 200,000 people on a wait-list. We are at 250,000 right now. What we are looking at is the number of people who have waited outside of the medically accepted guidelines. That is what we need to focus on and that is what we are dealing with.

More difficult than that, though, even, is to get people to come back to their family doctors to get the procedures and examinations done to make sure that they are healthy. That is where we're going to need our front-line medical practitioners, primary care, to help us bring people back in so that we will be able to deal with their issues easily and straightforwardly early on in their diagnosis so that we can have—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, the fact remains that hospital system capacity is a serious problem in this province, and we all know—all of us know—it didn't get that way overnight. We know the Liberals spent years in office and neglected our hospital system. The facts are very clear. The OHA points out that the total spaces we have in hospitals right now remained the same for 20 years, including the last four years, and the province grew by nearly three million people. So there was no extra capacity put in place by the Liberals.

The question I have is, will this Premier fix the problem that he has ignored for four years, just like the Liberals did

before him, or will he step aside so that New Democrats can fix the hospital system that we need?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Maybe we can just take a look at the facts here. Our government has actually increased health care spending from \$59.3 billion in 2019-20 to an expected \$64.1 billion in 2021-22. We've also invested an additional \$5.1 billion in 2020-21 and an expected \$5.2 billion in 2021-22 in dedicated COVID-19 health response funding. Our government has increased health care spending more than any other government to date in history.

We have already created 3,100 beds since the beginning of this pandemic and several hundred more intensive care beds, and we're continuing to grow. We are also investing \$22 billion over the next 10 years in hospital capital infrastructure that will lead to \$30 billion in capital investments.

If that's not what growth is, I don't know what the member opposite expects.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: My question is for the Premier.

When the Ford government took office in 2018, there were 1,200 workers at the Alstom plant in Thunder Bay. Today there are 400 workers, and it will soon only have 75 unionized workers.

This government has promised a bright future. The Premier and his ministers have repeatedly come to my riding and made promises of jobs and slung some mud. Yet again, though, people are facing unemployment because of this government's lack of urgency.

Premier, what is this government going to do for the hundreds of workers and their families facing many months without a paycheque? Through you, Speaker, why didn't the Premier act sooner?

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

Hon. Stan Cho: Thank you to the member opposite for that important question. Of course, it's a difficult time for the people of this province, especially for the people of Thunder Bay, but I want to remind the member opposite that these layoffs are temporary, that the closure of the facility is to retool.

Why, Speaker? Because there is lots of business on the way to the great people of Thunder Bay, thanks to this government's investments into transit infrastructure, into actually getting subways built, and into expanding the GO network, to connect with the grid and finally catch up Ontario to other world-class jurisdictions around our planet. These investments are going to continue. We will see those jobs return to Thunder Bay and a day of prosperity unlike any other seen in this great province.

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

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Again, my question is for the Premier.

The Alstom plant needs certainty. Workers have had an excellent track record and can produce 170 vehicles per day. There are long lead-up times when there are new orders and the plant needs certainty from this province about orders.

The people of Ontario need more mass transit; we know that. We can build it here in Ontario. Premier, will you commit to a made-in-Ontario transit strategy? And, Speaker, through you, will the Premier do something to help the Alstom plant workers today?

Hon. Stan Cho: Speaker, the answer is yes. This Premier has committed from the very beginning of our mandate to the transit system, to the great people of Thunder Bay.

Just to highlight a few of those examples: \$171 million to refurbish 94 GO Transit rail coaches at the Alstom plant located in Thunder Bay. This is on top of our partnership agreement to purchase 60 new electric streetcars, which will maintain 300 good manufacturing jobs at the facility, Speaker. This is on top of the huge growth that we'll see—upwards of \$180 million to the TTC to support up to 60 new streetcars.

Speaker, this is a long list of investments that our government is making into transit expansion. That means jobs for Thunder Bay not just for today but for many days to come.

GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: At the core, all levels of government have one true mandate: that is, to support our hard-working constituents who have elected us as their representatives in this House. During these unprecedented times, we must look to this core reason for guidance and direction.

Ontarians expect clean water, clean air, safe products and safe working conditions. Good rules and regulations are necessary to maintain these high standards.

1050

Ontarians across the province have called for our government to lead the charge in this field by eliminating unnecessary regulatory and financial burdens for the great people of Ontario and to make sure that Ontario is open for business and open for jobs.

Speaker, through you to the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction, my Mississauga colleague: What is our government doing to deliver clear and effective rules that promote public health and safeguard the environment without sacrificing innovation, growth and opportunity?

Hon. Nina Tangri: I really want to thank my colleague from my neighbouring riding of Mississauga Centre for the question.

Yesterday, I rose in this House and tabled our eighth red tape reduction package. This package builds on our incredible effort to make life easier for businesses and the people across Ontario.

Through this piece of legislation, we've announced our intent to eliminate the annual licence plate sticker renewal

fee and requirements to have a physical licence plate sticker for passenger vehicles, light-duty trucks, motorcycles and mopeds. This change will save each and every vehicle owner \$120 per year in southern Ontario and \$60 per vehicle in northern Ontario. Further, we will reimburse every eligible owner of vehicles for any licence plate renewal fees since March 2020.

Speaker, this is not a one-time deal for relief. This government will continue to explore ways to lower the cost of living in every corner of this province.

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

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Thank you to the minister for that answer. I know that the members in my riding of Mississauga Centre were thrilled to learn that this unnecessary, costly requirement is being eliminated.

As our province slowly but surely places the pandemic in its rear-view mirror, we must look to the future and how we plan to rebuild and accelerate the growth of our economy to pre-pandemic heights. The removal of licence plate fees provides the people of Ontario with direct financial relief, keeping more money in their pockets, not the government's pockets, something that I hope all the members of this House would be in support of. However, there still remains more to be done.

Could the minister tell us what progress the government has made in helping to reduce costs and eliminate burdens for businesses and Ontarians, and what more Ontarians can expect from this package, if passed?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you again to the member for her question.

Our government is proud to support important measures to ensure the prosperity of Ontario. We believe the people of Ontario deserve all the help they can get in these trying times.

When we took office in 2018, Ontario's regulatory burden was amongst the heaviest in North America. Ontario had the highest cost of regulation compliance right across Canada. Since then, our government has taken over 400 actions to cut red tape.

Now, as we bring forward this new bill, we have achieved \$373 million in annual savings for businesses and people by cutting the unnecessary and costly burdens left over by the previous Liberal government.

Our government has remained steadfast in our commitment to support Ontario businesses and people, and with this new package, we'll bring further relief to ensure Ontario remains the number one place to grow a business and build a family.

HOME CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé.

The Ontario Community Support Association has released their report and it says that 17% of PSW, RN and RPN positions are vacant.

What does this human resources crisis look like, Speaker?

Well, Jutta's parents in Bracebridge were told that there are no PSWs available—no home care in downtown Bracebridge. So she moved in to help them. She broke her foot trying to care for her parents, and guess what? There was no PSW to help her either.

A woman in Nickel Belt has a severe infection. She lives 40 minutes away from the hospital and does not drive. She must find a ride to the hospital three times a day for the next 14 days because they cannot find a nurse to come to her home.

Why is the government allowing the private for-profit home care companies to keep their lucrative contracts while failing to deliver the home care people so desperately need?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member very much for the question. Our government certainly recognizes the importance of home care in our overall health care system. In fact, it's been described as a three-legged stool, with home care, long-term care and hospitals. They all have to be in balance for the health system to work properly. That's why we passed the Connecting People to Home and Community Care Act, which is going to modernize the delivery of home and community care services by bringing an outdated system designed in the 1990s in to the 21st century. We do have an active consultation that's going on right now with our home care partners to understand what we need to do to change the system as we work to bring home and community care into the local Ontario health teams to perform the care that is appropriate and relevant in each of our communities across the province of Ontario.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Everyone on this side of the House knows why 17% of home and community care positions are vacant. It is because a private company would rather increase their profits than pay home care workers a living wage.

Dr. Hamilton from London, in his letter to the minister, said, "The home care and community support services' nursing teams" were "in a crisis five years ago, and has now collapsed.... This has resulted in a record number of emergency visits and admissions of palliative" care "patients to" his "hospital."

His solution is simple: Get rid of the for-profit agencies. Follow the Maritimes and BC lead for equal pay for all nurses and personal care workers, whether they work in the hospital or home care sector.

Speaker, our home care system is broken. When is the minister going to fix the home and community system so that Mrs. Kiddle, Jutta's family, patients requiring palliative care get the home care that they need to safely stay home?

Hon. Christine Elliott: First, I would say that we're currently working on modernizing our home and community care system, but I would disagree with the member opposite as to the reason why she has a concern about home and community care. One is, we have put the money into it. In 2019-20, we invested an additional \$155 million in home and community care, and in 2021-22, we made an

additional investment of \$111 million for high-intensity supports at home.

However, as the member will know, there are health human resource challenges across the province of Ontario that we are actively working on, which include hospitals and long-term care as well as home and community care. We have a number of proposals that we're working on to increase the number of personal support workers by 8,000 over the next several years and to increase the number of nurses by 5,000 through graduating more nurses, but also with our jobs and credentialing and laddering programs that will allow personal support workers to become registered practical nurses and then from there into registered nurses, if they choose to. We are actively working—

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

GUN VIOLENCE

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is to the Minister of Health. Today, I sent a letter to you, Minister, which asks for your support for Bill 60, my private member's bill, the Safe and Healthy Communities Act (Addressing Gun Violence). When I first tabled this bill, your government said that if the bill had merit you would support it.

Right now, there are students in the GTA who are reeling from the trauma invoked by gun violence. My riding of Scarborough–Guildwood has already this year seen 10 shootings, including one fatality. We're mourning the loss of Jahiem Robinson, an 18-year-old student who was gunned down inside his school. I visited this school. I talked to parents, students, the principal, even the custodial staff. They believe that this bill has merit and that we need to do more. Bill 60 would provide trauma-informed counselling paid for by OHIP, a service that this school and its parents and students agree is needed right now.

Will the minister work with me on Bill 60 so that we can get these much-needed services and help to the people in our community who are suffering as a result of this type of violence that is affecting their community? This bill has merit, and I ask for your support for this—

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

To reply, the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Thank you for that question. We all know that in the province of Ontario, especially given the opioid crisis and the pandemic and everything that we've been seeing, there is a great need of support, especially for our children and youth. And our government has invested in children and youth mental health.

1100

We invested over \$31 million in new annualized funding this year to improve access to specialized mental health treatment services, to reduce wait-lists and wait times, and support the mental health and well-being of children and youth. This includes an investment of \$20 million for an across-the-board 5% funding increase for all government-funded children and youth mental

health agencies. In addition to that, there's \$2.7 million for four new youth wellness hubs across the province of Ontario: in Guelph, in Renfrew, in Timmins and Windsor. In addition to that, through the Addictions Recovery Fund, we're also making additional investments in children and youth wellness hubs so that we can support our children and youth and build resiliency in them.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: While I certainly support the investment in youth mental health, I asked this government to reinstate the \$25 million that was cut from the education "other" budget, which supported after-school programs such as Focus on Youth, which was directed towards vulnerable youth at risk of violence.

These programs need to be reinstated. They need to be reinstated now. There is a 43% increase in shootings in my riding alone, for year-to-date. There are more shootings than there are days in the year. By meeting with young people, with their families, one of the questions that the young people asked is, "Is anyone listening to us?" Are we actually hearing the young people when they say that they need help, and they need that help now? Programs for youth need to be funded, and the cuts that were made early on in this mandate need to be reinstated.

Bill 60 is offering an immediate solution. Back to you, Minister of Health: You did talk about funding, digital counselling services; I'm asking for that to be done now, and so are the families and the young people affected by gun violence.

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Once again, I'd like to reiterate our position is to ensure that we provide youth and children the supports they need where and when they need them. We have made significant investments and will continue investing in our children and youth by providing them opportunities to have their mental health looked after—the youth wellness hubs, for instance, the ones that I visited around the province; the investments that we've made through SAPACCY to provide specific resources for young people so that they have safe spaces where they can be comfortable and receive culturally appropriate services.

We are looking to ensure that people, that young people have the resources they need so that we can prevent, so that we can build resiliency, so that we can further educate, because we know that children are our future. And this government has taken that very seriously, making investments that now total over \$525 million a year in new investments to ensure that we look after advocating for our youth and providing the supports they need and also building treatment capacity to help those that are in greatest need. Our government takes—

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

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Mike Harris: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. I can tell you that Ontario's auto industry is one of the most

important sectors we have here in the province. It employs thousands of people directly and indirectly. But under the previous Liberal government, hundreds of thousands of automotive and manufacturing jobs—I can tell you firsthand, 12,000 of those alone came from Waterloo region—fled the province for either the States or overseas. Ontarians deserve to know that their government is working day and night to make sure that these jobs have been regained and that the industry is confident enough—and this is a crucial part of this question—to make significant investments in Ontario once again.

Speaker, through you, can the minister please outline clearly to the House how this government is securing a long-term future for the auto sector and the hundreds of thousands of Ontarians that rely on it?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Our government has been laser-focused on working with the auto sector to make Ontario the electric vehicle manufacturing powerhouse. Our automakers have already announced almost \$6 billion in investments. Of that, \$4.3 billion are investments that will transition the industry toward electric vehicle manufacturing:

—Ford's \$1.8-billion investment to retool their Oakville plant for EVs;

—Stellantis, a \$1.5-billion investment to retool their Windsor plant to build hybrid EVs; and

—GM's \$1-billion investment in Ingersoll will produce the BrightDrop electric vehicle delivery van.

Speaker, under the previous government, workers and industry were abandoned. They left the province. Now we're committed to working with the auto sector. We will make Ontario the destination for EV manufacturing.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you to the minister. He's absolutely right. The previous Liberal government, of course propped up by the NDP time and time again, voted against or were out there trying to force these jobs out of the province. Ontarians deserve better. With the transition to electric vehicle production, entirely new sectors are opening up here in the province, and new jobs become available that never existed before. Ontarians need a government that is willing to support the hard-working men and women in Ontario's auto sector by focusing on the supply side of building the electric vehicles of the future.

Could the minister tell us how the government plans to support the broader electric vehicle supply chain, while integrating it with components that are already made right here at home in Ontario?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Ontario will create an end-to-end supply chain for EV production. That's outlined very clearly in our Driving Prosperity plan. Building electric vehicles in Ontario is not only critical to the long-term security of the 100,000 workers, but will also provide opportunities in a number of industries, like our mining sector. We have all the minerals for EV production right here in Ontario: nickel in Sudbury, cobalt processing in aptly-named Cobalt, lithium north of Red Lake, graphite in Hearst. The Premier is very hard at work attracting an

EV battery manufacturing facility—a true game-changer for Ontario.

We will lead North America in the transition to electric vehicle production, creating new innovations and securing our economic prosperity.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is to the Premier. I've been talking to paramedics and Niagara residents, and, frankly, what's happening with people who dial 911 is terrifying. We have so few staffed hospital beds in Niagara that ambulances are waiting upwards of five hours to off-load patients. Residents are dialing 911 and waiting three hours or more for an ambulance to be available. Some are being told to take a cab; it's faster. Front-line workers have said, "An answer to all these issues is quite simply more fully staffed hospital beds, paramedics and ambulances. Fix that and all the ambulance issues go away."

Does the Premier think it's acceptable that people wait over three hours for an ambulance after dialing 911 in Niagara? Why aren't paramedics, hospital health care workers and Niagara residents getting the support they need?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: There are a number of issues that have been brought forward by your question. First of all, with respect to paramedics, we recognize that in some areas of Ontario, there are areas where paramedics are waiting for long periods of time in emergency departments when they need to get back out on the road. That's why we brought in specialized nurse practitioners and other nurses who are able to receive patients and allow those paramedics to be able to go back out onto the road. That has been very successful in the Ottawa area, and in other parts of the province as well.

With respect to the second half of your question about not having enough beds in Niagara, I'm sure the member will know that a new hospital is being built in Niagara, so we are certainly addressing that issue as well.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm certainly aware of the new hospital being built as we've been waiting almost 11 years. But we need to fix this problem. I'm going to ask anybody: If you dial 911, do you expect to wait three hours? Or be told to get a cab, it's faster?

Again to the Premier: Not only has this Conservative government ignored these issues, they've actually gone out of their way to make it worse. Tens of thousands of health care workers have signed a petition saying that Bill 124 pushes down their wages and drives nurses out of their jobs—with inflation at 6%, it's a wage cut of 5%—the same nurses we need to clear the backlog. Yet when the NDP colleagues and I tried to repeal Bill 124, the Conservatives voted it down.

Paramedics have asked the Premier to commit to funding for more paramedics and dispatchers to handle the

volume of 911 calls in Niagara. The government has ignored it.

1110

Can the Premier explain to us how his cuts have done anything other than create chaos in our health care system?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much. First, as I previously indicated, we've increased health care spending in Ontario by more than any other government to date. We're now at \$64 billion in health care, whereas it was \$59 billion when we started here. So any suggestion that anything is being cut is not the case.

We are increasing our investments. We're increasing our investments in health human resources. We're also modernizing our ambulance system and making sure that we can respond quickly. We're also making sure that our paramedics are being put to good use. They're helping people stay in their own homes. The Ministry of Long-Term Care has paramedics that are helping there to visit people so that they don't need to go to long-term care or to support them while they're waiting for long-term care.

We also have paramedics in the Ministry of Health. We're working to make it a comprehensive service so that when somebody does need health care and they need perhaps both a nurse and a paramedic, we can combine that for a better patient experience.

As for the health human resources issue, we have a strategy to increase paramedics, personal support workers, registered practical nurses, registered nurses and nurse practitioners. We're working on this all at once to create a better patient experience for everyone in Ontario regardless of where they live.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Roman Baber: My question to the Premier: On February 1, the Premier was asked if he supports the mandate on truckers. The Premier said he was in favour of vaccination. That's what the Minister of Labour told me every time I asked him if he believed it was right to make workers choose between their own health and their ability to put food on the table.

But on February 15, we got a whole new Premier. He said it doesn't matter if you have one shot or 10 shots, you can still catch COVID. The Premier said that these are hard-working people who don't believe in it, that it's their choice and it's about democracy, freedom and liberties. Now the Premier sounds exactly like the member from York Centre—as if we had amnesia for two years.

My question to the Premier is, what is his position today? Is it the Premier who believes in vaccination when asked about the mandates? Or is it the new Premier who believes it's a choice and it's about freedom; and if so, will he help me pass my jobs and jobs bill through third reading on March 3?

Interjections.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, I'm very happy that we are seeing, really, a progression away from the COVID

restrictions that were so important at the onset of the pandemic. The member will know, of course—because he was in the caucus at the time and voted in favour of a number of the measures that were brought in—that we inherited a health care system that was severely, severely understaffed. We inherited a health care system where 800 people in ICU could bring this province to a standstill, and we said no more. That is why the Minister of Health has made such enormous investments in health care.

We're coming out of that now, Mr. Speaker. The important thing is now that we are coming out of that, we are loosening restrictions and we're seeing the economy begin to grow again so that we can be in the same position we were before the pandemic, leading the country in terms of job creation and being a jurisdiction where people want to invest in.

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

Mr. Roman Baber: The Premier says he stands for rights of workers, but he had no courage, no sense of moral obligation to defend workers when their employers said, "Inject yourself or lose your job." The Premier presided over the greatest labour injustice in recent history as tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of working Ontarians were terminated, suspended, or resigned or retired because of ideology, not science.

Now the chief medical officer told all of us that passports no longer make sense because two doses offer limited protection against infection. That means you can no longer say that someone's risk of transmission is lower because their risk of infection is lower. The same applies to mandates. No one is putting anyone at risk. It is the most disgusting allegation of the 21st century. Shame on everyone here who perpetuated that lie.

Does the Premier stand by—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member will withdraw his unparliamentary comment.

Mr. Roman Baber: Withdraw.

Will the Premier stand by allowing businesses to impose mandates or will he protect all workers next Thursday and help pass my jobs and jabs bill—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member will take his seat.

And to reply, government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I don't know which member for York Centre we have. Is this the member for York Centre who, month after month after month, stood on this side of the House and voted in favour of every single measure that he now, today, says he didn't support at the time? There was a different reason for him, right?

Mr. Roman Baber: There were no vaccines when I was sitting there.

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

The government House leader to reply.

Hon. Paul Calandra: So I just don't know which member for York Centre we have in front of us today, Mr. Speaker.

But I do know this: Because of the measures that this government put in place, we are coming out of the pandemic. We are leading the nation in terms of getting vaccines into people's arms, which is leading us to opening the economy quicker, which is seeing a rebound in the economy every single day. The Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade is fielding calls from people around the globe who want to invest in the province of Ontario. That is the future of the province of Ontario. There are great things ahead for us. This is the jurisdiction where people want to live, work, invest and raise a family. It is because of the hard work of this government, in spite of that member.

HIGHWAY TOLLS

Mr. Lorne Coe: Steven Del Duca and the Liberals say they will make life more affordable for Ontarians. The reality is, after 15 years of a Liberal government in Ontario, the cost of living for hard-working families and businesses went sky high. When the Liberals were in power, they imposed tolls against drivers, leaving them to foot the bill. Durham residents and businesses were forced to endure the unfair tolls imposed on Highways 412 and 418 by the Del Duca Liberal government.

Could the Associate Minister of Transportation tell us what his ministry is doing to cut transportation costs for hard-working Ontarians?

Hon. Stan Cho: Thank you to the member from Whitby for that question. He is a tireless, passionate advocate for his constituency, and his hard work is paying off.

Recently, our government announced that we will be removing tolls on Highways 412 and 418. Effective April 5 this year, people and businesses will no longer need to pay to use these highways. This will level the playing field and cut costs for Durham drivers, who were wrongfully disadvantaged by Steven Del Duca and the Liberals. It will also help reduce gridlock on our major highways, getting you home to your families faster after a long day's work.

Our government made a promise to the people of Durham, and thanks to the hard work of that member, we are keeping that promise.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you to the minister for his response. When the previous Liberal government made the decision to toll these highways, the people of Durham suffered. It's comforting to know that under this government, they are no longer suffering. Removing the tolls on Highways 412 and 418 is very welcome news for drivers in Durham. Yes, I've long advocated for this change, and I'm happy to hear that the voices of my community have been finally heard.

When Steven Del Duca was transportation minister under Kathleen Wynne, he ignored these voices. For over a decade, Ontarians had to deal with a government that said no to Ontarians and yes to their own agenda.

What is the Associate Minister of Transportation doing to expand on the initiative to remove tolling and to show

hard-working Ontarians that they've been heard once again?

Hon. Stan Cho: I'm glad the member from Whitby brought up the record of Steven Del Duca as transportation minister under the leadership of Kathleen Wynne. Steven Del Duca thought it was acceptable that Durham region drivers were the only drivers in Ontario forced to pay tolls to travel north and south through their own communities. Our government thought that was wrong, and we got rid of those tolls.

Steven Del Duca barely built new transit throughout the GTA, and the few times he did it, there were questions about it. The Auditor General found that he inappropriately influenced Metrolinx to build a GO station in his own riding. Meanwhile, our government is investing a historic \$28.5 billion in the largest subway expansion in Canadian history.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Independent members, come to order. Government side, come to order.

Hon. Stan Cho: We're the only party that says yes to Ontarians, and we're going to keep doing that.

Interjections.

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

Heckling is not permitted, and if you ignore the Speaker's request to come to order, I will have to start calling you out by name and potentially move to warnings. There is less than 15 minutes left to go in question period.

1120

Please start the clock. Next question.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Doly Begum: Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Parents and families across the province are struggling not only to find spots for their little ones, but also struggling to afford the cost of child care. I have heard from a dual-income family for whom the \$1,200 a month on top of their regular expenses was just unfeasible—\$1,200 a month, and that's lower than the average cost of child care in the city, which for some people is just their entire paycheck. Child care could be the deciding factor for someone being able to work and, without access to child care, it has forced many parents, especially women, to leave their jobs.

Speaker, Ontario continues to be the only province that has not signed the agreement with the federal government for \$10-a-day child care. My question is, why is the government refusing to sign this critical agreement that will help millions of families in the province and support the economy?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member is quite correct that under the previous Liberal and NDP coalition governments, the cost of child care really did escalate tremendously across the province of Ontario. In fact, when the Leader of the Opposition held the balance of power

between 2011 and 2014, child care and the cost of it were never a priority for the Leader of the Opposition.

Now, the Liberals, unfortunately, made child care a priority. Their priority was to make it the most expensive in the entire country, Speaker. We know how important it is to bring down the cost for parents. Parents have told us that this could be the difference between somebody working and a two-income household, and we know that we have to provide better options.

But what we will not do is sign a deal that will disadvantage future generations for years to come. We will sign a deal that is in the best interests of the people of the province of Ontario, Mr. Speaker, because that is what Ontarians want us to do. We will sign the best deal for our parents, for future generations. We will get the job done on behalf of parents and families.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: Speaker, the House leader is quite right: Under the former Liberal government, the price of child care skyrocketed. But right now, you have a majority government and you have a choice on the table. You have the option. You can take that decision right now.

ECEs and child care workers have been on the front lines throughout this pandemic, caring for our little ones, making sure that parents can continue to work, that many of our essential workers could continue to carry our province through an unimaginable crisis. And yet, there continues to be little support to ensure decent work and pay for child care workers.

Ontario needs to sign the deal now—actually, by the end of the fiscal year, which is March 31—to ensure that we can receive adequate funding. These delays are costing working families hundreds of dollars every single day, money that could have helped these families, especially during this difficult time.

Speaker, my question is, once again, why are the Premier and his government refusing to help Ontario's hard-working families, invest in the future of our children and support the working families of this province?

Hon. Paul Calandra: To be clear, Mr. Speaker, what the NDP is asking us to do is to sign a deal that will not achieve \$10-a-day child care, that will not reduce the costs for the parents of the province of Ontario, and that will saddle future generations of this province, who are relying on us to get a good deal, with expenses they cannot afford.

So, very clearly I say to the members opposite: No, we will not sign a deal that disadvantages the parents of this province, who want a good deal, who want more money back in their pocket and who want options for child care. We won't sign a bad deal. If that means we have to wait a little bit longer, if that means we have to work a little bit harder to get a good deal for parents today and into the future, we will do that.

I say very clearly to the members opposite—they can ask us time and time again—that we will not sign a bad deal for the parents of this province. We want to bring child care costs down, and we will hold out until we get the best deal for our parents, Mr. Speaker.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Premier. Mr. Speaker, for weeks, downtown Ottawa was occupied by thousands of protesters—in quotation marks—with hundreds of semi trucks with incessant honking, the use of air brakes, harassment, threats of violence, and intimidation. For weeks the residents of Ottawa were looking to this Premier and to this government for leadership and support.

But what did they get? Zero, nada, zilch, nothing. The Premier couldn't even pick up the phone to call the mayor to see how things were going. But finally, after weeks of inaction, the government decided to try to save face and talk tough about \$100,000 fines.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like the government to tell us, how many of these tough \$100,000 fines did they issue to help end the occupation of Ottawa?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: What I will say is that police, OPP, RCMP were working actually before the occupation occurred in Ottawa, sharing information, sharing operational plans to make sure that there was a plan in place that could be executed using multiple police services. And I have to say again—I will repeat—it was done successfully.

To suggest in any way that there was not preparation in place through police services is, frankly, quite a disservice, and a little disappointing, that you don't understand how police services have been sharing intelligence and information with each other through the entire occupation. It has been successfully implemented. I think it's really important for the member opposite to understand that things such as revoking the CVORs have been a successful deterrent, both in Windsor and in Ottawa. We have people who willingly chose to leave because they understood a revocation of their CVOR was going to lead to—

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

The supplementary question.

Mr. Stephen Blais: It seems that either the minister doesn't know how many fines for \$100,000 they issued or they didn't actually issue any \$100,000 fines. I think I can speak for everyone on this side of the House that we would all like to see the Premier's intelligence about this protest.

This government has flailed and flubbed during this occupation the entire time. We have a Solicitor General who overinflated how many OPP officers were in Ottawa to support Ottawa police. We have a transportation minister who was slow to act on going after insurance and licensing. We have a government caucus from Ottawa that was all but invisible during the entirety of the crisis—

Interjection: I was there.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Not from Ottawa. None of your Ottawa representatives said a peep during the protest.

Interjections.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: This was a whole-of-government failure, Mr. Speaker. This—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member will take his seat. The question has been put.

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, it fascinates me to hear this Liberal member talk about the idea that political government leaders should be intervening in what happened in Ottawa. There was an operation that was successful. Is the member opposite suggesting that we should have—

Interjection.

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

The Solicitor General to reply.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Is the member opposite suggesting that we should have controlled the Ottawa police and told them what to do? How would you have felt if we'd started doing that? It is important that there is a separation between what the police do to protect our communities and what we as government leaders do to protect our communities. We have done that. We—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I could not hear the minister because of the applause.

The next question.

COVID-19 RESPONSE IN INDIGENOUS AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

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

My question is to the Premier. While COVID numbers may be in decline in the southern parts of Ontario, we continue to see extremely high numbers of COVID-19 in First Nations, in towns across the north. The province-wide easing of many restrictions completely misses what's happening and what's needed in the north. We're talking about the historic lack of health resources that has not improved since the pandemic started.

Will Ontario ensure provincial resources are made available to support both on-reserve and off-reserve Indigenous populations, who are still experiencing pandemic- and COVID-related health emergencies? Meegwetch.

1130

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member very much for the question. This is an important issue, because our government is dedicated to making sure that everyone in Ontario, regardless of where they live, receives the supports they need to deal with COVID as well as other health emergencies.

I would say that we had a very good collaboration between Indigenous communities as well as the government for Operation Remote Immunity, for the vaccination effort that happened, which is still continuing for second doses and third doses, including in fly-in communities.

But I would also say that we are aware that there is an increase still in COVID infections in some parts of northern Ontario. We can see that from waste-water surveillance that we are conducting across the province. It may perhaps be, although it's not conclusive yet, that that is because COVID transmission has happened somewhat later in the northern communities than in the southern communities, but that's something that we're monitoring very carefully and something where we will make sure that if additional resources are needed, absolutely, in Indigenous communities in the north, they will be provided.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: A question back to the Premier: Speaker, health officials across the north have said we are weeks behind the rest of the province when it comes to test positivity rates and hospitalizations. This virus remains a serious threat to the north, with some experiencing their highest numbers since the beginning of the pandemic. There are over 600 active cases of COVID in 25 First Nations, with more in the adjacent towns.

The north is in a critical stage in our fight against COVID. Again, will Ontario ensure its approach to easing public health measures reflects the needs of the north? Yes or no?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Well, yes, of course. We are watching all parts of Ontario to understand the number of COVID cases in each community. Today, we have 1,425 COVID cases in Ontario, with 319 people in our intensive care units. We are aware that there are higher levels to some degree in northern Ontario, which would of course include many First Nations communities.

But we're also working to provide additional tests to everyone in Ontario so that we can determine community transmission, so that people can keep themselves safe by using these rapid tests. They are available at 2,385 community grocery stores, as well as pharmacies, as well as in 22 community centres for vulnerable populations, some of which would include First Nations communities. We know that in northern Ontario, because of the stores in the north, we do have a good concentration of these rapid tests. There are 5.5 million of these tests available weekly that we encourage everyone to use to make sure that we can limit the community transmission and—

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

EMERGENCY MEASURES

Mr. Roman Baber: Speaker, Canadians coast to coast are waking up in horror. First the provincial cabinet, then the federal cabinet invoked emergency legislation to deal

with largely peaceful protesters. This government followed Justin Trudeau's playbook to name-call and demonize peaceful and freedom-loving Canadians who made a different medical choice, who want to open their business, who want their kids in school without a mask. If needed, they could have been dealt with with bylaw, highway traffic or the code, but a state of emergency was declared by this government in response to bridge blockades and protests that no longer exist. The invocation of the Emergencies Act by the federal government does not meet the legal test, as it is in response to a situation that already resolved.

Will the Solicitor General end Ontario's state of emergency, and will she condemn the unlawful, unprecedented and, frankly, perverse declaration of emergency by Justin Trudeau?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, as he enunciated in his question, the federal state of emergency was passed by the federal Parliament, with majority support of parliamentarians. That is an act under their purview.

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

CORRECTION OF RECORD

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

Mr. Jamie West: I just want to rise on a point of order to correct my record. This morning, during my member's statement, I said that McIntyre Powder inhalation continued until 1990. It was discontinued in 1979. Thank you, Speaker.

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

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

The House recessed from 1135 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

SMOKE-FREE ONTARIO
AMENDMENT ACT
(VAPING IS NOT FOR KIDS), 2022

LOI DE 2022 MODIFIANT LA LOI
FAVORISANT UN ONTARIO SANS FUMÉE
(LE VAPOTAGE N'EST PAS
POUR LES ENFANTS)

Madame Gélinas moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 85, An Act to amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, 2017 with respect to activities related to vapour products /
Projet de loi 85, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2017 favorisant

un Ontario sans fumée en ce qui concerne des activités liées aux produits de vapotage.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member for Nickel Belt like to briefly explain her bill?

M^{me} France Gélinas: The name of the bill is Vaping is not for Kids, and it does six things. The first one is that it prohibits all promotion of vapour products, so that the vaping industry doesn't get our kids addicted to the nicotine in the vaping products. Second, it bumps the age when people can buy vaping products to 21 years old. Third, it limits the sale of vaping products to specialty stores—no more vaping products in corner stores close to our schools. The cancer society showed us this is where our kids get addicted to vaping. It also takes some of the tax revenue from vaping to ask Ontario Health to look at the health effects of vaping, especially on youth, as well as asks that research be done to continue to monitor how many underage kids continue to vape in Ontario. It also touches on the flavours that could be available.

I hope you will support this bill.

OUR LONDON FAMILY ACT
(WORKING TOGETHER TO COMBAT
ISLAMOPHOBIA AND HATRED), 2022

LOI DE 2022 EN SOLIDARITÉ
AVEC LA FAMILLE DE LONDON
(ENSEMBLE CONTRE L'ISLAMOPHOBIE
ET LA HAINE)

Mr. Hassan moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 86, An Act to enact two new Acts and to amend various Acts to combat Islamophobia and hatred / Projet de loi 86, Loi édictant deux nouvelles lois et modifiant diverses lois pour lutter contre l'islamophobie et la haine.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member for York South–Weston care to explain his bill?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I'm honoured to introduce the Our London Family Act, a bill created by our leader of the official opposition in collaboration with the National Council of Canadian Muslims. I would like to thank the co-sponsors of this bill: my tremendous colleagues from London–Fanshawe, London West, and London North Centre. It is time for bold, concrete action to tackle Islamophobia and hate in Ontario.

This is not a partisan issue; it is a moral one. That is why we collaborated with NCCM and community groups to create legislation that takes real action to stamp out Islamophobia, white supremacy and hate crimes.

I hope and trust that all members of the House will support the Our London Family Act and we are able to pass this very important legislation as soon as possible.

NAVIGATION PROJECT
MANAGEMENT INC.
ACT, 2022

Ms. Fife moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr64, An Act to revive Navigation Project Management Inc.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 89, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

PETITIONS

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank Dr. Lisa Massé for collecting these petitions to save eye care in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas the government only pays on average \$44.65 for an OHIP-insured visit—the lowest rate in Canada; and

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

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

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

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

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

I support this petition. I'll affix my signature and provide it to page Benjamin.

GASOLINE PRICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Monsieur Claude Gagnon from Chelmsford in my riding for these petitions.

“Gas prices.

“Whereas northern Ontario motorists continue to be subject to wild fluctuations in the price of gasoline; and

“Whereas the province could eliminate opportunistic price gouging and deliver fair, stable and predictable fuel prices; and

“Whereas five provinces and many US states already have some sort of gas price regulation; and

“Whereas jurisdictions with gas price regulation have seen an end to wild price fluctuations, a shrinking of price

discrepancies between urban and rural communities and lower annualized gas prices;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“Mandate the Ontario Energy Board to monitor the price of gasoline across Ontario in order to reduce price volatility and unfair regional price differences while encouraging competition.”

I fully support this petition. I will affix my name to it and ask page Tanisha to bring it to the Clerk.

INJURED WORKERS

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to thank the good people of Elliot Lake, Massey and Walford, along with a great deal of individuals who have taken the time to submit this petition. The petition is entitled “Petition for an Official Statement of Apology on Behalf of the Government of Ontario to the McIntyre Powder Project Miners.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas over 25,000 Ontario mine workers were subjected by their employers to mandatory, non-consensual inhalation of finely ground aluminum dust, known as McIntyre Powder, between 1943 and 1979 as a scientifically unproven industrial medical treatment for the lung disease silicosis; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario supported and sanctioned the McIntyre Powder aluminum-prophylaxis program despite the availability of safe and proven alternatives to effective silicosis prevention measures, such as improved dust controls and ventilation, and also despite expert evidence from the international scientific and medical communities as early as 1946 that recommended against the use of McIntyre Powder treatments; and

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“Whereas the miners who were forced to inhale McIntyre Powder experienced distress, and immediate and long-term health effects from their experiences and exposures associated with aluminum inhalation treatments, as documented through the participation in the McIntyre Powder Project;

“We, the undersigned, petition the government of Ontario to provide an official statement of apology to the McIntyre Powder Project miners.”

I completely and wholeheartedly agree with this petition and present it to page Morgan to bring down to the Clerks’ table.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition entitled “A Just Recovery Means Decent Work for All.” I’d like to thank Justice for Workers for collecting signatures.

“Whereas COVID-19 has exposed the way in which low wages, temporary jobs, unstable work and unsafe working conditions are a health threat not only to workers themselves but also to our communities;

“Whereas systemic racism in the labour market means Black workers, Indigenous workers, workers of colour and

newcomer workers are overrepresented in low-wage, precarious and dangerous employment and more likely to be without paid sick days, supplemental benefits or working part-time involuntarily;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to change employment and labour laws to:

“—provide at least 10 permanent, employer-paid emergency leave days each year and an additional 14 during public health outbreaks;

“—ensure all workers are paid at least \$20 per hour, no exemptions;

“—promote full-time work by offering additional hours to existing part-time workers before hiring new employees;

“—provide set minimum hours of work each week, and provide schedules at least two weeks in advance;

“—legislate equal pay and benefits for equal work regardless of race, gender, employment status or immigration status;

“—protect all workers from unjust firing (stop wrongful dismissal) and ensure migrant and undocumented workers can assert labour rights;

“—ensure all workers are protected by ending misclassification of gig workers, and end all exemptions to employment laws;

“—make companies responsible for working conditions and collective bargaining, when they use temp agencies, franchises and subcontractors; make companies financially responsible under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act for deaths and injuries of temp agency workers;

“—end the practice of using temporary agency workers indefinitely by ensuring temp workers are hired directly by the client company after three months on assignment;

“—make it easier for all workers to join unions by signing cards, allowing workers to form unions across franchises, subcontractors, regions or sectors of work...; and

“—enforce all laws proactively through adequate public staffing and meaningful penalties for employers who violate the laws.”

I am proud to affix my signature to this petition, and I will send it to the table with page Maverick.

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Lindsey Tuomi from Dowling in my riding for signing the petition.

“Improve Winter Road Maintenance on Northern Highways....”

“Whereas highways play a critical role in northern Ontario;

“Whereas winter road maintenance has been privatized in Ontario and contract standards are not being enforced;

“Whereas per capita, fatalities are twice as likely to occur on a northern highway than on a highway in southern Ontario;

“Whereas current MTO classification negatively impacts the safety of northern highways;”

They “petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: to classify Highways 11, 17, 69, 101 and 144 as class 1 highways; require that the pavement be bare within eight hours of the end of a snowfall and bring the management of winter road maintenance back into the public sector, if contract standards are not met.”

I fully support this petition. I will affix my name to it and send it to the table with page Pania.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank the patients from Dr. Chisholm’s office for collecting these petitions. It is entitled “Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas the government only pays an average \$44.65 for an OHIP-insured visit—the lowest rate in Canada; and

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

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

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

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

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

I support this petition and provide it to page Kristian to provide to the table.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from Mr. Clarke from Hanmer in my riding:

“Time to Care....

“Whereas quality care for the 78,000 residents of (LTC) homes is a priority for many Ontario families; and

“Whereas the provincial government does not provide adequate funding to ensure care and staffing levels in LTC homes to keep pace with residents’ increasing acuity and the growing number of residents with complex behaviours; and

“Whereas several Ontario coroner’s inquests into LTC homes deaths have recommended an increase in direct hands-on care for residents and staffing levels, and the most reputable studies on this topic recommend 4.1 hours of direct care per day;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To amend the LTC Homes Act (2007) for a legislated minimum care standard of four hours per resident per day, adjusted for acuity level and case mix,” starting right now.

I fully support this petition and I would ask Elya, our page, to bring it to the Clerk.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition to save eye in Ontario that was collected by patients at Old South Optometry in London West. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas the government only pays on average \$44.65 for an OHIP-insured visit—the lowest rate in Canada; and

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

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

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

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

I support this petition. I affix my signature and will send it to the table with page Julia.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Jo-Anne Laplante from Levack in my riding for these petitions, “Make Highway 144 at Marina Road Safe.

“Whereas residents of Levack, Onaping and Cartier, as well as individuals who travel Highway 144, are concerned about the safety of a stretch of Highway 144 in the vicinity of Marina Road and would like to prevent further accidents and fatalities; and

“Whereas three more accidents”—it’s now four more accidents—“occurred since summer 2021 resulting in severe injuries, diesel fuel spilling into the waterways” and the death of two people and their dog, “the closure of Highway 144 for several hours delaying traffic and stranding residents; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Transportation has completed a review of this stretch of Highway 144, has made some improvements and has committed to re-evaluate and ensure the highway is safe;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows: “that the Ministry of Transportation review Highway 144 at Marina Road immediately and commit to making it safe, as soon as possible.”

I support this petition. I will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk with page Tanisha.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Jamie West: I’m going to make MPP Bouma’s day. I have more petitions to save eye care in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas the government only pays on average \$44.65 for an OHIP-insured visit—the lowest rate in Canada; and

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

“Whereas optometrists have never been given a formal negotiation process with the government; and
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“Whereas the government’s continued neglect resulted in 96% of Ontario optometrists voting to withdraw OHIP services beginning September 1, 2021;

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

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

I support this petition—I hope that this is resolved soon because I have so many envelopes to open—and I’ll provide it to our page Elya to bring it to the table.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Yvon Levasseur from Coniston in my riding for these petitions, “MS Specialized Clinic in Sudbury.

“Whereas northeastern Ontario has one of the highest rates of multiple sclerosis (MS) in Ontario; and

“Whereas specialized MS clinics provide essential health care services to those living with multiple sclerosis, their caregiver and their family; and

“Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is recognized as a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Immediately set up a specialized MS clinic in the Sudbury area that is staffed by a neurologist who specializes in the treatment of multiple sclerosis, a physiotherapist and a social worker at a minimum.”

I support this petition. I will affix my name to it and ask page Pania to bring it to the Clerk.

FEWER FEES, BETTER SERVICES

ACT, 2022

LOI DE 2022

POUR DE MEILLEURS SERVICES

ET MOINS DE FRAIS

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 23, 2022, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 84, An Act to enact two Acts and amend various other Acts / Projet de loi 84, Loi visant à édicter deux lois et à modifier diverses autres lois.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Waterloo to finish her opening debate on behalf of Her Majesty’s loyal opposition.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It’s always a pleasure to stand in my place and give commentary on a piece of legislation, particularly a piece of legislation this close to an election in Ontario, and to communicate the concerns that we’ve been hearing from across the province.

As the official opposition’s finance critic and Treasury Board critic, I do follow the money very carefully in this place, and for good reason, I have to tell you, because on many occasions, trust has been undermined. I’m speaking more broadly about the context that we find ourselves in as we move into budget 2022.

We have gone through a very tumultuous and challenging time in this province, fighting a pandemic, really challenging the mental health, the physical infrastructure, the health care system, the education system. We have been through a crisis.

This election that is upcoming, which of course this bill speaks to, will really be a test of this government, I would say. People will say that all elections test the government of the day, but in this instance, the government had an opportunity to do the right thing, to invest in health care, to invest in our education system.

Just yesterday, I had to ask a question of the Minister of Education as to why, two years into a pandemic, we still do not have HEPA filters in our classrooms. There is truly no excuse for this. Even after one year, we knew how important air quality was to the health and well-being of the employees, the students, the workers in our schools. There was just an announcement on Monday—a very late announcement and really just a promise to finally do what they said they were going to do a year ago.

The context for which Bill 84 falls on the floor of this Legislature is very key. It was just tabled yesterday around 2 o’clock, a briefing was set for 4 o’clock, and now I’m going to speak to it. I wasn’t able to attend the briefing but, I was, of course, happy to have been offered a briefing, because, as you know, for the fall economic statement, that courtesy was not shown to the official opposition. We want to know the details that are in this legislation.

Having just seen a tweet—this is how we find out information here in Ontario’s Legislature—from one Colin D’Mello from CTV, the budget is going to fall on April 30. This legislation hasn’t even passed yet, and yet the government has already announced that date. Why is that date very significant, Mr. Speaker? I know you’re curious, and I know the people watching are curious as well. I want to thank Sabrina Nanji from Queen’s Park Observer, because this morning she articulated what many people are feeling about this budget. There was history in this place in 2019 when the Conservatives promised to be different than the Liberals. You remember that, when they stood in their place and they said, “We will guarantee”—these are the exact words of the Minister of Finance; I should say the first Minister of Finance because then there was a second Minister of Finance and now we have a third Minister of Finance. He stood in his place and he said, “We guarantee that Ontario’s budgets will be delivered by March 31 or we will pay.”

Mr. John Vanthof: For the people.

Ms. Catherine Fife: “For the people,” yes.

Remember, “Promise made, promise kept”? Now we have a very strong track record of, “Promise made, promise broken.”

Mr. John Vanthof: For themselves.

Ms. Catherine Fife: For themselves.

Tucked away in the latest red tape bill that, as I mentioned, just dropped yesterday, there was a clause to push the Ford government’s self-imposed deadline for tabling the budget from March 31 to April 30. Budgets are traditionally dropped on a Thursday. The election is set to start May 2. The election date is June 2. I’ve been counting down since 1,436, I think.

Why does this matter? While April budgets aren’t exactly rare, the government of the day promised to be different, and that was part of their brand—fiscal responsibility and fiscal accountability. They put this law on the books in the name of financial transparency and accountability, which apparently they don’t care about anymore. Things have gotten so bad over there—massive defections of members. Now the independent members almost have full party status on this side of the House. This requires the finance minister of the day to publicly release the budget by fiscal year-end. In Ontario’s case, that is March 31. Otherwise, the Premier and Minister Bethlenfalvy would have to pay \$10,000 and \$20,000 respectively; now they don’t.

So they’ve changed the rules. They’ve avoided the fines. They have abandoned the financial accountability and transparency piece. They just decided to “amend the law (and keep the cash).” These are Sabrina’s words, and they ring true for me.

“Politically speaking,” she goes on to say, “the later the budget, the better positioned the” government of the day “will be.” They can run on all of these vote-grabbing promises without the scrutiny of the opposition members. They will run on a budget without scrutiny and without accountability.

Really, it’s shocking, given that strong “we will be different” mantra that we heard from this government. “We will be different from the Liberals.” It turns out that they aren’t really that interested in being different from the Liberals; they’re interested in running an election on the money that they did not spend during the pandemic. This was recently confirmed by the Financial Accountability Officer. To date, even in this moment, as early as two weeks ago, the Ontario health care system is \$1.4 billion underfunded in this year—in this year.

They have a record amount of money in the contingency fund. Contingency funds are not often used by governments because—it’s essentially a slush fund, Mr. Speaker. A lot of this money came from the federal government for pandemic measures. Obviously, that money was not spent on pandemic measures.

There will be a day of reckoning where we can determine—we can do a return on the investment, or lack of investment—how long that lack of leadership that this government portrayed kept us in pandemic mode longer. We had the most lost school days out of all the provinces

in the country. Our businesses were closed the most out of every province in the country.

Just as early as two weeks ago, I did a round table with Michael Wood and the member from Ottawa Centre. We still heard consistently the same messages, the same frustration from businesses around how the small business grants were distributed. Our members have continually raised this to the government. Whole sectors—independent travel agents, for instance. The government of the day said, “You cannot travel. You cannot do your job.” But they were still left out of any support for small business grants. Subsidiary businesses that were not forced to close, but lost a huge amount of business—I’m thinking of dry cleaners—were shut out of the small business grant.

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This government was very clear about picking winners and losers. And there was no appeals process, so even if you had a legitimate cause to receive the small business grant, there was no one to talk to, there was no one to appeal to, there was no due process, and there was no transparency.

I will say that I think the small business community in this province will be a long time forgiving this so-called “open for business” government, because this was the government that did not invest that financial aid from the federal government into our communities, and they hurt those businesses. They made an intentional and mindful decision to not invest in keeping businesses open and keeping schools open. I can tell you that in the region of Waterloo people understand that. It’s a very educated community. When they see that there is \$4.6 billion in a contingency fund, waiting for an election, they are furious.

It reminds me of that same sort of emotion that we experienced when the Liberals embraced that hubris and that arrogance just prior to the 2018 election. I distinctly remember going over to the now leader of the Liberal Party and saying, “I really wanted to get the vulnerable road users act passed”—because there were three weeks before the election. I said, “You’ve got a majority government. You can make this happen. We can prevent people from being hurt on our streets. You can do the right thing.” He said, “Don’t worry. We’ll be back. We’ll do it when we’re back.” Of course, nobody came back—seven people came back, some of them just by very close margins.

So when I say that people see through this kind of political maneuvering, it doesn’t do any justice to anyone in this House. In fact, it undermines confidence in our political infrastructure. Given what has happened with the so-called “freedom convoy” and, really, that breach of trust, I think that you should at the very least not be using the people’s money to campaign for your own political interests.

In schedule 4, you’ve basically brazenly said, “Yes, we’re going to drop a budget. It’s going to have \$4.6-billion-plus worth of pandemic funding that should have been used in a pandemic, and we’re going to use it to run a campaign”—so not so different from the Liberals, as it turns out.

There is a significant problem, also, with dropping a budget on April 30, outside of the fiscal year. I know that there are some businesspeople over there. Fiscal years actually matter. People have budgets. For many public agencies and not-for-profits that do the important work in our communities by taking care of seniors in home care, children in care, vulnerable Ontarians with disabilities in congregate settings—they depend on those transfer payments, and they're not going to know what's in those transfer payments until April 30. So you have intentionally, once again, chosen your own political interests over the interests of the people we serve. So all of those little nameplates that the Premier gave to all the members—I know you have one, Mr. Speaker—“for the people,” just throw them in the trash, because nobody is buying what you are selling on this anymore.

So here we have a government that is moving the goalposts, if you will, for their own volition. They're also doing a number of things in this—and I do want to go through the schedules, because I want to be respectful of the civil servants who actually drafted this legislation.

Schedule 1 really is kind of humorous, though, and let's be honest: We all need a little humour. The At Your Service Act, schedule 1, says—get this, Mr. Speaker—“The act provides that ministries and prescribed entities shall comply with any service standards that apply to them under the act. If a service standard is a guaranteed service standard, a refund or compensation may be payable for a failure to comply with the service standard.”

The Minister of Economic Development, this morning, equated this to a Domino's situation: If you don't get your pizza in 30 minutes, it's free. If the government was adequately funding public services, if there weren't 13,000 people in Waterloo region waiting for surgery—the backlog—which is painful, which is emotionally laborious, then I could see trying to introduce this customer service guarantee in some public services. But I will say this about that—because you know I'm going to anyway: During the technical briefing, some of our researchers, who I want to thank for their work, were told that any ministries or government entities that can't comply with these as-yet undefined standards—you haven't even said where the bar is, and all we have right now is 30 minutes or free—will be named and shamed on a government of Ontario web page.

Today is pink day. It's anti-bullying day. “Oh, let's put all these names of all these ministries and public agencies—let's name and shame them,” because that has proven to work so well, #sarcasm. It is also unclear which ministries and government entities will be covered under the service standards.

So lots of decision-making and consultation will need to be done to see if this actually is real. Right now, it has the feeling of a commercial. It has the feeling that this is just something that sounds good. Of course, who wouldn't want to have an At Your Service Act?

I really do think that, given the track record of this government and your abject failure to keep promises, particularly on a budget which you sold as your brand—

you would have to give the people of Ontario a refund because you did not meet any kind of standard with regard to transparency and fiscal responsibility for people in Ontario.

Schedule 2 is the Building Ontario Businesses Initiatives Act. I spent a lot of time, when we were both finance critics, with the Minister of Economic Development. In fact, we used to drive to the Niagara-on-the-Lake economic development forum hosted by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. We had good conversations. We tried to work collaboratively together. This morning he was talking about how the province was caught back on its feet and wasn't prepared, in a very progressive procurement model, to ensure that we had the resources we needed in this province to deal with the pandemic. For instance, the stockpile of personal protective equipment had all expired. This section is particularly light on details.

I do want to remind the government that a whole year ago, I brought forward the Supply Chain Management Amendment Act to diversify the vendor strategy. This is a proven way of supporting local economies.

I always tell the story of Canadian Shield in Waterloo region. They developed the Canadian Shield, the face masks for hospitals. They hired many people in the community. Then, about a year ago, they actually had to fire 46 people because they couldn't get their Ontario products into our hospitals.

So what the government say they value and what they say they want to accomplish—you've had a whole year to actually honour that bill. At the time, when I brought forward the private member's bill to diversify the supply chain, which actually had the support of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and many other stakeholders, including many municipalities that wanted the freedom to embrace diversifying their own supply chains—and why not? Why not mobilize your buying power at the municipal level, at the provincial level and, of course, at the federal level? At the time, the government House leader said, “We're already doing this.” Well, if you were already doing this, you wouldn't need this act. Then, incredibly, one of their members said—and it's a matter of public record—“You can't rush diversity.” Well, Mr. Speaker, if you look outside in this province, you see great talent and great potential in our companies and they have pivoted as far as they possibly can, but the buying power of the government has not actually been mobilized to support those local economies.

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We heard that the staff at the technical briefing—and this will be of interest to you: that the government only knows how many Ontario businesses the Ontario public service does business with. They do not know how many businesses the broad public sector supports. So there's a lot of work to be done to make schedule 2 possible.

There are other jurisdictions, though, that we can look at on procurement. I didn't know that I would be so fascinated with procurement in my life. For instance, the city of New York has embraced a very comprehensive strategy around mobilizing even the smallest amount of

products. They've done such a good job, but they had to build a whole infrastructure to make it happen. And so, why we feel that there are legitimate questions about the efficacy of schedule 2 is that that infrastructure is not there. It's a little chapter, if you will. Also, and I think most importantly, they don't know how they'll be measuring the success of this program or if it is compliant with other trade agreements.

So in principle, we can support it. We brought it to the government a whole year ago. We want to see it be successful. But I have to say, as it is written and as it is crafted—and based on the briefing that we received yesterday, not fully thought through, but hoping, hoping really, that buying local and supporting local is truly part of the new Supply Ontario procurement strategy and that that procurement strategy is inclusive of diverse communities, women-owned business, racialized-owned business, veterans, Indigenous communities. Let's pull everybody into the fold to ensure that they can be successful.

Schedule 3, Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017: There are amendments around the control of Indigenous care societies on matters of child welfare that disproportionately impact their communities. As I mentioned, this bill just dropped yesterday. We are still in the process of doing some consultation on this particular schedule of this act, but I will tell you, given what we saw in budget committee and budget consultation, there doesn't always seem to be a willingness to acknowledge how Indigenous communities are further marginalized by a lack of resources in this province and it warrants, really, to review some of these stats.

As of March 2020, 69% of children in care were Indigenous in Ontario—69%. Of the 26,000 some-odd children who are in foster care, 14,970 are Indigenous. For many years, I have been saying this, based on consultation with Indigenous communities: Foster care has replaced residential schools. So there is really a call to action to get this particular schedule right, and we will take our lead and our guidance from our critic and from the community as a whole.

I'm going to go back to schedule 4.

Schedule 5 is the Highway 407 East Act. This permanently removes tolls from Highway 412 and 418 up to May 2023. Our critic on this issue, the member from Oshawa, introduced a subsequent bill, I believe, just yesterday saying that based on the regulation, though, the toll relief will expire in May 2023. She also did introduce it 44 months ago as Bill 43. So you had a long time to really acknowledge the weight of the fees, the weight the tolls have on commuters in the Oshawa-Whitby area—all the way up to Highway 115, actually, I think. It was debated and passed in 2020, but the government didn't act. At that time, the whole language concept around understanding the high cost of living—this was not in the verbiage that the government was using. Also, Bill 83, introduced before this bill—our critic introduced the freeing highways act, as was promised; let's be honest.

It is interesting to note, though, that when this announcement was made, I believe on Monday, or possibly

it was just yesterday—it has already been a long week and it's already Wednesday—the Premier took a couple of shots at the leader of the Liberal Party. He was the Minister of Transportation for a long time, and lots of promises were made, including a GO station in his riding where no business plan actually warranted a GO train station in his riding.

The Liberal track record on infrastructure investment is not something that you would ever want to run on, especially given the state of our highways in northern Ontario. Also, I just learned that in the latest version of transit infrastructure projects, the much-talked-about—the ribbon was cut in 2007—Highway 7 between Guelph and Waterloo regions, that has been bumped down the highway list of projects. We actually do suspect that this is because of the fast-tracking of Highway 413, which is a highway that not even the Liberals were willing to build, because there was no business case from a financial perspective or from a congestion relief perspective.

Also, the Bradford Bypass, which is growing—the resistance to the Bradford Bypass really is gaining such momentum. People are not going to just let this happen. They are going to fight. They're going to fight this bypass and, certainly, a highway that runs parallel to the 407, which would be the 413, which will take 10-plus years to build at a huge cost to the province and not alleviate the congestion that we're experiencing in some core areas. Meanwhile, the Highway 407 was given a gift of a billion dollars recently. So, really, from a priorities perspective, communities like Waterloo region and Guelph—they're not so vote-rich, if you will. We don't have the density of the ridings and of the votes. This government is solely focused not on what's good for the province but where the votes are, and we can confirm that on several levels.

Going back to the Highway 407 East Act: I just want to say thank you to the member from Oshawa and congratulate her on her advocacy. Certainly, her community knows who fought to remove the tolls on these highways. Being consistent matters. I really do believe that. I know that our leader, Andrea Horwath, knows that as well.

Leaving the tolls for one second—I do want to come back to them. I want to say, though, that in Durham region—actually, I'm just going stay on tolls, because it's so exciting. For years, residents in Durham region have had to deal with unfair tolling on Highways 412 and 418 in addition to the congestion of residential roadways that these tolls have caused. It was people in these communities—they truly understand that the Premier could have removed the tolls on Highways 412 and 418. When they find out that this election promise and this campaign-style announcement that was made on Tuesday has a fixed date, I think they're going to feel betrayed. I think they're going to have good reason to question why the tolls are only going to be removed until May 2023. You have to admit; they have good reason. When the Premier goes out there and says, "We're taking these tolls off, even though I could have done it in 2018, even though I could have done it in 2019 and 2020 and 2021"—honestly, now that there's a fixed date on that, that does not bode well. May 2023—

it's in the regulation. I would urge that you check it out. It's a little bit of a sore point, because I know that the local members were trying to get the Premier to do the right thing for a long time, and we were trying to help the Premier do the right thing for a long time as well. So let's see if we can get him to do that.

1550

Going back to schedule 6: This is the schedule relating to the elimination of vehicle licence sticker fees, specifically providing for rebates for vehicle plate fees paid after March 1, 2020. This is an interesting promise, Mr. Speaker. The legislation itself does not say which vehicles would be exempt from licence sticker fees; this would be determined via regulation, something that the Conservatives used to rail against. They used to say—because this was a Liberal trick, but again, they are following in the footsteps of the Liberals: You introduce some legislation and then you move everything over to regulation and, really, out of the purview of legislators, who are elected to make sure that there is some transparency and accuracy in some of these regulations. This is not true of schedule 6 of this particular act. Ministry officials said the fee waiver/rebate will apply only to passenger vehicles like commercial vehicles, motorcycles and mopeds but not to heavy-duty commercial vehicles.

The response to this campaign goody, one could call it, has been very interesting, and I don't think it was the response that the government was hoping to get. The Toronto Star comments on their website have been very interesting. One said, "Does Ford have an obsession with licence plates?" We do know that the licence plate fiasco, one of the fiascos, one of the—I don't know. I'm running out of words to describe—boondoggle? I've got to get my thesaurus out. "Does Ford have an obsession with licence plates? When will he learn there are more areas he can help the people. Just another ploy to get votes." That was 14 days ago.

Bradley says, "So is the plan to remove a billion dollars in revenue to buy our votes, then cut nursing and teaching jobs to pay for it?" Let's be honest, if you've removed \$1 billion of revenue from the Ontario provincial coffers, that's a huge amount of money. I know that "\$1 billion" gets thrown around in this place a lot—especially when we were talking about gas plants. You remember the good old days when we weren't talking about you wasting a \$1 billion. "Perhaps he may plan to get rid of the highly profitable LCBO and let companies rake it in." So there is a lack of trust here from the people we serve.

Justin says, "You cannot buy my vote, especially knowing that this \$1 billion must be cut from somewhere." This is true. Finding \$1 billion—unless you're going to go to the contingency fund, but that's only one-stop shopping. That was money that was supposed to go towards pandemic relief. It should have been going to small businesses. It should have been going to our long-term-care homes. It certainly should have been going into our hospitals to address the backlog.

This one was starred by my staff Robyn: Martin says, "User fees do have a greater impact on poorer people so

eliminating ... renewal fees will help." At the same time, though, "This is important because it is this same ... government that has used the budget situation as an excuse for cuts to programs." This goes back to that service guarantee concept. Saying that there's some kind of standard of a public service in Ontario is not necessarily a bad thing, but you definitely have to resource those public services so that a standard can be met. You have to define what that standard is.

Some of these comments are quite hilarious.

I do want to thank Allan and Sheila Wood from Peterborough. They're seniors. They're on a fixed income. They wrote, "Our costs on everything are going up—food, heat, gas, insurance—so we will take the licence fee"—of course; they're on a fixed income—"but we have concerns about health care"—as most seniors do in Ontario—"and this refund will not buy our vote."

I appreciate that perspective. I appreciate people who are informed, who use critical thinking skills to say, "Okay, this sounds fine; this sounds good, but why? What's the motivation behind it?" Now that we have a new budget day just days before the election starts, which will absolutely remove scrutiny and accountability on that budget process—which is a budget process that I enjoy. I enjoy learning where we are investing, where we're not investing. I like telling those stories, and I like learning from that because one day I hope to maybe mix it up a little bit, Mr. Speaker.

I was talking to the local 570 CityNews in Waterloo, and they said that some of the callers coming in saw right through this maneuver. They are not being fooled, and they don't actually appreciate being told, "I'm doing this for you," because they know that there's a cost to this action. They definitely see through that.

Around the priorities—this was also some feedback that came into my office. This is from Adam. He says, "The vehicle registration fee amounts to less than two days of infant/toddler child care in Ontario. My family would save \$18,000 per year with \$10-a-day child care. If Doug Ford really cared about saving people money he wouldn't be the only Premier without a child care deal."

I do want to say the clock is running down here. We have to sign that federal \$10-a-day child care deal. The fact that Ontario is the last—we're well past being embarrassed by this. It is downright irresponsible. So when the Premier says, "I'm going to give you back \$120 for your licence sticker. You don't have to pay for that sticker anymore"—first of all, I want to say that I just never thought we would talk about stickers so much in this place: stickers that don't stick, stickers that you've got to buy for your business. I mean, really—and that whole carbon tax thing that he still rails on about. I feel sheepish about it sometimes.

I recently just read an exposé—this was in the Narwhal. Fatima Syed did a huge exposé on what the Cap and Trade Cancellation Act is going to cost us, not only as a province, but as a country. The damage that this government has done from a credibility perspective, and this particularly has to do with—on July 25, 2018, the government tabled

the Cap and Trade Cancellation Act officially, but they had already signalled that they were going to move away from this, saying that it was not going to address environmental concerns, which obviously was not true. Koch Industries, of course, was also prevented from recouping the \$30 million in credits they had purchased prior to this very quick, no-consultation cancellation of the cap-and-trade program here that we had with Quebec and with California. So they've had no recourse because their concern was truly not taken seriously by the government. This is actually a pattern that this government has followed through on. This bill also barred any domestic legal action related to the cancellation, a decision the company argues showed an intent to act with impunity in a blatantly unlawful and inequitable manner.

Mr. Speaker, what has actually happened is that now Koch is going to have to go to a NAFTA arbitration tribunal. So what the actions of the provincial government of Ontario will in effect do is reopen NAFTA's chapter 11 and change the whole dynamic around cap-and-trade, which has been a proven strategy to reduce emissions, and other jurisdictions have embraced it. Ontario is literally knuckles on the ground—and damaging for the country as a whole.

When I hear the Premier say, "I saved you a whole bunch of money by cancelling cap-and-trade"—\$30 million in legal fees. At one point the government was hiring so many lawyers, we were in so many jurisdictional battles because they acted with impunity and without consultation with key stakeholders on the environment, on infrastructure, on energy. On energy alone, this government probably hired at least 100 lawyers.

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And where did it get us, Mr. Speaker? I can tell you it didn't get us lower hydro rates as promised. What was the promise? A 12% reduction in hydro rates?

Interjection: Yes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I can tell you Allan and Sheila Wood haven't seen that in Peterborough. They tell me all the time.

So, the Highway Traffic Act—I think that people see through this licence sticker thing. As I said, I've run out of words to describe it that are, of course, parliamentary. Adam's concerns around the mixed-up, poor priorities of this government are felt by many people. The fact that you've had almost a full year to bring in a child care plan that would save families thousands of dollars—on average, families in Toronto spend the equivalent of a mortgage payment on child care. That \$120, in the long run, I would say, is not going to work as a strategy, as a plan. But what they haven't also factored in is the \$100 million-plus to cut the cheques. If you didn't pay your sticker fee for your licence from March 2020 or March 2021, the government is now set to get those cheques in the mail by the end of April. For every cheque that will be cut, to those some 59,000-plus drivers, that's between \$20 and \$50 per cheque. So there is a cost. You haven't costed out this promise. You've just stayed focused on the revenue loss, which is \$1.1 billion. But a \$100-million

mobilization fee, activation fee for the taxpayers of Ontario, for the citizens of Ontario, is not factored into this campaign goody.

I have to say, if the Liberals had done this, you would be up in arms. You would call them out on it, just as we are calling you out on this as well. One hundred million dollars to process rebate cheques, days ahead of an election, is as cynical as you get, and it's more than disappointing; it is ultimately fiscally irresponsible.

Megan Enns Robinson says she completely agrees with the child care comment. "My family would also save \$18,000 a year if there was \$10-a-day daycare. Also, where is that billion dollars in lost revenue going to come from?"

Pam Hill says, "Who is this really appeasing in the electorate?" This is a valid question, I think, to ask of people.

Someone quoted, "One hundred per cent.... Does" Mr. "Ford really believe that families will be so dazzled by saving \$120 that they won't notice their huge child care fees anymore? I pay the vehicle" registration "fee and have no children in care but I would still prefer to see \$10-a-day child care in the province."

Do you know why it's also good? It's good for the economy. The \$10-a-day child care fee, which this government has missed out—now months and months. Alberta—Jason Kenney; oh, my God—they have it. And for every dollar that you do invest in child care, be it capital, be it staff resources, the return on investment to the overall economy is—for every \$1, you get a \$7 return on the investment, particularly for women.

I can't believe we still have to say stuff like this, but women have been disproportionately impacted by this pandemic. Many women who were either working part-time or full-time had to leave their work. Their kids were at home the most out of every province in the country. There's definitely a generation squeeze here happening with women who are not only caring for their children but also caring for parents. Their lost revenue—Equal Voice, I think, has predicted that we're back 15, 20 years, Mr. Speaker. Any progress that we had made was undone in this pandemic. That is deathly serious. It will have serious long-term consequences, on the whole, for everybody.

I do want to mention schedule 7, the Laurentian University of Sudbury Act. What has happened to Laurentian at the hands of this government by their inaction has completely shaken the post-secondary education sector. I have University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier in my riding, as well as Conestoga College—all fine institutes. When you see a government abandon a university, as they did with Laurentian, I have to say, it has ripple effects out into the entire province. It calls into question what the motives are. Why would the government not recognize the value of Laurentian University to the rest of the province?

This is actually being felt in that community right now. I do want to thank the member from Sudbury for having that community's back, for always being straight up and honest and transparent with the community as a whole. I know the community definitely values that.

This schedule changes the makeup of the board, but it still leaves important conversations that are happening, that will happen behind closed doors, that will happen in camera. We're still trying to digest why the government has moved in this direction. Why is the makeup of the board of directors part of an omnibus piece of legislation, 70 days before an election? Why is this important?

We have good information about how important a university like Laurentian is. In the Auditor General's special audit from just this past December, she said, "Laurentian has been one of the primary post-secondary organizations serving northern Ontario and one of Sudbury's largest employers. As of December 30, 2020"—at the time—"Laurentian employed ... 1,751 people ... approximately 758 were full-time employees."

These are big numbers in a small community. Their value to the local economy is indisputable. Of that, 8,200 domestic and international undergraduate students attended or were enrolled in 2021. Laurentian has a very successful graduate program, and generally half of its students are from northern Ontario, Mr. Speaker. These stats show the significant role that the school played in northern Ontario's economy and the ripple effect the school filing under the CCAA has had on many people's livelihoods.

This is what I generally don't think the government understands. When you don't step up, when you signal to the PSE sector that you're essentially on your own, it has a chilling effect on the entire post-secondary education field. That should be of concern to all of us, because we do know how important these institutions are to fostering an innovative economy, having people reach their potential. That is the value of education and certainly a missed opportunity in that regard.

We're still in the process. What we do know for sure, though, Mr. Speaker, is that the Laurentian community was not consulted on this at all. This also follows another pattern that we're seeing from this government, where you craft an omnibus piece of legislation and then you dictate how it will be. This really does undermine the democratic institute that we've all been elected to serve. We take an oath to do what's best for our communities and to come to this place to try to do good things. I have to say, to date, the government has not followed through on some of those stated goals, if you will.

What an opportunity Bill 84 would have been to be bold around housing. Now that we're not going to see a budget until three days before the election—this would have been a good opportunity to rebuild some trust with the people we serve. Certainly, there's a lot of tension out there on the housing front, and particularly on schedule 11. So I'll end on the housing piece just because there is no riding in this province, there isn't an MPP in this province who should not be fully acquainted with the housing crisis in this province, Mr. Speaker.

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Now that the government has been here for almost four years, they can't keep pointing to the Liberals. It is true that there was a lack of definite investment in housing—

purpose-built housing, affordable housing, even maintaining the current stock of affordable housing in Ontario. I remember being in this House and debating a housing bill that did very little—but it did have a good title; the Liberals were quite famous for that. At Toronto city hall, they were debating how they were going to maintain their current stock of subsidized housing. Who in their right mind thinks that not maintaining and keeping up with the maintenance of affordable housing is a good idea? If you have an investment, you take care of that investment. You don't let it fall into such decrepit disrepair that people can't live there anymore. So I do make the point that there was a lack of investment.

Here we have a government that has refused—they have a half-day summit on housing; I would think that it would warrant a little bit more than a half-day.

And they're looking to streamline some of the red tape. That's another thing: That's what this bill is supposed to do—it's supposed to reduce red tape. I think there have been now 14 bills around red tape. Ironically, some of them created more red tape, particularly in health care.

Schedule 11 really doesn't do anything to address the housing crisis in Ontario. I invite to you look at schedule 11, and these are just a couple of examples—the government recently refused to fast-track zoning for the modular housing units in Willowdale, a three-storey building with 59 studio apartments to house people on the streets or who are underhoused.

We're seeing that in Waterloo more and more—people who are underhoused, people who are couch surfing. A lady and her husband—I met them, and we've opened a case for them—both lost their jobs during the pandemic. They were gainfully employed. They were paying around \$1,100 a month, but as a couple they could maintain it. Once they lost their jobs, they lost their housing. They are literally living in a tent in Waterloo region. We have been unable to find them housing because there is no emergency housing. There is no shelter system for these folks to go to.

There's this fellow in Waterloo who moved to Windsor—he was called the "toonie guy," because he was a panhandler in uptown Waterloo. He was a former student at University of Waterloo, back in the late 1970s. He developed mental health issues. We were very fond of him. He relocated to Windsor in early February. He froze to death on the street in Windsor.

These are the kinds of crises, these are the kinds of stories that should resonate with each and every one of us. To present an omnibus piece of legislation not acknowledging the state of disrepair that our emergency housing, our supportive housing, our affordable housing is in in the province of Ontario, is truly a missed opportunity to demonstrate some leadership, to demonstrate some empathy, to understand that housing and shelter is everything in Ontario. You can't find a job without housing. Women are disproportionately impacted by violence if they do not have housing. Schedule 11 does essentially nothing to tackle Ontario's housing crisis.

When I give you an example—like the government recently refused to fast-track the zoning for modular

housing units in Willowdale—there’s no excuse. You’re willing to fast-track a highway, you’re willing to fast-track an Amazon warehouse, but you’re not willing to recognize the urgency on housing? This means unnecessary winter days and nights out in the cold for Ontarians who deserve a warm and safe place to live. The city of Toronto is forging ahead with the project, but this PC government has obstructed that project at every turn. Why? Because of NIMBYism; because there’s an opportunity for the government to say, “We recognize that housing is a crisis, but we’re not going to act over here because it’s inconvenient.” I have to say, there really is no excuse.

There are municipalities that want to be part of the solution. Municipalities are creatures of the province. The province has to indicate to those municipalities that there is some flexibility around development, around streamlining some fees. It takes every level of government to be part of the solution on this.

What I would say with regard to Bill 84 is that, after almost four years of watching this government go through the motions on several fronts, and really cause a significant amount of damage—sometimes unintentionally, I guess, or not fully thinking things through. But at this stage in the game, the level of cynicism and pessimism around, for instance, moving the budget date outside of a fiscal year really epitomizes the disregard and the disrespect that this government has for the people we serve. Dropping a budget on April 30, three days before an election, not giving us as legislators the opportunity to scrutinize that budget and to hold the government to account is disrespectful to this place, to the roles, and to the oath that we take as legislators.

I’m willing to bet that the people of this province are not going to take it. I think that they see right through what this government is doing. Giving them a \$120 refund at a cost of \$1.1 billion, with a processing fee of \$100 million at a minimum, really is the final straw, if you will—the straw that broke the camel’s back, the last nail in the coffin. People see it for what it is.

I welcome the opportunity to present a more hopeful, more progressive vision for investing in people, because when you invest in the people, you have a stronger province. That’s what our leader, Andrea Horwath, has been talking about. We’ve released our platforms ahead of time on housing, for instance, and the response has been really positive and hopeful, Mr. Speaker. If there was ever a time in the history of this country and of this province to present something hopeful to the people, to speak to them honestly in a very transparent way—“This is how we see the province. We see it as an inclusive economy, not just picking winners and losers. We see housing as a core pillar of building a stronger province.” That is the kind of leadership that this province needs, and that is not found in Bill 84.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Question and response?

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you to my Waterloo region colleague for filling an hour. I know it’s not always easy.

She brought up a couple of interesting points. I just wanted to get her thoughts on a few of them. She and I

share, obviously, several stakeholders in the region. It’s interesting, because a lot of the people I talk to are quite happy to have \$120 or \$240, or maybe even more depending how many vehicles they own, back in their pocket. I think that translates across any riding here in the province. I too was on 570 CityNews and had discussions about what was happening. A lot of the callers who called in after I had an opportunity to speak were quite happy about it. So there’s always two sides to the coin, Mr. Speaker.

But just to talk a little bit about what the member was speaking about towards the end of her leadoff, talking about affordable housing, we’ve seen some excellent affordable housing initiatives done over the last little while by this government. We also see in this bill the realty centre of excellence being created. Why won’t she support that, looking at ways to free up land and allow—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Thank you.

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I return to the member from Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to my colleague for the question. Listen, you’ll understand that you dropped this piece of legislation yesterday around 2 o’clock. The briefing was at 4 o’clock. We’re still working through. You can’t blame us for being cautious and wary of this government, because you haven’t been able to operationalize many good initiatives in four years.

So we’re going to look at that. The government has lands to disperse. We would prioritize affordable housing, not those folks who have a lot of funding for donations to political parties. We want that process to be transparent, we want it to be open and we want it to be focused on the most vulnerable in Ontario, not the wealthy friends and family members of government members.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Sudbury.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Waterloo for an excellent debate. I had the opportunity to join her and Joel Harden, our MPP for Ottawa Centre, for a round table on small business. In her debate, she said this government, the Conservative government, has hurt small businesses; that they lost the trust of small businesses. I want to ask her for some examples.

I’m going to share one from Sudbury while she’s preparing. Scott Bartlett has a martial arts studio in Sudbury. He applied for the Ontario Small Business Support Grant in March 2021. He’s still waiting to hear back from this government. There has been radio silence on that side, so Scott and many people in Sudbury have lost complete trust in the Conservative Party with small business. I’m just wondering if the member from Waterloo has stories to share as well.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member from Sudbury for the question. I think it’s incredible that we are two years into this pandemic, almost 50 round tables, and we kept hearing the same thing over and over again from businesses. What they really needed from this government was clear communication, which they’ve never received, which is ironic because schedule 1 is this—what is it

called?—At Your Service Act. What they wanted was clear communication.

They wanted transparency in the application process for the small business grant. They wanted an appeals process if they were denied. They wanted somebody to pick up the phone and say, “This is why: You didn’t dot this i; you didn’t cross this t.” There are so many businesses, and the round table in Ottawa, organized by Michael Wood, was profound in that they were exhausted by this government’s inaction on the small business grant.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Scarborough—Agincourt.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you to the member opposite for her presentation. Under the Del Duca/Wynne Liberals, the annual cost for businesses to comply with regulations soared to \$33,000 per business—this is not change money—the highest in Canada. It is no wonder that businesses were packing up and leaving before this government stepped in.

This bill is part of our government’s eight semi-annual burden reduction packages, aimed at eliminating unnecessary burdens and opening doors to economic activity. Will the member opposite continue to say no to eliminating unnecessary burdens and reducing conflicts or duplicative regulations?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Well, I’ll tell you what’s going to be important for businesses in Ontario: It would be to see a budget in the fiscal year, by March 31. Many businesses provide services to the government across this province. Changing the date, leaving businesses, agencies, public service organizations in the lurch for a whole month ahead of what will promise to be a very volatile election, is really irresponsible, I would argue.

And so I wish the government had pulled some of these schedules out, so that we could have a fulsome and wholesome debate on them. I mean, I feel strongly about procurement. I would like to see some details around the procurement. So would small businesses, I would also argue, so we’re going to continue to do our job, which is to hold the government to account and press you to be open and transparent with the people that we serve.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Thunder Bay—Atikokan.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you to my colleague from Waterloo for her comments. The titles of these bills—I always get excited, because it says “At Your Service.” I have two mothers, Carolyn Karle and Kim Moore, who are fighting tirelessly for detox beds in Thunder Bay. We know they were counting on the budget because they still have faith that this government’s going to come through. And so, I know they’re going to be severely disappointed with the delay in the budget and I know that many others would too.

I’m wondering if my colleague could tell me about some of the other things that people in her community are asking for in light of the opioid crisis in our communities across Ontario.

Ms. Catherine Fife: That story will play itself out across all of our ridings. The member from Sudbury has

talked openly about the opioid crisis in his community. It’s happening in all of our communities. Already, resources have run thin. They are stretched. The people who are on the front lines are stretched. I’m also thinking of the agencies that deal with domestic violence, which is up in the province of Ontario. I’m thinking about how women who are working in the home care sector, their fiscal year ends March 31. What we heard in the budget consultation is that the not-for-profit agencies that do the work that the government commissions need certainty. In fact, they’ve been asking for two- or three-year budget cycles so that they can plan, so that they can invest in their communities. Expecting these agencies that are already at their wit’s end to wait for leadership is irresponsible and, I would argue, cruel.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I was actually surprised that the member from Sudbury didn’t ask this question. Schedule 10 talks about mining and the creation of a Critical Minerals Strategy in Ontario. This morning, our Minister of Economic Development talked so eloquently and so excitedly about what we’re doing in the mining sector here. The proposed changes in this legislation are correcting outdated information so that we can continue to expand mining in Ontario while respecting Aboriginal and treaty rights and the environment.

My question to the member opposite: Does the member and does your party—do you support the expansion of northern Ontario’s economy through avenues like mining?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It’s interesting that you would ask me that question, because the schedule makes three housekeeping amendments to the Mining Act. I can see why the government is very focused on mentioning Indigenous communities—although you say “consultation with Aboriginal communities” in the legislation. I can see why the government is really sensitive about not consulting with Indigenous communities, particularly with what we have seen with the Ring of Fire, otherwise known as the ring of smoke. And so, I see that the government is trying to make amends in some regard. We don’t have to do that because we have open, honest, transparent and truthful relationships with Indigenous communities. And we will see—

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: We just want water,

Ms. Catherine Fife: They just want water—the Indigenous communities. That’s what our critic just said: water. How about water? Let’s start with water and then let’s start building some trust.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Point of order, the member from Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to correct my record. When I introduced Monsieur Claude Gagnon, I said he was from Chelmsford; he’s from Val Caron. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): That’s a valid point of order. We’re always welcoming members to correct their own records. Thank you so much.

Further debate?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I'll be sharing my time today with my parliamentary assistant for transportation, the member for Scarborough–Rouge Park.

It's a pleasure to rise today in the House to speak to the Fewer Fees, Better Services Act, 2022, introduced by the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction.

C'est un plaisir pour moi de me lever à l'Assemblée cet après-midi pour parler de la Loi de 2022 pour de meilleurs services et moins de frais, présentée par la ministre associée déléguée aux Petites Entreprises et à la Réduction des formalités administratives.

Speaker, from the beginning of our time in office, our government has been focused on an agenda of prosperity. We understand that economic prosperity is the key to the success of individuals and to communities right across this province, including communities like Georgina, East Gwillimbury and Bradford West Gwillimbury in my riding of York–Simcoe, as well as countless others, from Windsor to Cornwall, from Whitby to Kenora. The success of these communities, their vibrancy and vitality, and the success of the individuals who live in them is directly tied to the success of our economy.

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When we were first elected in 2018, we inherited a situation in this province where, after 15 years of the Liberals sitting on this side of the House, electricity rates were skyrocketing, 300,000 manufacturing jobs had left the province and small businesses closed. Ontario was in a difficult spot, one that threatened our reputation as a place where people could realize their dreams and their aspirations, and ultimately threatened the future of our province.

The fact is, when I was first elected to this House back in 2018, opportunity was being strangled by red tape. It is a credit to the Premier that he recognized this and established the Office of Red Tape Reduction to root out ways to reduce unnecessary burdens on businesses and organizations in this province so that they can get on with doing what they do best: growing their businesses and creating jobs.

Wrestling with red tape is not something that anyone aspires to. No little girl has ever said to me that when she grows up she wants to spend her days filling out forms or waiting for permits to be approved. No. She wants to start a business. She wants to pursue her passions and build a better life for herself and for those around her.

Today, Ontario is once again a place where people from around the world come to seek a better life. Over the next 20 to 30 years, Ontario's population is expected to grow by 30%. That is a testament to our province and the opportunity that exists here. It also speaks to our responsibilities as legislators and as a government to make sure that we're creating an environment that people choose as the place where they want to live, raise their families and chase their dreams.

Bill 84 is the eighth red tape bill our government has introduced in the last four years, and we're already seeing positive results from this aggressive approach. Between

June 2018 and June 2021 alone, our government reduced the total number of regulatory compliance requirements by 6.5% and achieved \$373 million in net annual savings in compliance costs.

This bill contains some transportation-related items that I want to speak to today, but, before I do, I want to mention something that we've done at the Ministry of Francophone Affairs. In January, we launched an online designation platform to make it easier for communities and organizations to apply for designation under the French Language Services Act. We've reduced the application burden and the application processing time, and that is just one of the examples of steps that we have taken behind the scenes to improve the lives of Ontarians and ensure that they have access to the services that they need.

Ce projet de loi contient certains éléments liés au transport dont je veux parler aujourd'hui, mais avant de le faire, je veux mentionner quelque chose que nous avons fait au ministère des Affaires francophones.

En janvier, nous avons lancé une plateforme de désignation en ligne afin de faciliter la tâche des communautés et des organismes qui souhaitent demander une désignation en vertu de la Loi sur les services en français. Nous avons réduit le fardeau et le temps de traitement des demandes, et ce n'est là qu'un exemple des mesures que nous avons prises en coulisse pour améliorer la vie des Ontariens et faire en sorte qu'ils aient accès aux services dont ils ont besoin.

Bill 84 contains three schedules from the Ministry of Transportation. First, this bill contains legislative amendments that would permanently remove the tolls on Highways 412 and 418 unfairly imposed by the former Liberal government.

Le projet de loi 84 contient trois annexes du ministère des Transports. Premièrement, ce projet de loi contient des modifications législatives qui supprimeraient de façon permanente les péages pour les autoroutes 412 et 418 injustement imposés par l'ancien gouvernement libéral.

A great deal of credit goes to the member for Whitby, the chief government whip; and the member for Pickering–Uxbridge, the Minister of Finance, both of whom I can say have provided a great deal of steady, constant encouragement to me and my ministry as we worked on this proposal.

As we announced last week, tolls will officially be removed from Highways 412 and 418 on April 5 of this year. Drivers will no longer pay to travel on these two important links in Durham region, full stop. We've already put in place regulations necessary to make that happen, but the legislation before the House today goes further by revoking the status of Highways 412 and 418 as tolled highways in law, making the change permanent, if approved.

Our second proposal in this bill is one that will apply to eight million drivers across the province. We are proposing to eliminate licence plate renewal fees and stickers for passenger vehicles, light-duty trucks and motorcycles and mopeds. This will save Ontario drivers \$120 a year in the south and \$60 a year in the north.

Notre deuxième proposition dans ce projet de loi s'appliquera à huit millions de conducteurs dans la province. Nous proposons d'éliminer les vignettes et les frais de renouvellement des plaques d'immatriculation pour les véhicules de tourisme, les camions légers, les motocyclettes et les cyclomoteurs. Cette mesure permettra aux conducteurs ontariens d'économiser 120 \$ par année dans le Sud et 60 \$ par année dans le Nord.

If adopted, this measure would be retroactive to March 1, 2020. Individuals who have paid renewal fees since that date will be refunded in the coming months.

Mr. Speaker, while we intend to eliminate the fees and the physical stickers, vehicle owners should remember that they will continue to be required to renew their licence plate every one or two years, at no cost, to confirm their automobile insurance is valid and pay any outstanding tolls and other municipal fines. This is important for our partners in law enforcement, the insurance industry and in other areas to ensure that vehicles are properly licensed to be on the road.

Finally, I should also mention that this legislation proposes measures to prepare for the implementation of the Towing and Storage Safety and Enforcement Act, through an amendment to the Licence Appeal Tribunal Act. It would allow tow truck operators, tow truck drivers and vehicle storage operators to appeal decisions about certification through the existing Licence Appeal Tribunal.

Speaker, it has been a pleasure to have the opportunity to put these comments on the record, and I hope that all members on all sides of this House will vote in favour of this legislation because of how it further strengthens Ontario's standing as the best place on earth to live, to raise a family and to pursue our dreams.

Monsieur le Président, je suis heureuse d'avoir eu l'occasion de formuler ces commentaires aujourd'hui, et j'espère que tous les députés de tous les partis voteront en faveur de ce projet de loi, car il renforcera la position de l'Ontario en tant que meilleur endroit au monde pour vivre, élever une famille et réaliser ses rêves.

Je vous remercie. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I now recognize the parliamentary assistant and MPP from Scarborough–Rouge Park.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Special thanks to the Minister of Transportation for sharing her time with me today.

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Before I begin, I want to thank the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction and her staff at the ministry for all the work that has gone into this bill.

Since our mandate began in 2018, our government has introduced, and successfully passed, over seven acts that remove unnecessary burdens and bring relief that works for the people. It is clear that the Fewer Fees, Better Services Act strengthens and builds on that work.

I would like to carry on from where Minister Mulroney finished her remarks and explain in detail to this House about the transportation-related aspects found in this bill.

Since day one, our government has committed to cutting red tape and getting more money back into the people's pockets. For example, we have introduced tax measures such as the Low-Income Individuals and Families Tax Credit, the care and relief from expenses tax credit and the Ontario Staycation Tax Credit. We are giving back to those workers seeking opportunity by implementing the Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit and offering relief to senior with the Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit so that they can stay in their homes with dignity.

But there are always more ways that we can give back, and with the skyrocketing costs of living and doing business, we need to look for other concrete ways to support Ontarians. That is why I'm pleased to see that the Fewer Fees, Better Services Act has proposed legislative amendments to the Highway Traffic Act to cut costs and save time for millions of Ontario vehicle owners by eliminating the annual licence plate sticker renewal fee and the requirement to have a physical licence plate sticker for passenger vehicles, light-duty trucks, motorcycles and mopeds.

This bill, if passed, would also permit the Minister of Transportation to issue a retroactive refund to March 1, 2020, for individuals who have already paid their licence plate renewal fees, with most refunds arriving in late March. Under these changes, vehicle owners would be required to renew every other year, at no cost, in order to confirm if their automobile insurance is valid and resolve any outstanding 407 tolls or fines. As our government transforms our highway network to offer more time savings, removing the annual licence plate sticker fees, it will offer immediate time and cost savings for individuals. And with the skyrocketing cost of living, it is only right to implement these measures and offer concrete relief back to the people.

Another way that this bill would make life more affordable for people is by proposing to eliminate the tolls found on Highways 412 and 418. This relief measure, if passed, will enable residents, commuters and commercial vehicle owners to use these two highways without having a toll charge, effective April 5, 2022. Eliminating these tolls from Highways 412 and 418 will cut costs for drivers and restore fairness for the residents and businesses of Durham region, who wrongly had these tolls imposed on them by the Del Duca-Wynne Liberal government. Removing tolls will provide another travel option for regional motorists, helping address gridlock on other highways and regional routes. Let me be clear: This is a promise made and promise kept by our government. By choosing to eliminate these tolls, our government is doing things differently, and our government will not stop doing the work to reverse the costly policies enacted by the Del Duca-Wynne Liberals.

Mr. Speaker, the final aspect of this bill that I want to discuss in greater detail is the legislative changes to the Licence Appeal Tribunal Act, a measure that supports the implementation of the Towing and Storage Safety and Enforcement Act. When in force, this act would require tow operators, tow truck drivers and vehicle storage

operators to have a certification to operate, ensuring that a qualified and compliant tow operator provides towing services. To ensure procedural fairness and a transparent process, our government is proposing an amendment to the Licence Appeal Tribunal Act, which allows certification decisions to be appealed by the applicant.

On this side of the House, we have made it clear that road safety is a top priority of this government, and Premier Ford has told the bad actors in the industry that the party is over. That is why we're continuing to operationalize the Moving Ontarians More Safely Act and its measures like the Towing and Storage Safety and Enforcement Act to reduce crime, reduce fraud, promote tow operators' safety and increase consumer protections. Our government will never waiver from implementing steps to promote road safety.

In conclusion, these three measures are just one part of this bill. There are a number of other great measures that will cut red tape and make a meaningful difference for the people of Ontario.

As a government, under Premier Ford's leadership, we have undertaken 400 actions to reduce burdens in Ontario, improve Ontario's competitiveness and make life more affordable for people, and the Fewer Fees, Better Services Act complements and builds on that work. We are saving millions for vehicle owners by removing requirements to use a vehicle plate sticker. We are making life more affordable and easier by removing tolls on Highway 412 and Highway 418. And we are continuing to deliver on our promise to make roads safer.

Mr. Speaker, most importantly, we are laying the foundation for certainty, stability and prosperity in the years to come, and I encourage all members of this House to support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Thank you. Questions and response.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the Minister of Transportation's comments today on Bill 84. I'm glad that she's here and certainly glad to hear that the tolls will be removed from the 412 and 418. I've been at that for a long time. I've been pleased to offer Bill 43 and now Bill 83—beat them to the punch, by the way—on the order paper. I've got to know, though, despite the reports and whatnot and the minister saying it wasn't feasible, if it was always possible, why wait 44 months when schedule 5 of this bill is essentially my Bill 43 and now Bill 83? Why not address that and also acknowledge—I'd be glad to claim the win on behalf of and alongside the tireless team advocacy of the chambers, the boards of trade, the mayors and regions. Why not give a shout-out to the folks across Durham region who have worked so hard to make this happen?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I return to the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member opposite for the question. She's correct that residents of Durham region have been calling for this for some time. That's why we spent a great deal of time studying this. Steven Del Duca, when he was

Minister of Transportation, is the one who imposed these tolls. He signed a contract to toll these highways for the next three decades. Removing those tolls is a complex process that does take time.

So for the member opposite: The contract provider is making the necessary infrastructure adjustments to operationalize the permanent removal of the tolls on these highways, and that includes things like decommissioning the gantry cameras currently on the entry and exits of Highways 412 and 418.

We are taking the necessary steps to operationalize our announcement, but make no mistake, on April 5, those tolls are gone.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Whitby.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to thank the Minister of Transportation for her presentation on the bill, which of course I fully support—in particular, the tolls being removed off of Highways 412 and 418.

1650

However, I'm a little confused because earlier today we had a presentation from the member of Waterloo, who said on numerous occasions that the minister is ending tolls until only June 2023. Clearly, there's a misunderstanding. Can the minister explain to the House what is actually happening with schedule 5?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I want to thank the member for that important question. It does need clarity, because what the member from Waterloo stated is simply not correct. Our government is removing the tolls on Highways 412 and 418, and these tolls will be lifted as of April 5. But as I indicated, Steven Del Duca, when he was Minister of Transportation and put these tolls in place, made them so complex that we have to do—it's a complex process to remove them. But for drivers in Durham region, what they need to know is that starting on April 5, they will no longer be paying tolls when they drive on Highways 412 and 418.

I know the member from Waterloo is disappointed. She is disappointed, but there is good news, Mr. Speaker, for the drivers from Durham region, because our government has followed through on our promise. We have removed those tolls from Highways 412 and 418.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's great to be in the House and talking about highways. I don't want to talk about tolls, but one thing I'd like to talk to the Minister of Transportation about is highway conditions. Highway 11 is a class 2 highway, and it's supposed to be clean within 16 hours. It was closed last night, reopened at 11:45.

I'd like to give a page a couple of pictures of what this highway looked like at 2:15 this afternoon—if you would give that to the Minister of Transportation. The south picture is one company, and the Trans-Canada Highway is bone-dry and clean. The other picture is another maintenance contract. I ask the minister if that is acceptable, that picture; if she would declare that an acceptable condition for the Trans-Canada Highway, that picture.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I thank the member opposite for the question. Road safety across the province is a priority for our government, and that's why we have taken steps at the Ministry of Transportation to rectify the work that was done by the Liberals when they were in government and, specifically, Steven Del Duca, when he was Minister of Transportation—

Mr. John Vanthof: Look at the pictures.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Order. Let her answer. You asked the question.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Mr. Speaker, I'll remind the members opposite that when Steven Del Duca was Minister of Transportation, Ontario's winter maintenance standards, especially in northern Ontario, hit an all-time low. And don't just take my word for it: In 2015, the Auditor General called out those contracts. That's why, since we've been elected, we have been taking the necessary steps to improve our contract standards, to make sure that we can continue to improve the road safety standards that we maintain. We are very proud of those standards that we have in Ontario, but we need to do more, and that is why we're continuing to work with our contractors to ensure that we're delivering the best results possible.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): The member from Mississauga Centre.

M^{me} Natalia Kusendova: Comme la ministre a dit, notre gouvernement respecte son engagement envers la communauté francophone de la province en uniformisant et en numérisant le processus des prestataires de services qui désirent obtenir une désignation en vertu de la Loi sur les services en français.

La nouvelle plateforme en ligne allégera le fardeau administratif des organismes publics prestataires de services en français, un autre moyen que notre gouvernement réduit le fardeau administratif et la paperasse pour les Ontariens et les Ontariennes. La ministre pourrait-elle indiquer à la Chambre aujourd'hui comment ce processus révisé s'inscrit dans le cadre de notre stratégie pour les services en français?

L'hon. Caroline Mulroney: Je remercie la députée pour sa question. Oui, au sein du ministère des Affaires francophones, nous avons cherché à trouver des moyens pour alléger le fardeau administratif parce que, pour livrer des services en français, nous avons constaté qu'il y avait déjà une très grande paperasserie qui nuisait à la livraison de services en français.

C'est pour ça que nous avons facilité la tâche des communautés et des organismes qui souhaitent demander une désignation en vertu de la Loi sur les services en français, une désignation qui est tellement essentielle pour de nombreuses communautés et organismes à travers la province. On a réduit le fardeau en diminuant le nombre de critères que la province demande en prenant sa décision pour déterminer si on devrait donner une désignation ou non, et on a aussi réduit le temps de traitement des demandes.

Monsieur le Président, notre gouvernement est très fier du travail que nous avons fait, mais nous allons continuer

à chercher d'autres moyens pour réduire le fardeau sur les communautés francophones de la province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Merci. I recognize the member from Sudbury.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the Minister of Transportation. I think the opportunity to ask a question is very, very important.

She mentioned several times the failures of the now-leader of the Liberal Party, Steven Del Duca, who was the former transportation minister. One of the things he couldn't complete was Highway 69. There are still 68 kilometres untendered.

I've spoken about this 25 times, 26 times today. I have warned about the economic impact. I have warned that it was unsafe. I have warned that people have died.

On February 2, Aimé Giroux and his wife of 50 years, Suzanne Pharand, died when they collided with a tractor-trailer.

Minister, will you finally commit to tendering the last 68 kilometres of this highway?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: The member is right: The Liberals made a promise to deliver this project over a decade ago, and it's our government that is bringing it to the finish line. The people of Sudbury don't need any more empty promises by Steven Del Duca and the Liberals. They need action.

Completing the final kilometres of the Highway 69 widening project is a priority for our government, and the progress that we have made so far is testimony to this: 70 kilometres are already complete and MTO is working diligently to get the approvals needed to complete the remaining 68 kilometres of the corridor.

Mr. Speaker, work continues to complete the 14-kilometre four-laning project south of Alban that is expected to be done; we're continuing, at this time, land negotiations with First Nations; and we're working as well with the federal government on environmental approvals for additional sections of this project. It is a priority for our government. We're going to continue these negotiations as they are essential to delivering this project. But let me assure the member opposite, it is a priority for our government and we will get the job done.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Mr. Speaker, point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Point of order: The member from Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: In my one-hour lead on Bill 84, I had referenced "toonie guy." Actually, he was also known as "two-dollar guy" and he did freeze to death in Windsor at the beginning of February. His actual name is Anatole Rybas. I wanted to put that on the record. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I find that a valid point of order. You are correcting your record, and all members are eligible to do so.

Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am glad to be able to take this opportunity and get my voice on the record and certainly the voices of folks in Oshawa on Bill 84 which is affectionately titled Fewer Fees, Better Services Act by this government. It's a good title.

I've had some interesting feedback from folks across the community and actually also from my staff. And, Speaker, you—and I will say all members of this House, regardless of stripe—have fantastic staff that do a lot of our heavy lifting, who are working with people across the community in need, in turmoil, and they do a lot of important work to fix and to solve and work with people in our communities.

Why I mention them is because in this bill, schedule 1 of 11 is called the At Your Service Act. It's interesting because I connected with my staff to get their take on who should be named and shamed or which ministries or which government programs do we have a difficult time interacting with, getting resolution for constituents—where's the biggest challenge? Where are we meeting with that resistance when we're trying to represent our constituents and support them?

They didn't give me a real list like that because it's not the people they deal with. It isn't the ministry liaisons, it's not the staff, it's not the bureaucrats, it's not the folks who are running around trying to support the initiatives of the government. The problem is the government. The problem is the decisions at the top that say, "We're going to throw together a program that we haven't done our homework on. We're going to come up with an initiative and we're going to try and sell it to folks, and you folks in the backrooms try and make this happen." Oftentimes, Speaker, it seems to be a challenge in the community.

This schedule of the bill says: "The act provides that ministries and prescribed entities shall comply with any service standards that apply to them under the act." Basically, if they don't, there can be compensation, there can be penalties, so to speak. The government said in a briefing to staff that it would essentially be a name and shame on a government website if they don't meet the service standards.

1700

I would love to know what this government knows about service standards. I would love to know how they're going to define them. I'm being a little cheeky, but we're fed up. Ontarians are fed up. Your own staff is fed up when they can't get answers or can't reconcile challenges for constituents.

I would say, if I could make some suggestions about service standards, definitely the Ontario Small Business Support Grant has had its challenges, and if we were going to name and shame, I would point my finger at a couple of ministers—and I know there have been different folks involved along the way. Admittedly, it has been a challenge. The businesses that have received the support are grateful. We are grateful on their behalf. The businesses who are stuck in limbo, or who got such a runaround without appeal, without anything that makes any sense and are left in the lurch? No. Whatever service standards you're going to set—they have not been met.

The small business grant definitely was an issue. Many businesses applied in good faith, were rejected or were approved for the grant and the money never came.

But aside from the Ontario Small Business Support Grant, I would argue that health care and education are services provided by the government, and wouldn't it be great if this bill actually invested in those things to improve services instead of setting them up for further privatization, like we've seen has been a priority for this government?

Service standards: Perhaps the ministers need to take a long, hard look in those mirrors and decide whether or not they are setting up their ministries for failure or setting up Ontarians for failure or for success. Programs are meant to serve Ontarians; they're not meant to serve a government agenda, or certainly a partisan agenda.

Remember when the Premier, at the beginning of this—and I realize I'm off on a bit of a tangent, but I still remember when the Premier was super-duper excited about disconnecting phones. I remember that sort of mocking of phones, how archaic to have phones that did such crazy things as plug into a wall. Those phones were phone numbers that all of our office staff would call to connect with someone, so that we could actually remedy and resolve things. Good luck getting an email back from a busy ministry, especially with a program like the OSBSG.

Let's talk about what service actually looks like, not just the concept of a name-and-shame website. Oh, and what about licence plates, while we're here? Licence plates—two years, folks. Happy anniversary. Happy plate anniversary—two years ago in February. That was when there were reports of the visibility challenges with the PC vanity licence plates. That was two years ago—still not resolved. So in terms of service standards, I think maybe there's a place to start.

Schedule 2: My colleague from Kitchener-Waterloo spoke a lot about this. This is the Building Ontario Businesses Initiative Act, supposedly to support the growth of Ontario businesses, to give Ontario businesses priority when it comes to procurement processes for goods and services. I'd like to thank her for her work on this. I have not had a file or a portfolio that delves, really, into this, but I am a constituency politician, and so a lot of the local businesses or folks will come to our offices and say, "I've got a product. I've got a great idea. How do I connect with government?" We do our best to send them through the government channels. I'm not an expert. I don't recommend who should get what contract or this or that, but we want it to be a fair process for them. A lot of them have come back and said, "We met all of the criteria and we couldn't even get in on this." It ended up going to someone in Quebec. It ended up going to someone in the States. I can't unpack that for them. I don't know what happens behind the curtain.

I certainly hope that when this government is talking about this section, schedule 2—I'd love to know where the accountability is. The government does not like to show its cards. I get that, but we've already seen in not quite four years quite a history of buddy favours and patronage. So how do we trust? Show us how we can trust. Prove to businesses and entrepreneurs that they can trust.

We look at the developers and the 413, the Bradford Bypass, where we put golf courses—we have lots of decisions made that we don't know how. We ask, and then they yell at us and say we're being too personal. We'd love to know how decisions are made about where the money goes, where it's spent and who gets what contracts. According to this section, cabinet gets to decide what businesses are Ontario businesses, how they will be given preference, which goods and services are to be affected. Is this going to be open and transparent? What is that called? Cabinet confidentiality, cabinet privilege, cabinet whatever-it-is. So, no, they don't have to tell us anything, and that, I see as a problem, because—I will say it—I don't trust them. I'd love for them to be more open and transparent because, as I said, we hear from local businesses that they meet criteria to get in on a process to bid and they are passed over. I really do hope that this will make things better for them.

Speaker, I'm going to look at schedule 4. This is interesting—quite cynical. Again, the member from Waterloo already explained that this is where this Fiscal Sustainability, Transparency and Accountability Act is being amended to provide that the deadline for the release of the budget in respect of the 2022-23 fiscal year is April 30, 2022. I'm going to assume that that's a platform budget, because starting in the beginning of May—so, again, that's April 30—it's going to be, what, the writ and then some of us will be re-elected in June. So is that a platform? I remember the 2018 election and looking for the PC platform. We looked everywhere for it. We couldn't find it. Anyway—

Interjection.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Yes, inside pizza boxes—we looked everywhere.

This is interesting. I'm frustrated by this on behalf of Ontarians: The government set their own timelines back in 2019, and they haven't been able to stick to them. In 2019, they changed the rules for their own game. They were supposed to incur personal penalties if they couldn't table the budget, if the budget didn't happen within the fiscal year, so by the end of March. By the way, only once with this government has that happened; it was March 24, 2021. The Premier and the finance minister were supposed to have had to pay personal fines equal to 10% of their salaries, so that's about \$20,000 and \$15,000, respectively. It isn't happening, and now we're moving the goalposts so that it can't happen again. Come on.

The government says, "Don't worry. Trust us. We're going to be so financially responsible. Oh, shoot, we're not going to make it. Move it. Put it into legislation." Anyway, they've missed the targets. Broken promises: It's not a new thing.

The hydro bills: Guys, have they been lowered by the 12%, as per the promise?

Interjections: No.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: No? Just checking. Okay, so instead of lowering them, they've actually hiked them.

I'm going to move on to schedule 5. I'm actually pretty jazzed about schedule 5. The reason that I am personally

jazzed about schedule 5 in Bill 84 is because my bill, Bill 83—I beat you to the punch, by the way, again—is my reintroduction of my bill, Bill 43, that was a collaborative effort from the folks across Durham region and the boards of trade, the chambers of commerce, all of the mayors, the regional chair and the grassroots movement to free the 412 and free the 418 and remove the tolls permanently from those highways. I debated Bill 43 back in 2020. I introduced it in 2018. The government begrudgingly allowed it to pass and then quietly allowed it to die and languish in committee, so it never actually became law. But here we are with schedule 5 that basically is my bill, so I'm pleased. I'm going to claim the win on behalf of the folks of Durham region. It has been a grassroots effort. The members across the way—and I see my colleague from Whitby—we all made this promise back in 2018. I made the promise as a New Democrat; they made the promise as PCs. We all knew that this was a community issue—except that I tabled the bill as soon as I got here, thinking that I'd be in a race. But here we are, 44 months later—better late than never.

The regulation that my colleague mentioned earlier says that the tolls would be removed during the period from April 5, 2022, to May 31, 2023. Well, that has an end date, but I will say that in this bill, Bill 84, should it pass, it starts from June 2023. Hopefully, we will indeed see it permanently; I don't know. Again, I'm going to go back to, I don't trust them, but I see the numbers, I see the dates. I see that the regulation is temporary. The minister acknowledged it has been a process, that they're doing their best to make the adjustments. I hope so. If not, my bill is here. You can pick it up; it's yours.

1710

I don't like to be cynical, but it wasn't that long ago—it was right before the break—that I read a letter on behalf of the mayors and the regional chair calling for the tolls to be removed. I basically was given the runaround about how it wasn't feasible. But here we are, it turns out it was feasible. So that is a win for the people of Durham region, and we are glad to see this moving forward.

I will acknowledge, even though the minister would not, that this is a team effort. Other members, I am sure, were trying to be heard and trying to make this happen. I'm just the one who actually tabled a bill and have been chasing it loudly. But I'll take my bit of credit for that, certainly.

Something else, though, that I raised the other day, a question yesterday, was about the congestion fees on the 407. There's a billion dollars that this government, that this Premier said, "Don't worry about it. You can keep it"—those weren't his words—but a billion dollars that the owners of the 407 get to keep. I see that as a problem, because a billion dollars would go a really long way to making a difference in the province of Ontario.

Part of the contractual deal with the 407 is, it's supposed to support some of our traffic flow. If it doesn't carry its share of the load on our roads, they owe congestion fees to the province. That's basically how it works. The government didn't collect it because they said

“pandemic,” but it turns out, based on a Toronto Star FOI that came out—was it yesterday? Anyway, in the last few days—actually, there was congestion. The only one that wasn’t congested—you could land a plane on it—was the 407. But the Premier is allowing them to keep that money, which is contractually and fairly owed by the 407. We shouldn’t just hand out a billion dollars, give it away.

Again, with the 413, the Bradford Bypass—this government has its pet projects. We get that. We see it. We know their favourites. But the 413—part of the rationale that the government gives is because of congestion. Well, if you could alleviate congestion using existing infrastructure by actually working within the contractual rules with the 407 and say, “Here’s this congestion fee,” they would be able to lower their tolls to a rate that actually would alleviate some of that congestion. It’s that ability to apply a pressure there, contractually speaking. But we didn’t do that, and that’s a missed opportunity. I wonder why.

I already referenced the two-year anniversary of those darn licence plates that are still out there. I have heard this; I did not do this, but I understand that people actually went out when they found out that they were unreadable, illegible, glow-in-the-dark, however we want to describe them—problematic, okay?—there were people who went out and bought them so that they could travel for free on the 407, because they couldn’t be read, or they assumed they couldn’t be read or whatnot. I’m just putting a question. This isn’t an accusation; I’m just thinking out loud right now. I wonder if that was part of the problem—if the 407 couldn’t read these darn plates, and you guys still haven’t fixed them. So let’s fix them. Let’s actually look after all of the pieces that we promised. You want to talk about service standards? Back to service standards, schedule 1. Let’s do this. Follow through, folks.

That’s the 407 congestion fees. The congestion fees, that billion dollars that we’re saying, “Never mind, 407 owners. You can keep it”—let’s talk about a billion dollars again.

I’m running out of time, but that surprises no one; I talk a lot.

Schedule 6 is amending the Highway Traffic Act. This is what has been the goody in the window. This government—all of you are tweeting the same pretty pictures about the licence plate renewal fees being scrapped, saving folks \$120 a year, sending them a cheque days before the election, reimbursing them the last maybe two years back to whatever the date is. User fees are a problem for low-income Ontarians, and everybody is fine with getting money back, okay? Surprisingly, a lot of people are writing to us about these. It is really interesting, because the Premier’s two biggest flops—I’m going to decide they’re the two biggest flops; everybody else may have their own favourites—have been stickers that don’t stick and licence plates that can’t be read. Somebody said, “I’ve got an idea. Let’s combine stickers and licence plates and see if we can make people forget.” People want to save money, sure, but how much money could we have saved if we had a child care deal by now? Somebody told me that two hours of child care is the \$120. Real differences in

people’s lives would be getting a child care deal. Real differences in people’s lives would be addressing hydro rates, affordable housing.

There are so many letters I got. Here’s one from a constituent in Whitby that says, “Give up a billion dollars in revenue? Who’s going to maintain all the transportation infrastructure...? How is” the Premier “going to make up for this billion-dollar loss in revenue? Lay off teachers? Lay off health care workers?” The Premier “better tell the voting public where the billion dollars is going to come from to make up for this loss in revenue!!!” That’s from Ron.

I got letters from Kitchener. Ava said, “I would like to voice my disagreement with the recent ... initiative to eliminate licence renewal fees.... I feel that this is simply a blatant move to win the next election in June. My fear is that vital provincial services will be reduced—such as education, health care, mental health, maintenance of roads, green initiatives.... Can you please voice these concerns in the Legislature?” Sure, Ava, I’m happy to.

Lisa wants to know, “How does the government propose making up this lost revenue? Will there be cuts to sectors already hurting and suffering?”

“All I have heard has been about cutting the program. Nowhere has it been said how the revenue will be recuperated. This is simply an election year vote grab move, and I’m completely against it.” Actually, in fairness, Lisa started out her letter by saying—sorry, because the government will want this part: “Now, please don’t get me wrong, do I love having to pay \$120 every year before my birthday? No.”

So folks will take the money back, but they are also worried when they look at education and health care. They’re worried about the damage that they’ve already seen and where this is headed.

I have so many more quotes, and I’ll be happy to share them in the questions and comments. Maybe then I can also get on the record a little something about schedule 11.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Questions and response?

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate the comments from the member from Oshawa. It was kind of a long way of saying thank you for taking off the tolls on those highways.

I was wondering if she would be willing to commit to supporting this bill that she’s so much in favour of?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I absolutely support removing the tolls from the 412 and the 418.

Speaker, funny story: My very first private member’s bill was actually a health and safety initiative. It was an important thing, and it was for the miners and firefighters whose widows were having money clawed back from them. I met with the then Minister of Labour. He came to my office and we discussed it. I had a private member’s bill. The government of the day took that part of my private member’s bill, put it in government legislation, and I had to vote against the legislation because it was an omnibus bill full of malarkey. It’s a neat trick of government to try and sucker us into different things.

I will say that I have always stood by the folks in Durham region, and I will continue to do that, regardless of the tangles that you put us through.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Questions and response?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I know you did not have a chance to talk to schedule 11 very much, but I would be interested in your view on the creation of a centre of realty excellence and if you think that this will lead to the government making good use of vacant government property to house everybody in Ontario who needs supportive housing, who needs housing right now?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you very much, and I appreciate it because I didn't have the chance to make comment on schedule 11.

Many people may not remember that it was the Ontario Realty Corp.—and now that portfolio of government buildings, so to speak, land or whatnot, with the exception of schools, is part of Infrastructure Ontario.

So now this new idea of establishing a centre—I don't have any details about governance or roles or funding or participants. Everything substantial is going to be left to regulation, which I hate. Do I think that this government is going to make the best decisions for affordable housing? Not really. Most of their decisions have been made based on dollars and developers and whatnot, and I really do hope that they make better use.

1720

I also met with the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario folks this morning, and they're a bit nervous that they won't have a chance to look at some of these properties.

So I hope the government works with all stakeholders, not just their favourites.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further response?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Bill 84, as you know, is the eighth red tape reduction bill, and the focus is on supporting people and businesses across the province. Since we've introduced these eight bills, we've been able to reduce the regulatory compliance by close to 7% and we're almost near our goal of achieving \$373 million in net annual compliance costs for municipalities in the region of Durham, not-for-profits, universities and colleges that the member for Oshawa and I share in our ridings, school boards and hospitals. Speaker, the opposition's voting record on these bills has been consistently no.

Would the member for Oshawa break that trend, given the impacts in her riding—again, universities, colleges, board, non-profits and, of course, taking the tolls off the 412 and 418—and say yes?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I wholeheartedly support schedule 5, which is my bill basically, so that one's good. It remains to be seen about some of the others, like schedule 7.

In the middle of the night last night, the member for Sudbury was reaching out to stakeholders at Laurentian University to say, "Did you know about this?" The answer was no. "Did they consult with you?" The answer was no.

And I say the middle of the night not because—I don't know his habits, but I do know that the bill was dropped middle of the day yesterday, a two-hour briefing while all of us were in here debating other things, and here we are standing up next day without a chance to fully delve. So this government saying, "Just support it. You don't have a chance to read it. Just support it"—come on. We're going to do our due diligence, which would be a new idea for the government. I encourage them to try it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Thunder Bay—Atikokan.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you to the member from Oshawa for her comments.

I want to further the discussion with regard to service standards because I am appalled, frankly, by the standards that we are providing public service to our people in Ontario, things like lack of responses on the Northern Health Travel Grant Program, lack of responses on assistive devices, lack of responses on Ministry of Transportation, environmental concerns—it goes on and on. Don't even get me started on the small business grant and the frustration that those businesses who are already struggling had to face.

What kind of standards would this member like to see in the service to the people of Ontario?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Great question.

I would like to thank this member and all of the members in our caucus, because we do a lot of work on behalf of our constituents, and this government actually makes it quite challenging to get that work done and to meet the needs of our constituents to support them, to get answers to their darn questions, to try to get them any kind of resolution.

What standards would I like see? The ones that we've been asking for. The ones that constituents have been asking for, that stakeholders have been saying, "this would make things smoother. This would make our lives better in terms of affordability."

This government can point to the licence stickers thing for \$120, but let's talk about what would actually set living standards better. That would be child care that's affordable. That would be affordable housing. That would be safety standards. That would be ensuring that workplaces are safe, not changing inspection standards.

I think that this is an opportunity for the government to, as I said, take a long, hard look in the mirror but also consult with real folks.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Kitchener—Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: I've got an interesting question, since the member brought it up. We're talking about how the government is going to be able to afford things if we're putting money back in people's pockets. What does that billion dollars mean? The member from Waterloo opened the door to this earlier, but I'm very curious what taxes the member opposite wants to raise to pay for the "plan" that the NDP have just released.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm actually quite pleased to have the opportunity to do a little back-and-forth with the

member from Kitchener–Conestoga, because I got a letter from Jane Lindsay from Kitchener, and she asked me a few questions that I'm going to do my best to answer his questions with, but also bat it back, because that's what we do here.

Jane says, "The government should be using our tax base wisely, not deleting what amounts to a small amount for most households, but which adds up to (according to press reports) a loss of \$1.1 billion. This money should be used to support services which benefit everyone, but which we couldn't access for \$120 per year, the price of a licence renewal. Whether the current party or another is elected, it will be devastating to hear if we cannot repair health care for the elderly or provide funding to improve the healthy environments in schools or any number of other necessary projects, because we are \$1.1 billion short."

This is a constituent who is doing their best to figure out how this government is making decisions. We are too. When we're government, we're going to do it responsibly and well.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member for Sudbury.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member for Oshawa. I want to congratulate her for her work on the tolls of Highways 412 and 418, on behalf of Durham region. I know it's coming through Bill 84 now, in schedule 5—but it was her, 44 months ago, who tabled this to bring it forward.

It reminds me of when GM was closing. The members stood up and fought to keep GM open. I'm wondering if the member can remind all of our colleagues what the Premier said the day after they announced they were closing.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: As I recall, the Premier said, "The ship has left the dock." I think I accused him of folding like a cheap suit, tapping out before he even got in the ring. But here we are, and the world keeps turning, and things can change. We had hope in Oshawa. We were accused of peddling false hope, but as it turns out, hope is worth something in Oshawa. Hope is worth something in Ontario.

This bill talks about better services and maybe better life, but people won't be able to measure it based on just what's here.

This government still has a short runway before they're out of here, but they could make some really positive changes for the people in Ontario, and I would encourage that Premier and this government to do just that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further debate?

Mr. Stephen Blais: It's a pleasure to be here, finally back in the Legislature after a two-and-a-half-month break, give or take. Mr. Speaker, I think that's part of the point—after two and a half months of being outside of this place, the people of Ontario expected a little bit more out of the government for their first piece of legislation.

What happened during that two and a half months? Well, we only had a small thing called Omicron rip

through the province, bringing the fears and anxieties of millions of Ontarians back to the forefront, putting pressure on small businesses, putting pressure on families with kids in school, putting pressure on long-term-care facilities, retirement homes and, of course, our hospital sector, which is already stretched. And the first bill from the government is about reducing red tape, if you can call it that. After two and a half months, I think the people of Ontario expected a little bit more.

This is, according to the government, a red tape reduction act. I'm curious, Mr. Speaker, why the government thinks that something as small as the provincial budget is red tape. I don't know about you, but I think the budget is pretty important. I think it's pretty fundamental to what the government wants to do, and so I'm not sure why they would consider it red tape by delaying it, or potentially delaying it, by weeks, if not more than a month.

I know that to some people on the other side, the budget is this pesky little thing that they have to plan for and get the approval of the representatives of the people of Ontario for, to spend their money. For some people, that might be a small little thing that can be cut like any other piece of red tape in government. But I think most people expect the government to put some attention into their budget, to have a budget that's on time. Obviously, this government doesn't believe in an on-time budget.

1730

This, of course, won't be the first time that their budget is late. Two years ago their budget was late, if I remember correctly. We all know that when the budget is late, the Premier has to pay a fine and the finance minister has to pay a fine. The Premier said, "I know it's not much, it's peanuts, but I gave back \$10,000 ... along with the Minister of Finance." Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know too many Ontario families who think that \$10,000 is peanuts, certainly not with everything that's going on right now. Now, \$10,000 is clearly peanuts to the former finance minister, and it's clearly peanuts to the Premier. But for a family that is having trouble buying groceries; to a family that is having trouble with high gas prices, which, by the way, haven't gone down; to a family that is having trouble with high hydro rates, which haven't gone down; to a family that is having trouble just getting by, \$10,000 is a lot of money.

That \$10,000 number is a really critical number, because it's almost exactly the amount of money an average family would save, per child, if we had \$10-a-day child care. Ten-dollar-a-day child care, which this government is delaying, procrastinating and putting politics on, would save the average Ontario family about \$10,000 a year. For the average Ontario family, that's a lot of money. That means affordable child care will deliver real results for them. That will pay for hockey and ballet and help them save for college or university or help them buy that new car or that new house or whatever it is that they need that \$10,000 for. That's real money to families. Unfortunately, the government just hasn't delivered on that \$10,000 a year for average families, and it doesn't seem like they're all that interested in delivering on it.

They continue to dither, they continue to dance, and real families are paying the price.

Let's talk about highways for a second, because highways and cars seem to be a key piece of this particular piece of legislation. As has been pointed out already—I don't need to kick a dead horse on this one—the government has had lots of opportunity to remove these tolls. They've decided to sit on it until 100 days before the election, hoping that might win them some votes in parts of the GTA. It reminds me of buck-a-beer. Buck-a-beer sounded really good, and if it actually happened, it would have been really good, but it didn't actually happen. It was done to win votes before an election, and guess what? Now we're seeing the same kind of gimmicky politics from this government.

The other interesting thing about the highway toll one is that it's very similar to buck-a-beer in that they don't plan for it to last very long. They have a regulation, O. Reg. 77/22, that takes the tolls away for a year. So are you going to bring the tolls back next year? Is that your plan? You get people to vote for you with this toll elimination this year, and then you bring them back next year, just like—

Interjections.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Well, that's what the regulation says. You could have passed a regulation that says, "Get rid of the tolls forever." That is not what the regulation says.

Is this going to be a permanent elimination of the tolls, or is this going to be a one-year limit to get you through this June and hopefully save your seat?

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Order, the member from Whitby.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I guess I should have asked that during debate earlier, Mr. Speaker, but I wanted to be heckled at 5:30 on a Wednesday night.

If the government really cared about getting rid of these tolls, they would have made it a permanent elimination of the tolls, not a one-year temporary gimmick in order to win votes 100 days before the election.

There's another really consistent piece of the government's modus operandi, and that is the complete ignoring of the city of Ottawa and eastern Ontario. They've had lots of little highway gimmick pieces of legislation over their term in office, but one of the biggest things they could have done for the city of Ottawa this term is to upload Highways 174 and 17 back from the municipalities of the city of Ottawa and the counties of Prescott and Russell. That alone, Mr. Speaker, would have cut a lot of red tape for those municipalities. It would have saved those municipalities millions and millions and millions of dollars each and every year—money that could have been spent on local road repair for potholes and sidewalks. It could have been spent on better local winter maintenance. It could have been spent on building better soccer fields and building better hockey rinks. But instead, Mr. Speaker, this government wants to continue forcing these municipalities to carry the cost for what is a multi-jurisdictional, major highway that, in any other part of the

province—this is a provincially owned highway, except for in Ontario.

And why is that, Mr. Speaker? Well, it was about 25 years ago, give or take, that a former Conservative government, under a former Conservative Premier, downloaded those highways to the municipalities. They wanted to clear their balance sheet ahead of an election. They wanted to play voodoo economics, basically, with the people of Ontario, to make it seem like they were balancing their budget, and so they sent it down to the municipalities, Mr. Speaker. And 20 or 25 years later, property taxpayers in Ottawa and in the counties are still paying for these two highways.

If they wanted to cut red tape, if they wanted to give real relief to real people, they would upload these highways so that the city of Ottawa and the counties can invest in more important local infrastructure: local roads, local recreation or whatever the local priorities happen to be. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, this is yet another broken promise because, of course, it was the Conservatives who, about four or five years ago, promised to re-upload these highways. In fact, that promise can still be found on the website and the Facebook page of a minister of this government. It's a promise they have yet to fulfil. It's a promise I don't think they will fulfil, Mr. Speaker, and I don't think the residents of Ottawa or the counties are going to believe them even if they try.

And of course, we've just come through a month-long occupation of Ottawa, where once again this government showed their disdain for the residents of Ottawa and eastern Ontario. For almost a month, there was virtually no action from the provincial government. It took the Premier four or five days to even acknowledge that it was happening, and when he did, he said, "Well, the mayor, Jim, has my phone number." That's not leadership, waiting for the mayor to call him. He should have been reaching out to the mayor every step along the way.

As far as I know, too, Mr. Speaker, he's the only provincial leader not to have yet visited Ottawa. The occupation is over. They're gone. He doesn't need to be afraid about being embarrassed, walking down Wellington Street. They're not there anymore. He should come to Ottawa and speak to small business owners and speak to the people in Centretown, who have been harassed and victimized. A leader would do that, Mr. Speaker. This Premier hasn't done that yet.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, this is a bill that Ontario residents would have expected more of this government from. It does very little to address the real and urgent financial needs of families. It certainly doesn't provide the \$10,000-a-year relief that affordable child care would. Once again, they are completely ignoring the National Capital Region, which has been their history. They're continuing that history of ignoring the national capital and, unfortunately for them, the voters of Ottawa are going to remember that in about 100 days from now.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Questions and responses?

Hon. Stan Cho: I know the member opposite loves tolls. In fact, if it were up to the leader of the Liberal Party,

those tolls would have existed on the 412 and 418 for 30 years, Speaker, so I'm not sure what the member—and I don't know how he says the Liberals are ready to govern when he doesn't understand what a regulation is. You can't just wave a wand and get rid of the infrastructure. There is a process to this. The fact is, there will be no tolls on 412 and 418. None of the drivers will be paying for that at all, hard stop.

But, Speaker, my question isn't about tolls, because we know how they feel. It's ironic to hear the Liberals talk about fiscal transparency, when we're being very open with the people of this province. Simple question: How can that member explain that when the Liberals were in power, they missed six of their last eight financial reporting periods? How is that possible?

Mr. Stephen Blais: I know the member from Willowdale doesn't often pay attention, but he might know that I wasn't there for any of that time. I got here two years ago—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Order.

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Mr. Stephen Blais: I got here two years ago, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Order.

Mr. Stephen Blais: What I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, is that for the four years that I was on the Ottawa Catholic School Board and for the nearly 10 years I was at the city of Ottawa, we ran balanced budgets each and every single year.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Government, you asked the question.

Question and response?

Ms. Catherine Fife: On April 11, 2019, when the member for Nipissing was finance minister, he introduced the accountability framework that would require governments to deliver the budget by March 31. He said, and this is directly from Hansard:

“In addition, the proposed act would require governments to deliver the budget by March 31.

“And perhaps more importantly, the act will include an ‘Accountability Guarantee’ for both the Premier and the Minister of Finance. They will each be required to pay a fine equal to 10% of their Premier and ministerial salaries for each missed reporting deadline.”

Then he turned to the Premier during this moment and said, “Sorry I didn't tell you about that one earlier, Premier. We are, quite literally, putting our money where our mouth is.”

This is what was said in this House. The finance minister and the Premier of this province promised the people an accountability guarantee. What does that say about trusting government when a government slides the change into an omnibus piece of legislation 100 days outside of an election?

Mr. Stephen Blais: I think the answer is obvious: It says that we can't trust this government. They have broken almost all of their major promises. There's no buck-a-beer,

there are no lower hydro rates, gas rates aren't any lower, and now they are delaying the implementation of their budget. Maybe \$10,000 is a lot of money to the Premier. Maybe I was wrong to assume that when he said it was peanuts, it was actually a lot of money to him. Maybe he doesn't want to have to pay that fine again for delaying the budget. But that's what we're going to get, Mr. Speaker, and it just demonstrates that not only were they not ready to govern, they've barely governed for the four years they've been here.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Mississauga–Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: My question to the member opposite starts with the Fewer Fees, Better Services Act, which is this government's eighth red tape reduction bill. It builds on the previous legislation we introduced to support people and businesses across this province. The measures included in these bills have allowed us to reduce needless regulatory compliance by 6.5% since June 2018. We are also near our goal of achieving \$373 million in net annual compliance cost savings for businesses, not-for-profits, municipalities, universities, colleges, schools and hospitals.

My question to the member opposite is, do you support efforts to make things easier for people and businesses in our province? Do you say yes to prosperity for Team Ontario?

Mr. Stephen Blais: I certainly support making life more affordable for Ontarians and small business owners. If you were to ask anyone in Orléans, if you were to ask anyone in Willowdale or Mississauga or any part of Toronto, if you were to ask any small business owner across this province if they are better off today than they were four years ago, not one of them would say yes, Mr. Speaker. They can't afford groceries. Gas prices are out of control. Hydro prices haven't gone down. They can't get an appointment with a family doctor. Their kids' schools are overcrowded. No one in Ontario would say they're better off today than they were four years ago.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Questions and response?

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Orléans. Earlier he mentioned he had been here about two years, coming in the by-election. So what I've witnessed over the last four years is very little consultation and things being dropped at the last minute with very little preparation. For example, this bill was tabled yesterday at 2 o'clock, a debriefing at 4 p.m. when most of us were on House duty because we're in cohorts with COVID, and then debating today.

Schedule 7 has to do with Laurentian University. I was talking to people at Laurentian University until 10 o'clock last night, trying to get some feedback on this. Would you agree that things would work better in the Legislature if the government would be more forthcoming with more advance notice and provide an opportunity to provide meaningful feedback?

Mr. Stephen Blais: I would agree. This has been a hallmark of their “governing style” for four years. We saw

it when it came to the changes they tried to make to education that led to the first major teachers' strike in a generation. We've seen it with budgets that are behind schedule. We've seen it with this legislation, as the member has just pointed out. And so, Mr. Speaker, I would absolutely agree that consultation and putting some thought into what you're doing is a much better way of governing, a much better approach than they take.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Questions and responses?

Mr. Mike Harris: I find it a little bit ironic and rich coming from the member across the way that he wants to say that he wasn't here during the tenure of the last government. That's fine, and I was one of the first people in the Legislature to congratulate him on his election in the by-election that we had, coming up on almost a couple of years ago now. But do you know who was here at that time? The current leader of the Liberal Party, Steven Del Duca. This member wants to stand there and say, "Oh, we should be downloading the highways back to municipalities," when his own leader, who was transportation minister at the time, said no, they shouldn't do that.

We talk about all of the things about saving money and putting money back in people's pockets that this member keeps talking about. Well, what about the Fair Hydro Plan? How much money did that take out of people's pockets? And we are still here, four years later, trying to clean up and untangle that mess. That's one of the reasons that I got involved in politics, because of the vote-buying that was going on from that party. We've reduced hydro rates by 12%; I'm not sure if you were paying attention over the last couple of days. But why are you standing there, defending that leader—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Thank you.

I recognize the member from Orléans.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Mr. Speaker, the Financial Accountability Officer has debunked this notion that hydro prices have gone down. I think families at home paying the bills would debunk that hydro prices have gone down. Affordability is at crisis levels in Ontario. People can't afford to buy groceries, gas prices are out of control, and they have no confidence that this government has their best interests at heart. The simple question that all Ontario residents should be asking themselves 100 days from now is, are you better off four years later? I think they're going to say no, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Question and response?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Speaker, while I've got a Liberal in the House, I'd like to ask a question, actually, about the tolls on the 412 and the 418. The member across the way from Whitby—we know this; we have this conversation in Durham region. We have no idea where those tolls came from. That was a surprise decision.

We knew that we were getting the roads in Durham region. This goes back a way, before the member's time—before my time, frankly. However—surprise—we got the tolls. I would like to know if it has been passed down through the Liberal stories, if we could figure out what

Durham did wrong to initially get those tolls on. Was it a punitive measure?

Interjections: He wasn't here.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, come on. Be nice to him.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I appreciate my friend from northern Ontario here, who has always been very nice to me.

Mr. Speaker, what is absolutely clear is that families, whether they're in Durham or Mississauga or northern Ontario or Ottawa and eastern Ontario, are suffering as a result of runaway inflation. They're suffering from high gas prices. They're suffering from high hydro prices. They're suffering from groceries that are more expensive each and every week to feed their families, and there has been absolutely no relief provided by this government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further debate?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: It's an honour to rise here today to speak in support of our government's plan, and particularly in support of Bill 84, the Fewer Fees, Better Services Act, introduced by my friend the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction. I'd like to thank her and her team, and all other ministries that contributed, for their work on this bill.

Before I begin, I want to thank my OLIP intern, Iqra, for her help with my speech today and all the other projects that she has been working on so far, including the visit by the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility to Mississauga–Lakeshore last week.

Speaker, it is appropriate that we're debating this bill this week, for Red Tape Awareness Week. As the associate minister said, this is the government's eighth red tape reduction bill. It builds on the success of many previous bills that I've also had the privilege of speaking about here, including the Main Street Recovery Act in 2020 and the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act in 2021. These are all high-impact bills that will make Ontario more competitive and help support our economic recovery after the pandemic.

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In total, this government has taken over 400 actions to reduce the burden of red tape. We're providing clear and effective rules that promote public health and safeguard the environment without sacrificing growth, innovation and opportunity. This has resulted in almost \$400 million in net annual savings to businesses across Ontario.

Last week, Stats Canada reported that inflation rose by 5.1% in January. That's the highest level since 1991. Gas prices are now 31% higher than at this time last year, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine could add to these costs, with some analysts predicting prices could hit \$2 per litre later this year.

As the cost of living goes up for Ontario families, this bill would eliminate licence plate renewal fees and sticker requirements for passenger vehicles, light-duty trucks, motorcycles and mopeds, effective March 13. These changes would help make life easier and more affordable for eight million drivers across Ontario. This includes over three quarters of my constituents in Mississauga–Lakeshore, for whom driving is their main mode of commuting.

Schedule 6 would also allow the province to refund eligible vehicle owners for any licence plate renewal fee they have paid since 2020. If the bill is passed, vehicle owners would receive a cheque in the mail as early as next month.

Speaker, I was disappointed to see a Mississauga councillor spreading misinformation about this bill on Twitter yesterday, so let me be clear: In order to receive a refund cheque, drivers must pay all outstanding fees, fines and tolls. I'll repeat that: They must pay all outstanding fees, fines and tolls.

It's worth taking a moment to review the history here: In 2012, the licence plate sticker fee was \$82 in southern Ontario. This is the year the leader of the Liberal Party was elected and, as we know, became the Minister of Transportation. A year later, in 2013, the fee went up 10%, to \$90. In 2014, the fee went up 9%, to \$98. In 2015, it went up 10%, to \$108, and in 2016, it went up another 11%, to \$120. In just four years with Steven Del Duca as Minister of Transportation, the cost of drivers' licence stickers skyrocketed by almost 50%, costing drivers hundreds of dollars of their hard-earned money.

At the same time, Minister Del Duca cut funding to winter road maintenance. In 2015, the Auditor General reported that contracts were awarded to the lowest bidder, even if they did not have the equipment they needed to clear roads properly. The time to clear major highways of snow and ice after a storm doubled from 2.1 hours to 4.7 hours. The OPP noted cases where poor road conditions led to serious accidents and even deaths.

As Postmedia reported, the Del Duca Liberals cut costs, and highway deaths spiked. Two hundred lawsuits were launched against the Ministry of Transportation.

The next year, in 2016, the Auditor General reported that contracts to build bridges were awarded to contractors with no experience. One contractor installed a bridge truss upside down—we all remember that—and Metrolinx had to take over the project. But the Del Duca Liberals paid them a full \$19 million anyway and even hired them again for phase 2, during which they caused \$1 million in glass damage and built a stairway incorrectly. Again, Del Duca's Liberals paid them anyway and awarded them another large contract worth \$39 million.

This was the record of Steven Del Duca and the previous Liberal government: more fees and worse services. Speaker, we're not going back to that. Our Premier and our government take the opposite approach. Eliminating these sticker fees will help put money back into the pockets of Ontarians, to help with the cost of bills, groceries and make life more affordable.

If passed, schedule 5 would also give drivers a break by removing tolls that were imposed on Highways 412 and 418 by Minister Del Duca and the previous Liberal government, effective on April 5. These are the only tolled north-south highways in the entire province. We agree with Durham residents, businesses and mayors: These tolls are unfair. John Henry, the regional chair of Durham, said, "All Ontarians, including Durham region residents, contribute to the construction and maintenance of these

highways. However, it's only in Durham that residents pay to use the connecting links...." Speaker, it's unfair to target drivers and businesses in Durham region.

I want to take a moment to thank the member from Whitby, the chief government whip, and our other members from Durham for advocating on this, including the member from Oshawa and our colleagues in the official opposition.

If passed, this change will help provide people with more travelling opportunity and address gridlock since the removal of the tolls will help to reduce traffic congestion on other local and regional roads.

I also want to take a moment to address a concern raised by the mayor of Mississauga at a recent council meeting about potential tolls on Highway 413. The Premier and the Minister of Transportation have been very clear: There will be no tolls on Highway 413 or on the Bradford Bypass. Unlike the Del Duca Liberals, we will not impose any further cost burdens on Ontarians.

I want to thank everyone who contributed to our pre-budget consultations and round tables again this year. One concern we heard again and again this year is that businesses and organizations often struggle to navigate through many difficult sources of government information when determining what's required for various applications.

I was pleased to see the At Your Service Act included here in schedule 1 of Bill 84. If passed, it would establish a single window for business services and require standard guarantees so the businesses can track the information they need from the government. It would require the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade to create guaranteed business service standards and public reporting obligations that all ministries must comply with—and mechanisms to take action when they fail to do so.

This government is committed to reducing the burdens of red tape, including the time businesses must spend on permits, applications and licences. As the associate minister said, we're creating a "tell us once" culture, so businesses do not have to provide the same information to several different ministries. There will be one website and one clear point of entry for businesses, with content that's easy to navigate and can be found in one place. We're committed to becoming a leader in North America in terms of how easily and quickly businesses can get up and running and access the tools they need to grow.

Speaker, I'll give another example. The province owns many surplus assets across Ontario that are no longer required to deliver government programs and services. Selling surplus properties reduces ongoing operating costs, minimizes risks and, most importantly, it puts properties back into productive use—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I regret to interrupt the member, but the clock has hit 6 of the clock, which means it's time for private members' business.

*Second reading debate deemed adjourned.
Report continues in volume B.*

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, OC, OOnt.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Ted Arnott

Clerk / Greffier: Todd Decker

Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffier: Trevor Day

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Valerie Quioc Lim, Wai Lam (William) Wong,

Meghan Stenson, Christopher Tyrell

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergente d'armes: Jacquelyn Gordon

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Anand, Deepak (PC)	Mississauga—Malton	
Andrew, Jill (NDP)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London—Fanshawe	
Arnott, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (PC)	Wellington—Halton Hills	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Arthur, Ian (NDP)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Baber, Roman (IND)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Babikian, Aris (PC)	Scarborough—Agincourt	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia—Lambton	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand—Norfolk	
Begum, Doly (NDP)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bell, Jessica (NDP)	University—Rosedale	
Berns-McGown, Rima (NDP)	Beaches—East York / Beaches—East York	
Bethlenfalvy, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (PC)	Pickering—Uxbridge	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins	
Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)	Markham—Stouffville	Minister of Legislative Affairs / Ministre des Affaires législatives Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC)	Scarborough North / Scarborough-Nord	Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)	Willowdale	Associate Minister of Transportation (GTA) / Ministre associé des Transports (RGT)
Clark, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby	
Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	
Crawford, Stephen (PC)	Oakville	
Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC)	Mississauga—Lakeshore	
Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Elliott, Hon. / L'hon. Christine (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce
Fee, Amy (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Fullerton, Hon. / L'hon. Merrilee (PC)	Kanata—Carleton	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Hon. / L'hon. Parm (PC)	Milton	Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiles et du Multiculturalisme
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gravelle, Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hassan, Faisal (NDP)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor—Tecumseh	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hillier, Randy (IND)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Solicitor General / Solliciteuse générale
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Karahalios, Belinda C. (NBP)	Cambridge	
Karpoche, Bhutilla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Ke, Vincent (PC)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
Khanjin, Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Kramp, Daryl (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	
Kusendova, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre	
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
MacLeod, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa (PC)	Nepean	Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries / ministre des Industries du patrimoine, du sport, du tourisme et de la culture
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
McKenna, Hon. / L'hon. Jane (PC)	Burlington	Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues / Ministre associée déléguée au dossier de l'Enfance et à la Condition féminine
McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Miller, Norman (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Mitas, Christina Maria (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough- Centre	
Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Morrison, Suze (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (IND)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Park, Lindsey (IND)	Durham	
Parsa, Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Hon. / L'hon. Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	Associate Minister of Digital Government / Ministre associé délégué de l'Action pour un gouvernement numérique
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Minister of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre du Développement du Nord, des Mines, des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Roberts, Jeremy (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	President of the Treasury Board / Président du Conseil du Trésor
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurattan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associée déléguée aux Petites Entreprises et à la Réduction des formalités administratives
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	
Vacant	Ajax / Ajax	
Vacant	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Randy Pettapiece
Teresa J. Armstrong, Toby Barrett
Lorne Coe, Rudy Cuzzetto
Goldie Ghamari, Randy Hillier
Christina Maria Mitas, Judith Monteith-Farrell
Michael Parsa, Randy Pettapiece
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs / Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Ian Arthur
Ian Arthur, Will Bouma
Stephen Crawford, Catherine Fife
Ernie Hardeman, Mitzie Hunter
Logan Kanapathi, Sol Mamakwa
Jeremy Roberts, Dave Smith
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Michael Bushara

Standing Committee on General Government / Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales

Chair / Président: Logan Kanapathi
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Mike Schreiner
Jill Andrew, Robert Bailey
Will Bouma, Guy Bourgouin
Chris Glover, Mike Harris
Logan Kanapathi, Sheref Sabawy
Amarjot Sandhu, Mike Schreiner
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

Chair / Président: Gilles Bisson
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Aris Babikian
Deepak Anand, Aris Babikian
Gilles Bisson, Lorne Coe
Wayne Gates, Robin Martin
Norman Miller, Billy Pang
Amanda Simard, Marit Stiles
John Yakabuski
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tanzima Khan

Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lucille Collard
Lucille Collard, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Natalia Kusendova
Jim McDonell, Suze Morrison
Randy Pettapiece, Gurratan Singh
Donna Skelly, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Kevin Yarde
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

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

Chair / Présidente: Laurie Scott
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Rima Berns-McGown, France Gélinas
Goldie Ghamari, Faisal Hassan
Jim McDonell, Sam Oosterhoff
Laurie Scott, Vijay Thanigasalam
Jeff Yurek
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tanzima Khan

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

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

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

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

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

Chair / Présidente: Natalia Kusendova
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Bhutila Karpoche
Aris Babikian, Jeff Burch
Amy Fee, Michael Gravelle
Joel Harden, Mike Harris
Bhutila Karpoche, Natalia Kusendova
Robin Martin, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Jeff Yurek
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Vanessa Kattar

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

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