

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

No. 46A

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

N° 46A

2nd Session
42nd Parliament
Wednesday
23 March 2022

2^e session
42^e législature
Mercredi
23 mars 2022

Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott
Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
Greffier : Todd Decker

Hansard on the Internet

Hansard and other documents of the Legislative Assembly can be on your personal computer within hours after each sitting. The address is:

<https://www.ola.org/>

Index inquiries

Reference to a cumulative index of previous issues may be obtained by calling the Hansard Reporting Service indexing staff at 416-325-7400.

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

L'adresse pour faire paraître sur votre ordinateur personnel le Journal et d'autres documents de l'Assemblée législative en quelques heures seulement après la séance est :

Renseignements sur l'index

Adressez vos questions portant sur des numéros précédents du Journal des débats au personnel de l'index, qui vous fourniront des références aux pages dans l'index cumulatif, en composant le 416-325-7400.

House Publications and Language Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 1180-2987

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Wednesday 23 March 2022 / Mercredi 23 mars 2022

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Getting Ontario Connected Act, 2022, Bill 93, Miss Surma / Loi de 2022 pour un Ontario connecté, projet de loi 93, Mlle Surma	
Mr. Deepak Anand.....	2441
Mr. John Vanthof.....	2442
Mrs. Robin Martin.....	2442
Ms. Marit Stiles.....	2442
Mr. Daryl Kramp.....	2443
Mr. John Vanthof.....	2443
Mr. Jeff Burch.....	2443
Mr. Michael Parsa.....	2446
Mr. Tom Rakocevic.....	2446
Hon. Jill Dunlop.....	2446
Ms. Marit Stiles.....	2447
Mr. Norman Miller.....	2447
Mr. Sheref Sabawy.....	2447
Mr. Tom Rakocevic.....	2450
Hon. David Piccini.....	2450
Mr. Jeff Burch.....	2450
Mr. Daryl Kramp.....	2451
Second reading debate deemed adjourned.....	2451

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

Long-term care	
Mrs. Robin Martin.....	2451
Addiction services	
Ms. Suze Morrison.....	2451
Long-term care	
Mr. Sam Oosterhoff.....	2452
Loneliness and social isolation	
Ms. Lindsey Park.....	2452
Affordable housing	
Mr. Tom Rakocevic.....	2452
Holi / Nowruz	
Mr. Michael Parsa.....	2452
Affordable housing	
Ms. Sara Singh.....	2453
Tourism	
Mr. Deepak Anand.....	2453
Invasion of Ukraine	
Ms. Marit Stiles.....	2453

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEUSES ET VISITEURS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott).....	2453
------------------------------------	------

QUESTION PERIOD / PÉRIODE DE QUESTIONS

Health care

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	2453
Hon. Paul Calandra.....	2454

Electric vehicles

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	2454
Hon. Paul Calandra.....	2455

Northern Health Travel Grant

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell.....	2456
Hon. Christine Elliott.....	2456

Credit unions

Mr. Bill Walker.....	2456
Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy.....	2457

Mental health services

Ms. Peggy Sattler.....	2457
Mr. Sam Oosterhoff.....	2457

Municipal funding

Mr. John Fraser.....	2458
Hon. Paul Calandra.....	2458
Mme Lucille Collard.....	2458
Hon. Sylvia Jones.....	2458

Infrastructure funding

Mr. Norman Miller.....	2458
Hon. Kinga Surma.....	2459

First Nations consultation

Mr. Sol Mamakwa.....	2459
Hon. Greg Rickford.....	2459

Health care

Mr. Rick Nicholls.....	2460
Hon. Christine Elliott.....	2460

Agri-food industry

Mr. Will Bouma.....	2460
Hon. Lisa M. Thompson.....	2461

Social assistance

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown.....	2461
Hon. Merrilee Fullerton.....	2461

Garde d'enfants / Child care

Mlle Amanda Simard.....	2462
L'hon. Paul Calandra.....	2462

Trucking industry	
Ms. Sara Singh	2462
Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy	2463
Cancer treatment	
Ms. Lindsey Park	2463
Hon. Christine Elliott	2463
Visitors	
Hon. Stan Cho	2463

DEFERRED VOTES / VOTES DIFFÉRÉS

Working for Workers Act, 2022, Bill 88, Mr. McNaughton / Loi de 2022 visant à oeuvrer pour les travailleurs, projet de loi 88, M. McNaughton	
Second reading agreed to	2464

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES / RAPPORTS DE COMITÉS

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills	
Mr. Aris Babikian	2465
Report adopted	2465

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES / DÉCLARATIONS MINISTÉRIELLES ET RÉPONSES

Journée internationale de la Francophonie / International Day of la Francophonie	
L'hon. Caroline Mulroney	2465
M. Guy Bourgouin	2466
Mlle Amanda Simard	2467
M. Mike Schreiner	2467

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Documents gouvernementaux	
Mme France Gélinas	2467
Climate change	
Ms. Sandy Shaw	2468
Social assistance	
Mr. Chris Glover	2468
Social assistance	
Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell	2468
Anti-smoking initiatives for youth	
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	2468
Child care	
Mr. Tom Rakocevic	2469
Social assistance	
Ms. Suze Morrison	2469

Soins de longue durée	
Mme Marit Stiles	2469
Optometry services	
Mr. Percy Hatfield	2469
Entretien hivernal des routes	
Mme France Gélinas	2470
Special-needs students	
Ms. Marit Stiles	2470

OPPOSITION DAY / JOUR DE L'OPPOSITION

Northern health services / Services de santé dans le Nord	
Ms. Andrea Horwath	2470
Mme France Gélinas	2472
Mr. Sol Mamakwa	2473
Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell	2474
M. Guy Bourgouin	2474
Mr. Mike Schreiner	2475
Mr. John Fraser	2476
Mr. Gilles Bisson	2476
Mrs. Robin Martin	2477
Mr. Tom Rakocevic	2480
Ms. Marit Stiles	2480
Mr. John Vanthof	2481
Ms. Andrea Horwath	2481
Motion negated	2482

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Getting Ontario Connected Act, 2022, Bill 93, Miss Surma / Loi de 2022 pour un Ontario connecté, projet de loi 93, Mlle Surma	
Mr. John Vanthof	2482
Hon. Jill Dunlop	2482
Mr. Percy Hatfield	2483
Mr. Michael Parsa	2484
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	2484
Hon. Paul Calandra	2485
Mr. Chris Glover	2485
Mrs. Robin Martin	2485
Mr. Joel Harden	2486
Hon. David Piccini	2487
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	2488
Mr. Percy Hatfield	2488
Mr. Michael Parsa	2488
Mr. John Vanthof	2489
Hon. David Piccini	2489
Miss Monique Taylor	2490
Mr. Michael Parsa	2491
Mr. John Vanthof	2491
Mr. Michael Parsa	2491

Ms. Jessica Bell.....	2492
Mr. Chris Glover	2492
Mr. Michael Parsa.....	2493
Mr. Joel Harden.....	2494
Ms. Donna Skelly.....	2494
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong.....	2494
Hon. Stan Cho.....	2494
Hon. Jill Dunlop.....	2495

Mr. Chris Glover	2496
Ms. Donna Skelly.....	2497
Mr. Chris Glover	2497
Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos	2497
Mr. Percy Hatfield.....	2497
Second reading agreed to	2498
House sittings	
Hon. Paul Calandra	2498

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 23 March 2022

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 23 mars 2022

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GETTING ONTARIO
CONNECTED ACT, 2022

LOI DE 2022
POUR UN ONTARIO CONNECTÉ

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 10, 2022, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 93, An Act to amend the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021 and the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, 2012 / Projet de loi 93, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2021 sur la réalisation accélérée de projets d'Internet à haut débit et la Loi de 2012 sur un système d'information sur les infrastructures souterraines en Ontario.

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: It's always a pleasure to rise, especially on such an important, wonderful bill, Bill 93. Mr. Speaker, I only have six minutes. I already spoke about 14 minutes on why this bill is important.

What we've seen in the last 15 years is the government had failed to address the needs of our province and that's why we are taking action right now. From 2007 to 2018 we had barely seen any investment into this important field. We all know how important access to high-speed Internet is for all Ontarians, including northern communities.

The opposition has made it clear that every time we talk about prosperity, they always say no. On this side, every time we talk about prosperity we know that every Ontarian needs high-speed Internet. That is why what we're doing through this bill is making sure that every Ontarian has quality Internet by the end of 2025. To improve access—that's what we're doing—we are making an investment of about \$4 billion.

Often, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the Internet, we talk about why we even really need the Internet today more than ever before. We all know we've gone through a pandemic and we've seen the impact of the pandemic on the last two years, whether it was working from home, whether it was kids going online for classes or if you go anywhere else and you get stuck there. How do you work from there? The Internet came in handy.

Thanks to the technology companies that stepped up. They worked hard. They made sure that we were connected. But in order to connect—it's kind of like saying, "I want to come to Queen's Park, and to come to Queen's Park, I need a good road or a good highway." Yes, I want to come to Queen's Park and I want to reach it on time. I want to support the communities. I want to deliver the results. But what if there is no road? What if there is no highway? How do I reach here? That's why it is extremely important, in today's world, when we have moved to a new normal and when the technology has evolved, in order for us to take the benefit of that technology, we need to have the infrastructure. That is what our government is doing, making sure we have that infrastructure in place, and that is what this bill is doing.

I hope, I believe and I urge all members from both sides to come together and work together for a better, more prosperous Ontario, and pass this bill. I really mean that. It is an important part for our province.

We've seen that over the years, and we've talked about it, we have the highest debt. We have a deficit. But that money is not going to fall from heaven. It's not going to come out of the trees. We have to work hard together to make sure we work for a prosperous Ontario. What that means is more investments coming to Ontario. More investments mean more jobs. More jobs mean more revenue, and not just for the government, but for the people of Ontario as well. When we have more revenue for the people of Ontario, they'll go out and spend. It will result in an economy which will be prosperous for all of us, and then, in other ways, when those cheques are collected by these people, what that means is, there's more revenue for the government. When the government has more revenue, it can do two things: It can flow back into the services that people need, and it can pay for some of the debt and the deficit as well. Either way we talk about it, if we really look at what we need today, we need our prosperity, we need to work together to grow our province. That is only possible if we all come together, the way we dealt with COVID, the way we fought COVID. When we come together, we'll grow together. That's what I wanted to give a message on, Mr. Speaker.

Talking about high-speed Internet, as I said earlier, it is a basic need for the 12% of Ontarians who do not even have access to the Internet. We talked about the future. We talked about investments coming in, but how can we have fair and wide distribution of opportunities if we don't have the tools, if we don't have the infrastructure? That is what this bill is doing: making sure that infrastructure is available.

I quickly want to talk about—and I always talk about—the global village concept. Ontario is home to individuals from 150 countries, speaking over 200 languages. What that means: I usually say, if you take milk and boil it and just leave it overnight, what you see at the top the next day is the cream. If you really look at what we've done in Canada, we have the cream from the world here. It's not just a global village, but we're the best of the best of the people from the world here. What does that mean? It means, let's say, for example, if a technology company, BYJU'S, in India, wants to go to Germany, France or Brazil, they don't really have to physically go to those places. All they can do is they can come here, open up their second headquarters right here in Ontario, in the GTA. From here, they can reach the rest of the world.

I'll give you another example: In India, there's Rajesh Exports, which is about a \$25-billion company. They manufacture jewellery. In order for them to expand into the rest of the world, rather than going to each of the countries, what they could do is they can come here. By coming here, through a consulate, through high commissioners, through the trade council, they can reach the rest of the world. That is what we can do, but in order for us to do that, we need the infrastructure, and that is what this bill is doing: making sure that we have the adequate infrastructure.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to share that our government wants businesses, workers and entrepreneurs to know that we are competitive, we are digitally inclusive and we are the economic engine not just in Canada, but we want to be the economic engine in North America. In fact, I want to say: Come here, invest here and let's build a better, prosperous and strong Ontario. And that can only start with you.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: I listened intently to the member from Mississauga–Malton, his last few minutes—I wasn't here for the first part—and I appreciate his understanding of the importance of the need for broadband Internet across the province. But I've spoken previously regarding the government's system of reverse auction and dividing the province into lots. We've consulted with many small Internet providers in our area, and we couldn't find one who actually was aware of this. So how can people in remote, rural Ontario be assured that this program is going to work when many of the providers who actually provide the limited service we have now aren't included in this thing? Is this reverse auction only for the big players? Will everyone actually be included?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Through you, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for that important question. As I always say, if we have four tires on a car and one tire is not in the same condition as the rest of the three, you can't run the car. Similarly, if we want a prosperous Ontario, we need to make sure the whole of Ontario is coming together and working together to build together.

0910

In order to answer your question about the reverse auction, I just want to share this note—it is for everybody:

We as members are the advocates for our residents. If you think that there are companies, there are players in your ridings and in the communities—I think we have MPP offices in each riding—go talk to them, convey to them, tell them that the province is open, the province wants to prosper and the province wants to be part of it. Please bring them on as well.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mrs. Robin Martin: I want to thank the member from Mississauga–Malton for his submissions here today. I thought it was very interesting. I didn't hear the first part as well, but the part I did hear I was very interested in. My riding is in the centre of the city of Toronto and, of course, the broadband connectivity is fairly good; although occasionally things disrupt that connectivity and I know residents get extremely frustrated by that. I know the member is in Mississauga and probably connectivity is fairly good in most of the GTA. I just wanted to ask the member how important he thinks connectivity is for people in ridings where it's even worse and what he thinks this means to those ridings to have this kind of broadband connectivity across the board in Ontario.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Through you, Mr. Speaker: First of all, I want to thank the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for the hard work that she's doing. Over the last two years we've seen the amount of work she has put in, and thanks to each one of us as Ontarians for the discipline and the sacrifice that we've seen, the result of which we've never seen in other provinces.

Over to you, about the question: I just briefly talked about the global village. Think about SCL, think about other technology companies that want to come and invest here. What are they going to look for? They're going to look for infrastructure, they're going to look for if we have the intellect available. But, above that, they're going to look for, "Do they have the tools?" A basic requirement today for a technology company is Internet. If we want to grow our province, we have no choice—I would say we have no choice. That's why it is very important to have the best broadband Internet available not just here but across the province, because that's—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Thank you. I recognize the member from Davenport.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I listened very carefully to the member from Mississauga–Malton's comments, and I don't think anybody on this side, for sure, is going to disagree that we need to build broadband faster, as this bill is titled. What I want to ask the member is, why should we trust this government to deliver on any of this?

I want to point out that the Financial Accountability Office report speaks volumes. The government made big announcements back in 2019-20 about how much of that—and do you know how much of that \$31.8 million announcement was spent? Zero; goose eggs; nothing. Then their 2021-22 rural broadband budget was cut in half. They only spent 0.6%—less than 1% of that.

Why would anyone looking to invest in this province believe anything this government has to say?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Through you, Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member for Davenport for that question. Absolutely, you're 100% right: We need to prove to the world that we are here for them. Do you know what? It's very simple. You've seen it. This government has cut—"reduced" is a better word—\$7 billion to the costs of businesses in the last year. And it's not one time; it's every year. I'll show you another example: 300,000 jobs were going; we have 330,000 jobs unfilled. That shows why and how people will support us.

Going to the broadband: I'll quickly come to that, Mr. Speaker. I don't know how much time I have left with this. I want to say that the government has committed up to \$4 billion to ensure every Ontarian has access by 2025, and the Financial Accountability Office report identified areas where there were unspent funds. These funds are still available and will be spent on reliable high-speed Internet. There was no reduction. It will never happen.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Hastings–Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: In my riding, to cross it—it's quicker to go from Toronto to Ottawa driving than it is to cross my riding. We're a huge, expansive rural area. COVID laid bare the reality that we have no connectivity in much of these areas. Emergency services, education, whatever, we do not have the capacity. In our urban core particularly, you have your large telecoms—Bell, Telus, Rogers—and collectively they bid, but in a lot of these smaller areas, maybe they just don't have an interest. How can we ensure that this bid structure will enable small telecoms to be able to bid to service a lot of these rural areas?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thanks to the member for Hastings–Lennox and Addington.

I just want to share this also, Mr. Speaker: I actually have a vacation home, which I bought 10 years back, when my daughter was born—15 years back, in fact. Back then, the reason I went there is because I felt it was a great place as the kids were growing up. I wanted to just show them the Canadian culture; as well, I wanted to assimilate with the society. But you're absolutely right: The last two years, if my daughter had to work or do schooling, I could not have gone there because the Internet was not that great. It's coming up, and that is what we're changing today.

We're making sure that if we want our province to grow together, we have to make sure we have infrastructure in place. If my daughter wants to go back and study online from there a day or two and we have some off time, we can do that. So that's what we're doing. We're spending \$4 billion, and we're making sure there is reliable Internet by 2025—

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

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again to the member for Mississauga–Malton and to the member from Hastings–Lennox and Addington—that was a very good question and it's something that people in rural Ontario face constantly.

We've been speaking with the mayor of Iroquois Falls, Tory Delaurier, on this issue quite a bit lately, and we've put forward requests for information, freedom of information, to see how big the lots are, to see where people are included, so we can actually give that information to the small Internet providers. You know what we got? No information back.

How can we provide information to our residents, to our mayors, when the government's not releasing any type of actual description on how the system is supposed to work?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thanks to the member opposite for the concern. Absolutely, I agree with you: We need to make sure that everywhere there is adequate Internet, and for that we need to give the opportunity to everyone who wants to invest and make sure that Internet is available.

I think what the member opposite is talking about is the competitive process for the Internet service providers. Again, during the design and development of the process, market engagement was conducted, including discussion and engagement with small and local Internet providers to ensure a level playing field. The current process is associated with and reflective of the feedback that the government has received.

Again, I say one more time: We will continue to work with these local providers. Please make sure you reach out to them and connect them with the ministry. We want to make sure that everyone is included. We want to make sure that we deliver what—

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: It's a pleasure to rise and speak to such an important issue, especially to our constituents in northern and rural Ontario. We're speaking today, of course, about Bill 93, an act to amend the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021.

At this point in the debate, so much has been said already. As municipal affairs critic, I'm going to touch on some of the comments that I've heard in meetings with organizations like ROMA and other municipal organizations that we've had the pleasure of meeting with. In all of those meetings, this is one of the top issues, if not the top issue, that is raised.

Our world is changing because of broadband, and we've brought this up many times in this House. You cannot truly participate in our modern society without access to broadband. I know the government recognizes that and I think all sides of the House recognize that.

It became evident during COVID-19, especially: kids learning from home and people working from home. Obviously, COVID-19 changed our lives. Members of this House participating in Zoom meetings from—I know in my house, my son was in a bedroom, my wife was in the office and I got the kitchen table. I'm just behind the family, and probably the cat, in the order of priorities, so I had the kitchen table for most of the pandemic to do my business.

0920

Like many other things with COVID-19, the issue existed long before COVID-19, but, obviously, the pan-

demic, for a lot of people, became focused on it. According to the provincial 2021 budget, as many as 700,000 households in Ontario are underserved or unserved.

If you look back at how the Internet was created and how broadband companies work, they are, as we know, profit-oriented. They're private companies. When we discuss connectivity in rural and northern areas of this province, the issue is with private companies. It's not particularly lucrative to build broadband access. Of course, private telecommunications companies respond to market signals to provide value to their shareholders and seek to achieve the highest return on investment as possible. Many rural, remote and northern communities do not have those favourable market conditions.

The result is that 700,000 households continue to be underserved. Clearly, the private sector is not going to solve this problem for municipalities. Our friends in the north and in rural areas across the province still had to send their kids to remote learning with little to no connectivity.

We, on this side of the House, recognize how vital broadband is; we always have. In October 2018, we put forward a motion on the subject and it passed unanimously. On November 26, 2020, my friend from Timiskaming—Cochrane put forward a bill on behalf of the official opposition, the Broadband is an Essential Service Act, Bill 226. He's been very passionate about this issue for many years. Once again, it passed, because broadband is so essential. I think everyone agrees with that, and we've been pushing this issue for many years.

Bill 93, the Getting Ontario Connected Act, is really amendments to the government's earlier Building Broadband Faster Act, so it's a pretty straightforward bill with two schedules. It makes some technical tweaks to the earlier bill, the Building Broadband Faster Act. It defines a "Broadband One Window platform," which is a digital platform run by the Ministry of Infrastructure. And it sets some new requirements for municipalities to issue permits for municipal service or right-of-way access, with some timeline requirements for municipalities: 10 business days to respond to right-of-way permit applications with distances of up to 30 kilometres and 15 business days to respond to permit applications with distances of 30 kilometres or more. It enables the minister to receive data from municipalities, hydro or gas companies and other owners and operators of underground infrastructure. That's all in schedule 1.

Schedule 2 strengthens the governance of Ontario One Call, which we know is the private corporation that was established to act as a centralized communications hub between excavators and the owners of underground infrastructure like mains, hydro wires, telecommunication cables, natural gas infrastructure and so on. So there are a number of governance changes around the composition of the board, the requirement to publish prescribed information, and then there are some monetary fines included for failure to comply with the act.

I want to focus on some of the stakeholder response or things that we've been hearing from our municipal partners over my term and time as municipal affairs critic. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture is one that I wanted to

start with, which has long identified the need for broadband expansion as essential, as a necessity, in our modern world. The OFA emphasizes the need for farmers in this province to have speed, reliability and bandwidth so that they can be competitive in a digital world, because the reality is that farming has become very much reliant on technology all across our province.

The OFA just recently conducted a survey where 62% of the respondents said Internet outages are causing an inability to conduct normal business activities, which impacts productivity and profitability. This survey was a repeat of a survey that had been done in 2015—five years earlier—that noted that the number of farmers who require stable Internet to run their business had more than doubled over that period of time. So it's very, very important to that community.

We're seeing the agriculture community more and more relying on access to broadband infrastructure, and they are not alone. More and more of our services are shifting to online space, including municipal services.

In the role of municipal affairs critic, I've met with organizations such as AMO, NOMA, ROMA and others. In each conference, one or more of the discussions is the importance of reliable, high-speed and affordable broadband and cellular connectivity across Ontario. We all understand that in the 21st century, and all these organizations tell us, what a necessity it is.

In a municipal primer on broadband connectivity from ROMA, they stated, "Municipal governments have a high level of concern about connectivity, even though the sphere of influence over the regulatory and funding responsibilities for telecommunications is comparatively low. That is because local governments are the closest to students, families, businesses, and seniors who are demanding solutions for connectivity.

"This complex reality highlights the important role that municipal elected officials play in advocating for better connectivity from the 'ground-up.' For example, some Ontario municipalities have built connectivity task forces within their community, while others have conducted surveys to collect information on the level of connectivity experienced by their residents and businesses."

There are many long-term initiatives that municipalities have initiated:

Wardens' caucuses have built economies of scale through Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology, or SWIFT, and the Eastern Ontario Regional Network.

Northern Ontario has commissioned geographic information system mapping data coverage and other services through Blue Sky Net.

Municipalities such as the town of Caledon have created an Internet levy to assist with financing broadband projects.

Intra-regional networks have connected individual sites within their communities, such as the Waterloo Region Education and Public Network.

Municipal governments have built their own networks and operate through separate corporations, such as YorkNet and Rhyzome Networks.

This is some incredible work by local governments across this province, but municipalities can't go it alone. Municipalities have been downloading many expensive, complicated soft services like housing, child care, long-term care and seniors' housing, all on the revenue of property taxes. They do great work, but no one can say it isn't a challenge. To see these municipalities create solutions where governments and ISPs failed is really quite incredible.

At this year's ROMA conference, the town of Caledon gave a great presentation on the needs in their area and their experience with broadband. Despite being part of the GTA, many rural, less populated areas of Caledon continue to have limited to no access to high-speed Internet. The town has taken collective measures to address the problem, from establishing a broadband levy to the Internet Grant Program and joining SWIFT. While the town will see a return on its investment through the province's support of SWIFT, broadband expansion, unfortunately, only fills a portion of the broadband gap. We have an opportunity to fill that gap.

I'll just spend a moment speaking about SWIFT. It's been an incredible advocate for expanding broadband services in southwestern Ontario. I think there are 20 upper-tier municipalities across southwestern Ontario, 126 lower-tier municipalities, and SWIFT is owned by the network of municipalities in the southwestern region. Since it was formed, it has undertaken 95 projects. It has been contracted with 19 different ISPs, 80% of which are small and medium ISPs, so it's been very important to SWIFT that the contracts are available to ISPs of many different sizes. They've made a \$260-million investment in broadband improvements and have connected 63,000 households and businesses throughout the region, so it's quite an incredible accomplishment.

The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus noted that SWIFT is the only broadband program in the region that has proven to be both effective and efficient. Many are wondering, with Bill 93, what will be the role of SWIFT. SWIFT has been able to take politics out of the decisions, and it's vital that those last-mile connections are undertaken, and they're frequently the least profitable for ISPs.

0930

My colleague from London West spoke with Barry Field, the executive director of SWIFT, to get his comments on Bill 93, and she has spoken about those. One of the things he pointed out was that the requirement to have municipal permits issued in 10 days in some cases, in 15 days in others, may be quite challenging for some of those very, very small of the 126 lower-tier municipalities that are part of the SWIFT network. That's definitely something that needs to be looked into and examined. Some of them have only a single staff person who's already doing everything for that small municipality, and the process of issuing permits can be very time-consuming. There has to be some recognition of the financial burden that this would create for very, very small municipalities in terms of their capacity and also their resources to meet those aggressive timelines. I hope that this government will ensure that

funding is available to municipalities to get the resources and increase their capacity to be able to meet those timelines.

My friend from Davenport spoke about the need not just to make announcements but to actually follow through with the funding and make sure that we have results. This was an issue that the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario brought up with us. They outlined that, while investments from the federal and provincial governments are appreciated, there remains "an immense infrastructure gap in Ontario" largely due to the significant transferring "of asset ownership to the local level" over the last several decades. AMO has found that municipalities are facing a \$52-billion infrastructure gap. It has been outlined that what is needed is stable, secure funding that they can plan with, and a simplified, streamlined grants process to reduce the application and reporting burden on municipalities. That's something that we could take the opportunity to move forward on, and an example of how what has been done so far in this government's term is, I think, widely perceived as not being enough.

While we're on the topic of funding, \$4 billion was announced for the Ontario Connects program. Certainly \$4 billion is a big number, but it's the kind of investment that's needed in order to address the connectivity challenges that, in particular, our small, rural and northern communities face. But the question is not the size of that number; the question is, will those dollars actually be invested and how will they be invested?

The Financial Accountability Officer revealed that the government cut the rural broadband budget in the 2021-22 budget by \$207 million, more than half, and to date has only spent 0.6% of this. This has been raised many times on this side of the House. The year before, it had a \$45.7-million budget for rural broadband and spent 1.37%. The year before, the \$35 million to \$31.8 million, zero was spent. There's a difference between budgeting and investing. Now they've got \$4 billion on the table. We're going to need that, but, again, what is budgeted and what is actually invested are two very different things.

We know that so far in 2022, this pattern of the Conservative government being much talk and not much action has been repeated over and over again. There was another report from the Financial Accountability Officer earlier this month that showed the Ford government had been sitting on \$5.5 billion in spending that was committed to health care and other vital services in this province. That \$5.5 billion that the government was sitting on included, once again, the money that had been allocated for broadband expansion. The FAO report on Q3 expenditures revealed that the government made an in-year cut to the broadband expansion budget, reducing it by more than half, by \$2.7 million. So we can talk about how committed we are to broadband, how committed we are to making sure that we help people in northern and rural Ontario, but actions have to be reflected by the words.

The FAO also revealed that, so far, the Ford government has spent only 0.6% of the remaining budget. You're not going to be able to expand broadband throughout the

province and meet the government's ambitious goal if the government is not prepared to spend the dollars that have been allocated to do that.

My time is almost up, Speaker. Just in conclusion, rural and northern Ontario have long been denied access to essential broadband services that some of us in Ontario take for granted. Certainly, where I'm from, most of us take it for granted, although there are, even in Niagara, areas where it's difficult. Of course, the pandemic showed us that it's often children who suffer from that. The members on this side, on all sides, of the House have talked many times about kids having to travel to the schoolyard or sit in a car in the parking lot in order to get connectivity, and that's not a way for the province to move forward.

I hope that this government takes the opportunity to provide real, tangible investment into broadband infrastructure. It seems to me that they have not done that. There have been significant gains made, but with the severity of the problem, I don't think the solutions and how readily the money has been spent and how it's got to the actual people that need it is reflective of the severity of the problem. We've waited long enough and Ontarians deserve far better in terms of how committed we are to provide broadband to all of Ontario.

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

Mr. Michael Parsa: Good morning, Speaker, and good morning to my colleague. Thank you for his presentation. One of the questions that I've always wondered when we talk about certain bills is the support that we provide to our small businesses and how much we need to do to be there for these businesses, Mr. Speaker. We've all referred to them as the backbone of our economy and we know the importance of these small businesses to our local communities. More so now than before, Ontario is becoming a jurisdiction where a lot of our businesses are thriving—of course, after two very difficult years for a lot of them. There is potential and there is light at the end of the tunnel, but we need to make sure that the services they rely on are there for them, Mr. Speaker. Internet and broadband access is absolutely vital and essential.

In a global market, where everyone is now looking for service, we want our businesses to be successful. To my honourable colleague, I'm wondering why the opposition continuously votes against initiatives like this which will support our local small businesses, and I'm wondering if my colleague will perhaps support it this time.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I thank the member for the question. As I have mentioned and as others have mentioned, the issue really is that when the government announces money, that money has to, first of all, make it to the front line, to the problem, and it has to be spent in the proper way. We've seen over and over again, and the Financial Accountability Officer has pointed out over and over again, that the government makes announcements but then sits on the money. Whether it's because they don't want to spend it or because they're not sure how to spend it to create the greatest effect, the money doesn't get spent and it doesn't get to the places where it's needed.

This is not only in the area of broadband but broadly in the government's actions over the last four years. I would certainly encourage when the government announces money that they do more than just announce it, that they actually make sure it gets to where it's needed.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Humber River–Black Creek.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: It's always an honour to rise. I thank my friend and colleague for his excellent presentation. I think this government is very well known for flashy legislation in terms of promising a lot of things but under-delivering. Certainly, getting broadband to communities across Ontario is very important, and I'm hoping to also see in the future some action around rates, because communities like mine are struggling. People are fighting to put food on the table, and broadband is a necessity.

But I want to pivot and talk about the fact that I think we both come from municipal backgrounds. Many times when I worked with a city councillor, we would see broadband companies coming in, tearing up people's homes and stringing wires around trees. Do you think that there is any conversation worth helping enable municipalities to be able to better deal with these companies in terms of working together to get broadband effectively to people?

0940

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to my friend for the question. As I mentioned, in our many meetings with municipal associations, like ROMA, for example, this is probably the top issue we've heard consistently through the last four years. Certainly, those are a couple of the issues—what kind of service they're getting in the municipality—but also, just like health care or any other issue, the issue of equity across the province—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I'm sorry to interrupt the member.

Pursuant to standing order 50(c) I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there have been six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned, unless the government House leader directs the debate to continue.

I recognize the deputy House leader.

Mr. Michael Parsa: Thank you, Speaker. Please continue.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): The deputy House leader has asked that the debate continue. I return to the member from Niagara Centre.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you, Speaker. Just to wrap the answer to the question, there is obviously a question of equity across the province. One of the struggles with the issue of broadband is to make sure that there is not only equitable access but equality in terms of how municipalities get those services.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank to the member for your comments today. I, like yourself, was one of many who was trying to work from home. I had three daughters who were home from university who were all trying to do their classes while I was trying to learn how to use Zoom and

Teams at the same time at the kitchen table. But we've seen the importance of learning from home, working from home and people running their businesses from home.

Our government has actively shown that we are getting shovels in the ground for many of these projects that are already connecting to better phone and Internet services, including access in the north.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the member, can the member please explain why his party actively votes against legislation that will connect the people of Ontario to the supports and services that they need?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Actually, as I mentioned in my speech, folks on this side of the House have been very aggressive in pushing the government to move forward with things. If we vote against measures, it's because they're not enough or because it represents efforts that are not getting to the people who need them.

The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane has been very passionate over many years, responding to his constituents and stakeholders across Ontario in pushing not just this government but other governments to move forward on broadband because our northern members see it. They see it in their communities and they see it in their schools. So we've been very passionate on this side of the House, and I'm really proud of the members of this House for how they've consistently pushed this issue over the years.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to thank the member from Niagara Centre for his very powerful comments. I listened intently to them. He is, of course, a tremendous representative for his community.

As I mentioned earlier, and I heard in your remarks, the government cannot simply accelerate broadband expansion if they aren't willing to actually spend the budget to do so. I really appreciated your comments on that.

I wondered if we could speak, if you wouldn't mind commenting a little bit as well, on accountability. Because we've seen this government spend—when they do spend, if they spend, those billions seem to go to their billionaire buddies, with little accountability, if anything. I wondered if you would comment a little bit on some of the protections that we think we need to have in place for this government, should they actually spend the money, which we haven't seen so far. What kind of accountability measures would you want to see in this legislation?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you, my friend from Davenport, for that question. It's a really important issue. We all tend to see things through the lens of our critic portfolios. In speaking with municipalities, this is such an important issue.

The constant complaint is really that they need government to listen to them. The solutions that we find are going to be local solutions, and they're going to be things that—we have stop telling them what to do. We have to stop announcing money that doesn't actually get to the people who are going to make a difference. We need to start listening to municipalities more and using the money that we

announce to provide them with the resources and funding that they need and support them in creating those solutions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member from Niagara Centre for his comments on increasing broadband in the province of Ontario. He talked about SWIFT, the southwestern Ontario initiative to do with broadband. I think he sounded like he was generally supportive of that. He brought up some technical issues with municipalities.

I know in my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka, which is pretty big geographically, there are big gaps in Internet and quite a few projects that are going on, and I know people are excited to see more Internet connectivity. I'm just wondering, in his own riding of Niagara Centre, what the connectivity is like and are there gaps that will be helped by more projects going on? Maybe he could provide some perspective on his own riding.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to my friend for the question. Yes, there are issues, but certainly in Niagara we have, I would say, pretty good connectivity. There are rural areas in my riding, in particular near Lake Erie, for example, where we would certainly be able to use any kind of improvement, but most of the complaints that I have heard—the serious complaints—have come in our meetings with municipalities and northern communities.

Being, I would say, privileged in areas of southern Ontario that have good connectivity, it's really difficult to listen to stories of kids struggling who may not have either the equipment or the connectivity to keep up with their homework, people who are having difficulty doing their jobs in northern Ontario. I think, as I spoke about earlier, that it's the issue of equity for people across the province. Just because someone lives in northern Ontario in a rural community doesn't mean that they should have to suffer with a much lower rate of service than everyone else.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further debate?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I'm so proud to stand here and speak in support of Bill 93, the Getting Ontario Connected Act. I would like to commend the Minister of Infrastructure and her team. Thank you for the great work done to bring this piece of legislation.

As an IT specialist who worked in technology for more than 36 years, I have to confess and declare that I am biased. I believed all my life that the main job of technology is to improve peoples' lives, shape the way we learn, work, live and even play. Accessibility to fast and dependable Internet is an issue that is very important to me, and this bill is part of our plan to have all of Ontario connected to high speed by 2025.

I worked at many corporations, many technology companies—giant companies—and teaching as an IT professor, and I know first-hand how critical it is for our economy, for our students, for our workers and for our businesses to have access to fast and reliable Internet if we want to build a stronger Ontario and compete in the global market.

Mr. Speaker, I have lived through all the progress our world made on connectivity and Internet on different speeds and accessibility. Growing up, there was no Internet. I didn't have my first email account until 1988, so I personally experienced the changes to my life and to my community that the Internet brought me. From dial-up connectivity all the way to high-speed broadband, optical links and being online 24/7 through your cell phone, I know personally how much I am dependent on Internet connectivity and how it can change the lives of our fellow Ontarians in the northern and rural communities.

I would like to talk about how high-speed Internet connectivity would offer a new world with new horizons and new opportunities to those who do not have it right now. It would offer a completely new experience in terms of business and economic development; education and upgrading skills; access to services, public and private; entertainment and lifestyle; social life and social integration; health care; and community safety.

0950

In the north and rural Ontario, if you opened a new factory that employs 200 people, it would be big news. What about offering jobs for the whole village or town? What this government and this legislation, if it passes, would do is offer access to all those businesses and make them online and offer new opportunities for finding remote jobs, for accessing the global market, for opening new businesses and bringing new businesses to those areas.

Small businesses in the north and rural Ontario depend on their local small markets, and at the moment, there is little incentive to open a business in the north. If these communities had access to high-speed Internet, it would completely change that. They would be able to access materials from across Ontario, even from anywhere in the world, connect with clients everywhere beyond their local range and sell their goods and services anywhere. They would have access to markets infinitely larger than they currently do. Access to global markets would encourage more people to open small businesses. Small businesses would not have to compete for the small, local markets anymore. That would also mean more jobs for the local communities and stronger economies.

Other businesses would also be incentivized to move north to those rural communities and open locations there. The cost of living in these locations is more reasonable. Real estate is cheaper. The only thing stopping them from doing that is the lack of infrastructure. More businesses will be moving to rural areas. Building up this infrastructure would mean that local businesses in the rural areas would have access to markets they never had access to before.

The COVID-19 pandemic showed people and businesses that many jobs can actually be done as effectively remotely and from home. With access to high-speed Internet, rural area Ontarians would also be able to work remotely. They would have access to a large variety of work-from-home positions. They can run their businesses from the comfort of their homes. They can access their bank accounts, invest in the stock market and participate

in the global economy. Without leaving their homes, they can protect their positions, as they will be able to continue their jobs online. We've seen that during the pandemic, Mr. Speaker.

With better access to the global world, more jobs, more opportunities to work from home, to invest and open businesses, to move businesses to rural communities, more people are going to be encouraged to move to and stay in these communities. In central Ontario we are in the middle of a housing crisis. Most of the jobs are here, and so most Ontarians are trying to move here to follow the jobs and opportunities. That's why it is critical to connect to all Ontarians. This is why this government and this legislation are aiming to build high-speed Internet infrastructure faster, to offer rural areas opportunities we often take for granted here, to encourage economic growth and migration, to build up the housing market of rural Ontario and alleviate the housing market of central Ontario.

Nowadays when someone is planning to buy a house, the first thing he or she checks about the house is how the Internet service is in this area and this house specifically. It is a big factor in the deal, because we depend on the Internet in every aspect of our day-to-day life.

I would like to talk about another factor in this, which is education. Discussing education, when the COVID pandemic hit Canada, people across Ontario had to adapt to a digital way of life. We closed down our schools and transitioned everything to online learning. This transition wasn't easy for everyone. For many people, it was impossible. Individuals who do not have dependable access to high-speed Internet were left behind. They could not attend classes or do their homework from home. Hundreds of thousands of Ontarians do not have access to high-speed Internet. That means that thousands of students simply do not have the same opportunities. They have to choose between their education and their financial stability. They have to commute to their campuses, even when they are closed, or to a local business, to be able to connect to the Internet so that they can submit their assignments or attend their lectures. They don't have the same measure of freedom and choices when it comes to their future, and that's simply not acceptable.

That's why the Getting Ontario Connected Act is so important. Access to high-speed Internet would completely change the lives of Ontarians living in rural areas and northern Ontario. People would have access to online courses. They would not have to leave their homes or go through long commutes for school and training. They would be able to go completely digital, something many Ontarians have never had access to before. Students would be able to attend any accredited online class offered by any school in Ontario or even internationally.

Easier access and flexible access to school and to training classes also means that students would be able to study while working. They would have the choice to earn their degrees and certifications on their own time schedule. Those working shifts would have the freedom to come home and spend a few hours expanding on their skill set.

As someone who personally experienced that, it made all the difference. I would work full time, go home maybe by 8 or 9 p.m. and be able to invest a few hours in the night to earn my certifications. My students wouldn't feel as pressured, knowing they had the flexibility to choose a time they could invest into their studies without having to sacrifice their work.

Access to high-speed Internet would allow for a new horizon of mobility when it comes to their professional lives and their education. That's why government invested \$4 billion in expanding our high-speed Internet infrastructure across Ontario, the largest single investment ever made to broadband Internet infrastructure in any province. That's why this legislation, if passed, will continue to build on what our government has already done. We made this commitment because we can't wait any longer. We need to make sure every business and every household in Ontario is connected. Our government is doing all it can to make sure that people who are counting on us have the tools they need.

Mr. Speaker, those in rural areas in northern Ontario often tell me that they feel sidelined by the Ontario government. They don't have the same access to the same opportunities. They do not have the same access to government services. A big part of this is due to the lack of broadband infrastructure in these communities. With access to online, banking services or government services such as licensing, zoning, government applications, applying for grants will be possible. As more of our government services are moving online, our rural communities are falling further and further behind, and the gap is growing. They simply feel as though our coverage of them is weak and not enough. That's why it's more important than ever to expand our high-speed Internet infrastructure, so that our rural communities can have access to the same services, the same funding for their programs and, most importantly, the same access to information about those services.

Our services are constantly moving online. Without the infrastructure they need, not only is it hard to apply to them, it's hard to even be informed about them. It's more important than ever to make sure that all Ontarians can learn what is available, what services are available to them and how they can qualify and apply.

1000

I believe the Minister of Infrastructure quoted that up to 1.4 million Ontarians do not have access to Internet or high-speed Internet in their homes. Mr. Speaker, that's simply unacceptable in today's digital age. The people we all represent deserve better. We cannot allow Ontarians to continue falling behind.

Access to high-speed Internet would mean that rural and northern communities would have near-equal access to the same entertainment we enjoy in central Ontario. Rural Ontario would not any longer feel as sidelined and left behind in terms of popular culture. High-speed Internet would open a new horizon for many people. They would have easy access to the same streaming services, the same movies and TV shows, the same music concerts, the

same live shows, theatre productions and concerts streamed online. They would be able to view the same digital art shows and museum exhibits and have the same access to all the newest box-office movies from the comfort of their homes. All Ontarians would be able to access the same e-book libraries for their entertainment or personal development. By being able to enjoy all the same things, rural communities would finally feel more integrated into our broader Ontario and Canadian community. They would no longer feel left out due to their locations.

By expanding broadband Internet infrastructure and connectivity to every household, we will finally be able to bridge that disconnect. With more equal access to opportunities and lifestyle, our government's plan to build infrastructure and also encourage more people to stay in their communities will help rural communities retain their youth. One of the things I keep hearing from rural Ontarians is that the youth do not want to stay. They leave to follow job opportunities, to have more access to services and programs. They leave to have better access to education and entertainment.

Mr. Speaker, speaking from my personal experience, I understand how they feel when my Internet service drops down. As someone who experienced everything from no Internet all the way to broadband, I fully understand how much high-speed Internet access can change the life of the community, and I understand how limiting it is to not have access. This bill is the key for building up our infrastructure faster, so that every Ontarian can enjoy the same digital resources and opportunities, so that young people do not feel that they have to leave their homes and their families to have a future.

The pandemic has proved to us how isolating it can be when those communities cannot see their loved ones. While most of us here can easily call our friends and families and chat with them over video calls, it is not so easy like that for rural Ontarians. During the pandemic, we had to limit indoor worship spaces to five people. The only way to access religious services, be it a church, a mosque, a Jewish temple or a gurdwara, is online services. I can't describe the amount of sadness, anger and upset for the seniors who cannot attend their prayers. The only relief for them was to attend online. The only way that can be done is having reliable Internet connectivity. That would be a mental, emotional and religious stress for those who do not have that, like rural areas in Ontario.

Access to high-speed Internet would also revolutionize health care in rural areas and likely cost the province less to offer health services. Our government's plan to build up infrastructure would mean that many medical services available online or over a video call would now be accessible to patients in rural areas. Over the last two years, the pandemic caused many medical professionals to close their doors and move consulting online. Patients in rural areas often have to wait and don't have access to those services. They have to be travelling to a bigger city with better infrastructure in order to receive consultation from a specialist. Often the province must cover some of those costs of transportation.

With greater access to high-speed Internet, patients would be able to see specialists over a conference call for their consultations, giving them faster access to professionals without the need for long wait times. These consultations would also be more flexible for the patients. They wouldn't have to take long periods off work or school. With new online services offered by certain medical offices, people would even be able to more conveniently set their own appointments from the comfort of their homes.

Patients in rural communities would also be able to access their own medical records online and send their records easily to health care providers without the need to leave their homes.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario has a shortage of licensed medical psychiatrists and finding a therapist in rural Ontario is not easy. Being able to build up our infrastructure faster would give more access to mental health resources for all Ontarians. That's why this bill is not only critical to opportunities, education and connecting our province, it is critical for protecting the well-being of people in rural areas and giving them easier access to better quality of care.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this legislation, if passed, is crucial to uplifting our communities, giving all Ontarians the tools they need to succeed in terms of economic growth and businesses; in terms of education and access to services, access to health care; access to better entertainment and social connectivity; and finally in terms of having easier access to better health care. Our plan to connect every household and business by 2025 will completely change the lives of the rural communities and make sure that no Ontarians get left behind in our increasingly digital age.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I will elaborate on some of the points within the questions.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I want to thank my friend and member opposite for his presentation. Notwithstanding jurisdictional powers, what is this government willing to do to work in all forms to bring down the cost of this broadband access?

I mentioned it briefly earlier today, but in communities like mine you have families working at minimum wage, trying to put food on the table. You know that now broadband is essential for everybody, but the costs are literally through the roof. What can we do to work within our powers to bring these rates down?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much for the question from the opposite member. My understanding is that the CRTC is the body which controls much of those services, from costs to licensing. I think this is a federal issue which we maybe have to have discussions with our federal counterparts to make sure that the Internet costs or connectivity costs are controlled.

I agree that we still have one of the highest Internet costs in even North America. I think there is room for improvement. I'm not 100% sure what the provincial government can offer for that, but definitely yes, I agree.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you to the member for that great speech. I know that after years representing rural Ontario where we were ignored, where farmers were ignored, small businesses were ignored, moms and dads were ignored, the \$4-billion commitment is truly huge. I think to Roseneath and an important announcement made in my community and MPP Kramp's riding and how important it is for economic success.

The member mentioned affordability. I hear of some exciting projects the county's working on in my riding as broadband as a utility. But the key piece is, our province has been there—Premier Ford has been there—for each and every one of these innovative ideas to ensure we can connect farmers, businesses, moms and dads. Why is this so important?

1010

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much to the member for the question. I cannot emphasize more the importance of connectivity for businesses, for banking, for transactions. Even all the new equipment for production and manufacturing is needing Internet for upgrades, needing Internet for uploading new software, needing Internet to log the process, needing Internet for even remote experts who set the equipment through Internet connectivity or VPN to get to those machines. Having reliable high-speed Internet means better business, means opportunities for local businesses to be able to get newer technology and improve their production.

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to my friend from Mississauga—Erin Mills for his presentation. The core problem here seems to be that we're dealing with private companies, and it's simply not profitable for private companies to provide broadband in northern and rural communities. How does the member think that we can solve this problem without significant expenditures of public money, especially when the Financial Accountability Officer has continually said that the money being announced is not actually making it to solve the problem?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much for the question. Again, I see a lot of discussion from the opposition around how we're going to do it. They're not discussing that we are doing it. We are discussing the mechanisms of how we do that, and we are focusing very much on this.

I just want to explain that, of course, the big providers—as in my past life, I was support for tier 3 providers, the smaller providers, and I understand the challenges. The ROI of putting money to put in infrastructure is the motive for providers to go into these areas. With having some of our agency partners at Infrastructure Ontario—they actually responded to the question put by the opposition about increasing the number of smaller lots and improving—

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

I recognize the member from Hastings—Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I would like to commend the member, particularly for his significant experience, both in technology and communications. He's a real asset to our government in moving this issue forward.

The reality is, every member in this House and across the province wants broadband now, today and tomorrow. It's imperative we do it as soon as possible, but the reality is, this is a highly complex, challenging process. There are so many different players. We have the CRTC with spectrum options, whether it's the 700, 800, 1,100 or 3,800 megahertz; whether it is the challenges of geography, of topography; whether it is a matter of MZOs; whether it is cultural organizations, competitive nature; and whether we have large telecoms or we have small telecoms. This is a significant challenge, but our government is moving aggressively to address this.

To do so we also need to partner. We have partnered with a lot of organizations across this province, whether it's SWIFT, whether it's EORN. I'm wondering if the member can tell us more about our ability to be able to partner with these various organizations and how helpful they are to enacting this project.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much to my colleague. I would like again to revisit that, because it came through the debate multiple times about the size of the lots, how competitive it is and what the process is to assign licences. As I understand from the ministry discussions, there will be a reverse auction process and all that we are trying to do here is maybe looking into—depending on the geographical number of users, the topology of the location and the nearest source of the Internet, it will specify the technology and the cost to do that. By having smaller lots and flexible payment options, it will mean that some successful local providers will be encouraged to join the bids and have local providers within those communities.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I was listening carefully to the member for Mississauga—Erin Mills' comments—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I apologize for interrupting. I just note the clock has 10:15, and it is now time for members' statements.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

LONG-TERM CARE

Mrs. Robin Martin: It's my pleasure to rise in the House today to speak about the good work this government is doing for my constituents in Eglinton—Lawrence. On March 9, I had the pleasure of attending an announcement at the Armenian Community Centre with the Minister of Long-Term Care and my colleagues from Scarborough—Agincourt and Don Valley North. The Minister of Long-Term Care announced 1,328 new not-

for-profit long-term-care beds and 641 upgraded beds in Toronto. I was delighted to hear that 256 of the upgraded beds will be at Villa Colombo Home for the Aged, an important long-term-care home and community resource in the riding of Eglinton—Lawrence. In addition to the new beds, just last week the government announced that the Jewish home for the aged will receive over \$4 million for additional staffing this year and Villa Colombo itself will receive \$3.5 million in additional funding for staffing to increase the hours of direct care to residents.

Mr. Speaker, the residents of Eglinton—Lawrence are not just my constituents; they are also my friends and neighbours. I know how important good long-term care is to them, and we all want to ensure that our elderly are being taken care of now and in the future. Under the leadership of the Minister of Long-Term Care, the government has committed \$6.4 billion to building more than 30,000 net new beds by 2028, and another 28,000 upgraded beds. This investment is needed.

We're fixing long-term care for the people in Eglinton—Lawrence and across Ontario. This announcement is good for our government and good for my residents, so I'm very happy to celebrate that today.

ADDICTION SERVICES

Ms. Suze Morrison: Earlier this week, I had the honour of visiting overdose prevention and harm reduction service providers in my riding of Toronto Centre. The stories that I heard drove home the harm being done by this government's continued failure to address the overdose crisis and the need for real solutions to the poisoned drug supply that is killing tens of thousands of people across this country.

Dayn is a harm reduction worker at the Regent Park Community Health Centre. He shared with me that, "We have a model for dangerous substances. It's called the LCBO."

Speaker, alcohol and marijuana are drugs, but as a society we said, "Let's create safe spaces to access those drugs, with quality measures and dosage information." We list the ABV on a bottle of wine, and our licensed weed stores sell us edibles and pre-rolls with gram dosages on them. We put in place education on safe use, and programs to address the negative social harms.

But when it comes to folks who use opioids—who are being poisoned to death by tainted supply—we don't see the same social response from either the provincial or federal governments. Another worker shared with me that, "The drugs aren't what's killing people. The toxic drug supply is what's killing people."

Speaker, we need to be able to have a serious conversation, guided by public health, about how to end the opioid crisis, and we cannot do that if we aren't addressing the safe supply of drugs in our communities. People in our communities are dying, while politicians in this room sidestep difficult conversations, because it is politically inconvenient. So let's have a hard conversation about how to get that done.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Under the previous Liberal government, Ontario only saw a mere 611 new long-term-care beds created from 2011 to 2018, an increase of just 0.8%—less than 1%. On the other hand, our government has a plan to end the crisis in long-term care by building tens of thousands of new and redeveloped beds. We've committed a historic \$6.4 billion to build 30,000 net new long-term-care beds and we've also committed billions to redeveloping more than 27,000 new long-term-care staff over four years and ensuring that residents receive on average of four hours of direct care per day by 2024-25.

That's why I was honoured to be joined by the Minister of Long-Term Care, Paul Calandra, last Thursday to announce the addition of 387 new and 645 upgraded long-term-care beds to modernize and expand six long-term-care homes in Niagara and Hamilton. What that means is that in four years, we have built more long-term-care beds just in Niagara and Hamilton alone than the previous government did over the last decade of their time in office. When these six homes are completed, 1,032 residents will have a new place to call home, near their family and friends. I was also pleased to be able to announce \$31 million in operational funding for long-term-care homes—new dollars—including \$6.1 million for long-term-care homes in my riding of Niagara West to increase staffing levels.

Speaker, we are taking action to make sure that we are fixing long-term care once and for all for the people of Niagara West, and across Ontario.

LONELINESS AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

Ms. Lindsey Park: Good morning, Speaker. Yesterday I introduced Bill 104, the Connected Communities Act, 2022, which, if passed, would require the government to develop a strategy to both reduce loneliness and social isolation and support Ontarians who may be struggling with loneliness and social isolation.

1020

Before the pandemic, there were signs that many people in Ontario, young and old, were feeling less connected than they did in past generations. Seeing less friends, volunteering less time in the community, the effect of new technologies: These all have an impact on our productivity, health and well-being. The pandemic only exacerbated this serious public health problem.

When it comes to our most vulnerable Ontarians, loneliness and social isolation are major risk factors for abuse and neglect. Now is the time for us to work in this House across partisan lines to develop a comprehensive, province-wide strategy to help those struggling with loneliness and social isolation. If passed, the Connected Communities Act provides one year for the development of an initial strategy and requires that the government subsequently review the strategy at least once every five years.

Being disconnected is just as dangerous to good health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, according to often-cited research. The young are also lonelier than the elderly, as

surveys have repeatedly discovered. We owe it to our constituents to work together in this place on this major public health issue of our day. I hope I can count on your support.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Owning a home is a dream that has become far out of reach for so many living in my community and throughout the GTA. An average home in the greater Toronto area will cost you over \$1.3 million. That's up almost 30% from last year. The reality is that right now, most people who aren't fortunate enough to inherit a home or get help from family or loved ones are out of luck. To pay the mortgage on an average home in the GTA, your combined yearly family income will have to be more than \$200,000, and that's not even to mention the down payment.

So many young families are not able to afford their own home like their parents and grandparents did. This means so many more will have to rent, but the average rent costs in northwest Toronto, my community, for instance, are \$2,000 a month, and with the cost of literally everything going up, many families are being forced to choose between putting food on the table and keeping a roof over their head.

This government must take real action to ensure every Ontarian has a home they can afford.

HOLI

NOWRUZ

Mr. Michael Parsa: As most of my colleagues here in the Legislature know by now, March is a busy but also a special month for many Ontarians.

This past weekend I joined members of the Richmond Hill BIA and the Richmond Hill Board of Trade to recognize and celebrate Holi, which began on March 18 and ended on March 19. For those who don't know, Holi is a traditional Hindu festival which celebrates spring and is also known as the festival of colours. The holiday typically begins at night, or first day, which is known as Holika Dahan. During this time, members engage in religious rituals and prayers. For the second day, the community engages in fun activities and celebrations which usually include the traditional throwing of the Gula.

Also this month, starting on March 20, Persians across the province and around the world celebrate Nowruz, which marks the beginning of the Persian New Year. Nowruz, which means "new day," like Holi, also celebrates the arrival of spring. This celebration marks new beginnings and serves as an opportunity for families and friends to gather around the Haft Sinn table and also to visit one another. Nowruz is a pillar of the Persian cultural heritage that dates back more than 3,000 years.

With that said, I'd like to take this opportunity to wish all those who celebrate a happy Holi, and also to the Persian community, a happy Nowruz.

Remarks in Farsi.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Sara Singh: This weekend I was out canvassing and knocking on doors in my riding of Brampton Centre, and I spoke to many constituents living in the Knightsbridge community who are concerned that rising rents are making it harder and harder for them to have a safe place to call home. I spoke to seniors who are on fixed incomes, people who are receiving the Ontario Disability Support Program and are worried that, should the rent go up, they are going to be choosing between putting food on the table or having a roof over their heads.

Speaker, on December 17, 2021, myself and members of the government met with our regional council to discuss the Housing Master Plan. The Housing Master Plan in Peel would provide funding for 18 different projects that would create 2,241 affordable housing units in our community, including in my riding of Brampton Centre, but also across the region of Peel. When is this government going to provide the funding necessary for the region of Peel to get construction and get shovels in the ground to create these affordable housing units?

People are growing weary. They're growing very tired and very stressed with the rising costs of housing, and everyone in this province deserves a safe place to call home. New Democrats are going to keep fighting to ensure that people have a safe place to rest their heads at night, because housing is a human right.

TOURISM

Mr. Deepak Anand: Mr. Speaker, the last two years have been extremely tough. We know that many of us have booked a vacation but had to cancel it because of COVID-19. I want to say thank you to all the Ontarians for following the protocol. Thanks for discipline. We can see the result. Now, we see the light at the end of the tunnel.

I'm going to ask each one of you to take the benefit that your government is providing through the staycation tax credit. As you know, Ontario offers the world in one province. We have vibrant cities, historic small towns, food festivals, food stalls, mountains and beaches. We have everything here where you can have a scheduled getaway and an amazing destination. By making tourism in the province more affordable for Ontarians through a temporary personal income tax credit, Ontario residents will be able to claim eligible accommodation expenses, up to 20% of their accommodation, through to the staycation credit.

I want to acknowledge and thank the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries for the wonderful job and for supporting Ontarians. By making tourism in the province more affordable through the Staycation Tax Credit, it will help keep tourism dollars right here at home.

I look forward to welcoming visitors to Mississauga, and encourage the residents to take advantage of the credit and explore our province.

INVASION OF UKRAINE

Ms. Marit Stiles: I would like to use my time today to share a message of solidarity with the people of Ukraine and Ukrainian Canadians, as well as those brave souls in Russia who are demonstrating in St. Petersburg and elsewhere as Russia's invasion of that country, Ukraine, enters its 28th day.

We have all watched in horror as casualties mount and cities are reduced to rubble. As I speak, over 100,000 people remain trapped in Mariupol. I was looking and realized that that city is the same size as London, Ontario. Imagine that, a city and a population of that size that has been subjected to a cruel, weeks-long siege by Russian forces.

This war, like all wars, is fuelling a refugee crisis. Canada has rightly offered safe haven for Ukrainian refugees, and today, Ukrainian children are receiving care just down the street from us here at SickKids hospital. We can be proud of that. But I want to echo Davenport's own FCJ Refugee Centre, which has helped countless people resettle here in our city and in our community, in calling on Canada to extend this support to anyone fleeing this war regardless of nationality.

Ontario can also do more, Mr. Speaker. We should increase our support for humanitarian aid and match donations made by Ontarians, and we should act immediately to make sure that construction firms run by sanctioned Russian oligarchs don't make a single dime on the construction of public transit like the Ontario Line and the Scarborough subway.

I want to commend everyone in my community and around the province who has stepped up to help in ways big and small, from hosting backyard fundraisers to selling baked goods. War diminishes us all, Mr. Speaker, but these actions of solidarity and compassion help restore our collective humanity.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm very pleased to introduce visitors who are representatives of the Groves Memorial Community Hospital in the township of Centre Wellington. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

1030

QUESTION PERIOD

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question this morning is to the Premier, and it's pretty simple. Canadians are finally going to have some progress on things that are important to them. Families who couldn't afford dental care are now going to be able to do so, starting with children this year. That's pretty great. People are skipping their meds. We know that that's the case in Ontario. Some folks are halving their meds—cutting them in half—to be able to afford their prescriptions. Those folks are going to

get a break on the ability to pay for the prescriptions that they need to stay well. The federal NDP, as you know, Speaker, led the way and we support their plan. Why? Because it helps people afford the dental care and the prescription drugs that they need.

The Premier is on the record quite clearly opposing pharmacare and dental care. Will he now get on board with the other premiers and the federal government to implement this plan to help Ontarians, to help make Ontarians' lives better, to help them pay for prescription drugs, to help them pay for the dental care they so desperately need?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Since a Progressive Conservative government brought in public health care in the 1960s we've ensured that it has improved every single time that we have been in government. We'll pay attention and we'll see what the federal government has to offer. But, of course, we would not sign anything that isn't in the best interests of the taxpayers of the province of Ontario.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Sounds like the way this government's handled the child care deal, Speaker, and that's not good news for Ontarians.

But look, these plans will make a real difference in people's lives. They will make a real difference in the health and well-being of Ontarians. This Premier has never, ever supported a national pharmacare plan. In fact, in 2018, when he took government, he made big cuts to pharmacare. He made big cuts to Ontario's pharmacare plan that really affected especially young people, young people who suddenly couldn't afford their inhalers for their asthma anymore. That's the record of this Premier.

So I'm going to ask, very straightforwardly: Will this Premier commit to doing what is right for Ontarians, to side with Ontarians, to help them stay healthier, to help them afford their prescription drugs? Will he do that?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, Speaker, of course that is what we've done right from the beginning since we came to office. But I'll tell you what we're not going to do: We're not going to allow the progress, growth and prosperity that we've seen since 2018 be jeopardized by a coalition government between the NDP and the Liberals. Of course we're not going to do that.

We're going to respect the voters of the province of Ontario and we're going to continue to provide the excellent leadership that we have had, the leadership that has seen this province grow, the economy grow; that has seen billions of dollars invested in health and long-term care; that has seen transit and transportation being built across the province of Ontario. That is what we're going to continue to do, because that is what is in the best interest of the province of Ontario. We'll let the NDP and the Liberals try to figure out how they can combine and do coalitions.

Now, colleagues, we've seen what coalition governments between the Liberals and NDP have meant to the people of the province of Ontario before: billions of

dollars of debt, out-of-control hydro rates, red tape and regulation and jobs fleeing the province like never before. The people of the province of Ontario aren't going to let that happen again, I can tell you that.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Notwithstanding the way that the House leader of the governing party has decided to talk about this, the fact of the matter is that this is a plan that is going to be good for Ontarians. It will help provinces across our country deal with things like the hiring of more doctors and nurses. It will help to expand mental health services and supports available to Ontarians and Canadians, which is exactly what we need, especially right now. It will help provinces to invest in better home care, better community care.

Yesterday, the Minister of Long-Term Care criticized the plan. He's doing it again today. And the Premier, we know, is opposed to things like pharmacare. He cut it here in Ontario. He's opposed to dental care. He's cut pharmacare, as I said. He cut \$330 million out of mental health, and then he complains that there's not enough money for health care for Ontarians coming from the federal government. These are big cuts and bad choices that this Ford government has already made in the last four years.

Can the Premier and his minister explain to the people of this province why they oppose a deal that will help people with their health care, help people with their dental care, their prescription drugs? Why don't they think Ontarians deserve to affordably obtain those things?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Unless I'm mistaken, there is no actual deal in front of the provinces with respect to the things that she talks about. And that's just like the NDP: They'll sign a deal before they've actually even seen it.

But we shouldn't be surprised; this is the same NDP that is now looking to form a coalition with the Liberals. You can just imagine it, Speaker, can't you? I can just see it here: The Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the Liberal Party, sitting around the illegal pool that the leader of the Liberal Party built in conservation lands in his backyard, sipping a pina colada, the leader of the Liberal Party saying, "I didn't know you liked pina coladas," the two of them thinking about, "Look at the success that we had in the past"—\$78 billion worth of debt they accumulated the first time; \$140 billion of debt they accumulated the second time; hundreds of thousands of jobs fled the province of Ontario.

But all of that changed when the people of the province of Ontario elected a strong, stable Progressive Conservative majority government. I believe, on June 2, they'll turn their backs on a coalition of the tax, spend and tax and return a strong, stable Progressive Conservative majority government.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: What it shouldn't be is all about this member and his crowing; what it should be about is Ontarians. What is important to Ontarians? What do they

need to help make life better? What are their important values that need to be addressed?

The second question is to the Premier. It's pretty clear that our province needs to step up and start taking some leadership when it comes to electric vehicles in this province. We have to start addressing climate change, and we know that, of course, this government has a very dismal record in that regard: He cut the rebate for EV vehicles; he ripped out charging stations; he eliminated the incentive for people, everyday people, to be able to afford to install chargers. He has dragged us backward for four years when it comes to climate change. By all measures, he doesn't actually want to have regular working people in this province afford to have an electric vehicle. They're on their own.

My question is, why is the Premier refusing to help everyday working people be able to be a part of the transition and afford an electric vehicle in our province?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, now we're seeing it, right? Now we're seeing the coalition working together, because that's the same question that the former Premier asked two days ago.

I'll tell you what we're not going to do: We're not going to pick a small subset of the Ontario economy and say, "Here's 5,000, 6,000 bucks so you can go buy an expensive \$100,000 Tesla." What we're going to do instead, Speaker—wait for it—is put in place the environment where people want to actually build and manufacture those vehicles right here in the province of Ontario. So as opposed to closing down automotive manufacturing in the province, people are investing in the province of Ontario, bringing back hundreds of thousands of jobs. Millions of people are supported by the decisions that we have made that have brought back manufacturing to the province of Ontario. And just last week, the Minister of Northern Development and Mines brought in a Critical Minerals Strategy which will help us develop batteries.

I suggest that during question period, the leader might want to take a moment to leave and take a look at the announcement that's coming, an enormous announcement for the people of the province of Ontario, more progress on our way to increase—

Interjections.

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

Supplementary question?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, this governing party might think that the people who deserve to own electric vehicles are their friends, their buddies who have the money, but I think that the working people of this province should not be dismissed as "a small subset" but be acknowledged as the people who drive our economy, who drive our province and make it a great place to live and work. You can build as many cars as you want, but if regular working people can't afford them, they're not going to be able to buy them.

Look, Quebec has outsold Ontario in electric vehicle sales for the last three years, each and every year, in the

number of vehicles sold, even though we have 70% higher of a population, because this government made bad choices and wrong decisions. BC, with a third of the population, outsold us the year after the Premier ditched the incentive. So it's pretty clear that this government made the wrong choice.

Regular working folks need to be able to afford electric vehicles. That's who I'm worried about, not the rich folks, not the folks who are the buddies of the Premier. People deserve to have money put back in their pockets, because, let's face it, gasoline prices are really, really high. Let's help our whole province tackle climate change and give everybody an opportunity to be part of the solution.

Why does this Premier stubbornly refuse to offer EV incentives to regular Ontarians, to regular, everyday working people so they can afford these vehicles?

1040

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, there's so much in that question. She talks about high energy prices, but she supports a \$200 carbon tax. How will that impact the very same people who she wants to buy EVs? How does it impact the people when we were seeing Ford leaving, we were seeing GM close down, we were seeing Chrysler say that Ontario was the most expensive jurisdiction to do business in and there was no point in making investments? Why? Because of the policies that they supported in the previous Liberal government when they were in coalition together between 2011 and 2014.

That changed in 2018 when a strong Progressive Conservative majority government was elected, and what did we do? We ended the carbon tax, lowering energy prices. We got rid of the red tape and regulation that was stifling innovation and manufacturing, that saw 300,000 jobs leave. They came back. We put the investments in place and the economy in place so that GM could come back, so that Ford would continue to manufacture, so that Honda would continue to manufacture. And in just 20 short minutes, Mr. Speaker, one of the largest investments in new technology and electric vehicle manufacturing will take place. I suggest the leader leave and watch that great announcement for the people of the province—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, we all know what ended when this Ford government got elected, Speaker. What ended was electric vehicle charging stations in Ontario. What ended was electric vehicle rebates so people could actually afford to make the choice to transition to an electric vehicle. What ended was the little bit of help that was available to people to be able to put a charging capacity into their own home. That's what ended in the province of Ontario.

But it doesn't have to be this way. Let's support every Ontarian to be able to afford an electric vehicle. We can actually get that done. It would make life more affordable for drivers, it would tackle the climate change crisis that faces us, it would bolster our auto manufacturing and create great jobs in this province. Look, the US has got a \$15,000 incentive that they're looking at right now for

electric vehicle purchases. The smart thing to do is for Ontario to put an incentive in place that will equal or increase that incentive.

So I guess the question pretty clearly is, why is this Premier refusing to do the smart thing, the right thing, the thing that helps everyday working people transition to electric vehicles by providing an incentive? Let's see it in the budget that's coming up.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Let's take a look. They built charging stations at GO train stations, right? This is how smart they were. Now, a fast charger: 20 minutes and your vehicle is charged. But somebody who goes and parks at a GO train station in the morning and stays there for nine hours a day, who has his vehicle charged in 20 minutes—they felt that that was the right spot for a charging station.

So what did the Minister of Energy decide to do? He decided, "Hey, why don't I put them in the on-ramps where people actually exit to fuel up? That seems to make sense." That's what we did. Congratulations. More people having access, eliminating the fear of having an electric vehicle.

Now, the incentives that they put in place—she can talk about it all she likes—were for the richest people in the province of Ontario. It wasn't for the poorer people, it wasn't for the people who are barely getting by because of the policies that they supported with them.

What we're doing is building a strong economy; hundreds of thousands of jobs coming back. Those auto workers who were laid off or who were out of work are now back in their facilities, building the next generation of vehicles for generations to come, and everybody will be able to afford it.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: My question is for the Premier. Speaker, the Northern Health Travel Grant continues to be a major issue in my riding. It's an issue across the north, and people are not happy. We have rising prices across this province, especially at the pump. In Atikokan today, if people would like to know, gas is \$2 a litre; \$1.92 in Thunder Bay. I spoke with a constituent who makes regular trips to Manitoba to obtain specialist care. She's been doing this for years. Margaret says that that trip now costs her 30% more. All the other costs associated with travel are up, yet the travel grant rates remain the same.

Premier, when is this government going to raise the rates for the Northern Health Travel Grant?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member for the question. We recognize that many residents of northern Ontario face unique health care realities compared to people living in other regions of the province. They sometimes need to go out-of-province to receive care. The northern Ontario travel grant program is continuously undergoing quality improvement to make sure that it can respond to needs of people living in the north.

The 2021-22 allocation for the northern Ontario health travel grant was \$48.2 million, and I would like to indicate that, in the 2021 fiscal year, the Ministry of Health received and processed 143,495 applications, and 138,000 and change, 96.2% of the applications, were approved, 95% within 30 business days. I know that there was a concern previously about timing in terms of receiving the grants. We have increased it to 95% within 30 business days, so we are responding to the needs of northern Ontarians.

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

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Again to the Premier: People can't afford to wait for this government to do the right thing. People are suffering. This is something I hear all the time from my constituents, and as I said, the rising cost of living is putting pressure on everyone. The people that need to travel for medical care are struggling—many of them are on disability—especially when they have to pay up front, they have to wait for their reimbursement and then it doesn't cover the costs. It's putting people into debt and others just can't afford to get the health care they need.

Everyone in this province has the right to get the health care they need, whether they live in Thunder Bay–Atikokan or Toronto. When is this government going to fix the travel grant? When will northern Ontario get equal access to health care?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Well, I can certainly agree with the member that people in northern Ontario deserve equal access to health care that everyone else in Ontario receives. That's why we're continuously upgrading the northern Ontario travel grant, to make sure that it does respond to the needs of people.

In November 2020, the program introduced a revised application form that allows clients the option to provide banking information to receive approved program payments by direct deposit. This is certainly a great improvement on what used to happen in the past, where people had to wait for long periods of time in order to receive reimbursement. This is especially helpful for repeat users of the program and will eliminate the wait to receive a cheque by mail. It is crucial to point out the cheque payments remain, still, for northern Ontario travel grant patients, but we are continuously working to make sure that the program can respond to the needs of patients in the quickest possible way so that they can receive the health services that they need and deserve.

CREDIT UNIONS

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is for the great MPP for Pickering–Uxbridge and the Minister of Finance. Minister, there are credit unions all across my riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, and as the minister would know, these are especially important institutions to so many rural Ontarians and small businesses in the agriculture, tourism and hospitality sectors all across Ontario. As the government looks toward long-term economic recovery and

prosperity, it is important that Ontario's financial institutions remain resilient and innovative.

Speaker, through you, could the Minister of Finance please tell us how the government and his ministry plan to support and grow a healthy, strong and competitive credit union sector?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you to the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. A round of applause.

Interjections.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: That's great. My colleague is completely right: Credit unions provide important financial services to many Ontarians and are vital to so many of Ontario's small businesses. That's why we have revised the 1994 Credit Unions and Caisses Populaires Act to address outdated red tape, reduce costs and burden for the sector and increase choice for clients—what a concept. After comprehensive research of national and international standards and extensive consultation with the industry, we are certain that Ontario's credit unions have a framework that fosters growth, are consumer focused, and are safe and sound so that credit unions can better serve their members and constituents.

Mr. Speaker, our government is always looking for ways to help keep more money in the pockets of hard-working Ontarians and ensuring small businesses have access to safe, modern and diverse financial services close to home.

1050

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

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you to the minister for that response and his great work to steward and foster all of our finances in our province. It's great to hear that this government has modernized the Credit Unions and Caisses Populaires Act with these much-needed changes. After 15 years of Liberal mismanagement, it's good to be part of a government that is working for the taxpayer in so many ways.

With so much ongoing economic uncertainty, and the pressure that so many Ontarians are under with inflation and rising costs, Ontarians want some certainty as to what to expect. Through you, Speaker, could the minister give us some more details on these changes to credit unions and just how these changes fit into the government's plan to build Ontario and keep money in the pockets of Ontarians?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you again to the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Colleagues, my colleague is right: Ontarians have faced a tough couple of years from the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic effects. Our government understands that. That is why these changes to modernize and provide credit unions an opportunity to expand services, such as some insurance products, makes Ontario's credit unions more innovative, more competitive and, most importantly, allows them to better serve Ontario and their communities.

All of this is part of our plan to build Ontario and keep more money in the pockets of hard-working Ontarians. That's why we're increasing the minimum wage to \$15. It's why 760,000 workers are getting a raise. We've eliminated the licence plate fees, and we've removed, in my

region of Durham, the expensive and unfair tolls on Highways 412 and 418 as put on by your leader—

Mr. John Fraser: Not in Brampton, though.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:—over there. As well, we're working on addressing many other things for the hard-working people of Ontario.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. This government's cuts to education and its failure to support our schools has created a mental health and staffing crisis within our education system. The Thames Valley District School Board estimates that student mental health needs are four times greater now than before the pandemic, at a time when People for Education reports that the majority of Ontario schools do not have the resources to address those needs. Mental health leaves for Thames Valley teachers and education workers are also skyrocketing, increasing 44% over the last year.

Why is this government ignoring the mental health needs of both students and education workers in Ontario?

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thanks to the member opposite for the question. I wish to also acknowledge that mental health is an important issue to each and every member of this House, and it's an important issue to each and every person in the province of Ontario. It's one of the areas that I believe there's a non-partisan consensus on ensuring that we're working together to improve the mental health of the province and respond to the needs of students and of every Ontarian alike, as well as the needs, of course, of our staff.

So I want to speak a little about some of the investments the government has made in mental health; but specifically, that the Ministry of Education, under the leadership of Premier Ford and Minister Lecce, have ensured that they're responding to the challenges of the pandemic, because we recognize that families, students and staff alike have gone through a lot over the past two years and we're ensuring we're supporting them.

Some of the ways we've done that are by quadrupling the mental health allocations to our school boards to ensure that they have resources in each and every classroom to support students as they go about their day and also ensuring that staff are supported. I'll speak more in the supplementary.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, not only are more Thames Valley staff being pushed to the breaking point, but the complexity of staff mental health needs is also increasing. That's why the Thames Valley District School Board voted last month to create a full-time staff mental health lead and they are urging the government to provide stable annual funding to address staff mental health needs throughout the education system. Not only is this an obligation of school boards as employers, but it is essential

if staff are going to be able to support students. They can't do this if they are struggling themselves.

Speaker, will this government reverse the cuts and start investing in a comprehensive plan to repair the disruption, stress and damage that education workers and students have experienced over the past two years?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My thanks to the member opposite.

To just clarify for anyone watching, I want to be very clear that this government has increased the funding for mental health in our education system by 421.6% since we came to office. That's more than quadrupling—prior to this government's investment in this area.

For many, many years, we saw the Wynne-Del Duca governments fail to take actions that were necessary. But our government has stepped forward, and some of the ways that we've done that include \$25 million for local priorities that support the mental health of students. We've seen mental health funding increase by \$10 million alone this year, totalling \$90 million. We've invested in mental health supports to create 1,200—1,200—new regulated mental health workers in school communities province-wide, with more of these critical workers, such as psychologists, physiotherapists and, of course, social workers being hired this year in Ontario schools.

We're also working closely with our implementation partner, School Mental Health Ontario, to bring a consistent, evidence-based approach to mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention to students across all Ontario provincially funded school boards. We're going to continue this work.

I appreciate the member raising this important issue.

MUNICIPAL FUNDING

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier. The government introduced Bill 100 as a response to the occupation of Ottawa and the blockade in Windsor. There's not much of anything in there for Ottawa.

The truth of the matter is, the Premier actually had all the tools he needed to use to protect the citizens of Ottawa during the occupation; he just chose not to use them. Our law-and-order Premier looked the other way, because he wanted the occupation to be somebody else's problem—Justin Trudeau's problem, Jim Watson's problem. Here's the problem: He made it worse for the citizens and businesses of Ottawa. It's funny; we haven't seen the Premier much in the last couple of months in Ottawa.

But that's not what the question is about. They now have a \$36-million tax bill for policing costs—an extra \$36 million to the taxpayers of Ottawa. That's an extra 2% on everybody's tax bill. This government shares some responsibility in that tax bill.

So will the government do the right thing and support the citizens of Ottawa by sharing the policing costs with the federal government?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, this is something that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing addressed the other day. We will be working closely with them. I know this is something that the minister, along with the AMO table, will be working on and looking at.

I know the minister of tourism is also working very closely with the mayor on this particular issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary? The member for Ottawa—Vanier.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I need to reiterate some of the elements that my colleague just mentioned here.

If the government is claiming that Bill 100 is meant to restore business confidence after the blockades, then I'm telling you that it does nothing to restore Ottawa businesses' confidence in the ability of this government to have their back. In fact, this bill does nothing in response to the occupation that happened in Ottawa, and it does nothing to indicate that the government cares if it happens again.

The response of the government to the occupation in Ottawa has been delayed and insufficient. The funding support has been delayed and insufficient. And now we have legislation that clearly says to the businesses and residents of Ottawa that they're on their own.

We have been calling and are once again calling on the government to provide more funding support to the businesses and workers and to the city of Ottawa, and to commit to an open and transparent review of the Ministry of the Solicitor General's and the Ontario government's response to the occupation. Will the Premier do that?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I'm happy to respond. Bill 100 is all about ensuring that Ontario and the trading partners that Ontario actively participates with have confidence that when our businesses are impacted through illegal blockades, we're going to be able to do something quickly about it. It speaks to how much trade goes back and forth between our number one trading partner: of course, the United States.

The Ambassador Bridge in Windsor is a very clear example. I just spoke with Mayor Dilkens on Monday about this very issue.

We need to have processes and, frankly, legislation in effect that are going to be able to ensure that our police officers, when they need to, can act quickly.

I can't speak highly enough about the co-operation that occurred between the RCMP, the OPP, the municipal police forces across Ontario who stepped up and reacted and responded to remove these illegal occupations. But in hindsight, we now have legislation that will allow them to react even faster.

1100

INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Mr. Norman Miller: My question is for the Minister of Infrastructure. Speaker, for far too long, municipalities across the province have not received the financial support they need to address their vital infrastructure backlog. This

is especially true in large parts of northern Ontario. Ontario's small, rural and northern communities are at the forefront of our efforts to build Ontario for the future, and many of them are facing an infrastructure deficit due to the lack of action from the previous government.

Government support is highly important to maintain the health, safety and well-being of northern and rural communities, and it is crucial as we continue to focus on our commitment to building Ontario. Mr. Speaker, through you, what is the government doing to support the infrastructure needs of municipalities in my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you so much to the very hard-working member. In our fall economic statement, our government committed to increasing funding to our small, rural and northern municipalities through the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund. Through this fund, Ontario's municipalities are seeing a net increase of \$1 billion to \$2 billion over the next five years to support infrastructure projects like roads, bridges, water and waste water systems. This is the largest increase to OCIF since its creation.

As part of our OCIF commitment, more than 19 communities in parts of northeastern Ontario, including the town of Parry Sound and the township of Seguin, will see over \$4.4 million to support local projects and will provide 30,000 residents with the safe and reliable infrastructure that they deserve. Through these investments, we are protecting the quality of life of all Ontarians.

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

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the minister. It's great to be part of a government that is committed to supporting and building Ontario. I'll add to that minister's list: I know there's significant investment in the pool wellness centre in Parry Sound and also the Seguin Parry Sound airport. These are two big projects the government is supporting.

For years, northern Ontario was ignored and neglected by the previous government when it came to investments in public infrastructure. In fact, it was the same government that shut down critical infrastructure in the north when they decided that it was a great idea to close the Ontario Northland passenger rail and sell Ontera at a mere \$61-million loss.

Mr. Speaker, through you, would the Minister of Infrastructure please explain what other initiatives our government is taking to support key infrastructure projects across northern Ontario?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Again, thank you to the very hard-working member for the question. Our government is devoted to building northern Ontario. We're taking significant measures to ensure the health, safety and well-being of our northern residents. One of the ways we're doing this is by investing in the redevelopment and construction of a new hospital to serve the Weeneebayko Area Health Authority. This project will better serve the communities of Attawapiskat, Fort Albany, Kashechewan, Moose Factory and Peawanuck by providing them with a

new hospital, an elder care lodge, visitor hostel, accommodations and a new ambulatory care centre.

Additionally, as the members know, our government has put forward legislation that, if passed, will cut red tape and ensure all Ontarians are connected to reliable high-speed Internet service. I want all northern Ontarians to know that this government, under Premier Ford's leadership, has their backs.

FIRST NATIONS CONSULTATION

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: My question is to the Premier. Projects like the proposed Ring of Fire will have an unchangeable impact on the ways of life for the people who live across the north, especially Indigenous people. Done right, this has the potential for economic opportunity for First Nations. But let's be honest: Ontario is rushing environmental assessments in the area and will be the major beneficiary if and when the roads and the mines are built.

Speaker, First Nations that have concerns about the Ring of Fire and want a more cautious approach are not being heard. Will Ontario ensure that development in Treaty 9 territories has been with free, prior and informed consent with all First Nations affected?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond, the Minister of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. Greg Rickford: In a significant departure from what is actually happening on the ground, in fact, we have two Indigenous communities leading the environmental assessment processes for the corridor to prosperity. We understand that there are more communities that might be interested in this. We don't actually build mines; we put those communities in that region in the best position possible to make decisions for what that region could be, what the potential, as the member finally has alluded to, holds for tremendous economic prosperity done right.

We're incredibly encouraged by the signals from the new company, Wyloo, that has acquired a considerable stake in that region. But we're going to focus on the kind of legacy infrastructure that the communities have asked for: a corridor to prosperity that improves access to health and other service programming and an opportunity to fortify broadband access to those communities and enhance the conditions under which those communities live in the future.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Very few members of this government have visited fly-in First Nations in Treaty 9, Treaty 5 and Kiiwetinoong since forming government. But those who are familiar with the Far North and who come from there know that families and neighbouring communities, neighbouring First Nations have close ties and relationships that go back to a time before colonization.

Governments divide interests all the time to get the outcomes that they seek. What we're talking about here is colonialism in action. Those methods have not worked for

hundreds of years. We cannot keep using them and expect a different result.

Why is this government dividing First Nations and families by forcing the road-proponent communities to carry out the crown's burden of consultation for the EAs in the Ring of Fire area?

Hon. Greg Rickford: The short answer is that the communities asked to.

But I want to thank my colleagues who have made trips up into the north, and especially the isolated communities. Obviously, COVID prevented us from visiting as many as we would like.

Here is another important truth and reality shared not just by municipalities across northern Ontario but Indigenous communities as well: They want in on probably the single-biggest environmental policy ever advanced by any jurisdiction in the world. How do we know? Well, the co-leader of the NDP-Liberal coalition over there was just talking about electric vehicles and electric batteries as Ontario's next opportunity, and we agree, Mr. Speaker. That's why we want to make sure that from exploration to electric engines, Indigenous communities and municipalities across the great northern Ontario can be counted on for one of the best economic and environmental opportunities this province has ever seen—

Interjections.

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

The next question.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Speaker, through you, my question is to the Minister of Health. Two years ago, just before the pandemic, my staff requested a meeting with the Ministry of Health officials along with myself and a doctor of podiatry. During the pandemic, we recognized that there was much going on in the ministry. There were lockdowns, hospital backups, vaccine rollouts, staff shortages. But we have re-requested this meeting, now that things are opening back up.

Minister, due to a 30-year-old piece of legislation, no new podiatrists are allowed to register and practise in Ontario. No other health profession has been restricted in this way. It's discriminatory. It makes no sense. Every year in Ontario, approximately 1,200 people have a major lower-limb amputation from complications of vascular disease and/or diabetes, with annual direct health care costs of approximately \$70 million to \$105 million. Diabetes is on the rise. Amputations are on the rise. Health care costs are on the rise.

Minister, will you meet with the health segment in this particular area over the next few weeks, either in person or virtually?

1110

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much to the member for the question. I understand that there are concerns that there aren't enough podiatrists in the province of Ontario. However, I believe it is a question of semantics

because, first of all, chiropodists and podiatrists are the only recognized and registered foot specialists in Ontario. The main difference between the two is where they were trained and educated.

Chiropodists represent the largest number of foot specialists in Ontario. Currently there are 600 chiropodists and 60 podiatrists in Ontario. Practitioners in the US, or those who came to Ontario before 1993, are referred to as podiatrists, while those who came after 1993, or who were educated in Ontario, are called chiropodists. I believe that whatever you call them—chiropodists or podiatrists—there are over 660 of them in the province of Ontario and they are serving Ontarians very well.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Back to the minister: Respectfully, Minister, you've been in government since 2018. Back in the spring of 2011, you were quoted as stating that the current podiatric cap makes no sense and you supported its removal. With an aging population the need for this to be addressed is becoming more urgent.

Successful implementation of organized integrated lower-limb preservation efforts have shown reductions of up to 85% in amputation rates, saving millions in health care dollars. Let's provide standardized, best practice, lower-limb-saving care to patients and communities. Close to 60% of podiatrists' patients feeling this lack of podiatrists are over 55 years of age. We are in a crisis.

Ontario has the lowest ratio of podiatrists to population compared to anyone else in the developed world. Soon we will not be able to find a podiatrist. Minister, you can fix it now. Will you agree to a meeting no later than April 14?

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

Minister of Health?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I would suggest to the member opposite that there is no crisis, that there is no significant problem because we already have both chiropodists and podiatrists who are qualified to provide these specialized foot treatments. While we aren't accepting any more podiatrists because we stopped in 1993, we are still graduating chiropodists who are eminently qualified to perform the work that you have suggested. We have over 600 in Ontario right now and we're continuing to qualify people as chiropodists. They are equally as qualified as podiatrists. That is what we're doing in the province of Ontario to make sure that the people who require these foot treatments, whether it's due to diabetes or something else, are going to be cared for by a qualified professional.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Will Bouma: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Speaker, agriculture is the backbone industry in our great province that financially supports about one in 10 jobs. It has a long history as an economic driver in my riding of Brantford-Brant, which is home to over 163,000 acres of rich agricultural farmland.

I recently visited Maple Point Farms, a family-owned farm. To Heather Bootsma and her father, Paul: It was a great visit. It's using vertical farming to grow microgreens all year round. I have to say, you can purchase them at the incredible Brantford Farmers' Market.

A 21st century agri-food sector needs a government that invests in new technology to strengthen and grow our province's robust food system. Would the minister please tell us how she is helping farmers and food processors in my riding adopt new technologies to grow their operations, strengthen our food supply chain, expand to new markets and create new jobs in Ontario?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I want to thank the member from Brantford–Brant for that important question, and more importantly, for his incredible support for farmers in rural communities in his riding.

He's absolutely right: Innovation is absolutely the key to building opportunities in Ontario's agri-food sector. Just recently, as I've been out and about across Ontario, I attended the Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies' AGM and I was taken by one of their seminars. It was titled Old Ways Won't Open New Doors. How appropriate is that? It's exactly that kind of thinking that's going to help grow our rural communities and, most importantly, strengthen Ontario's agri-food industry.

It's through programs like Ontario's Agri-tech Innovation Program, where we're investing \$22 million in over 170 projects across this province, that will enable our farmers and our food processors to continue to innovate and open new doors.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Mr. Will Bouma: Speaker, it is so refreshing that we have a provincial government that is in tune to the realities of farming and food processing in the province of Ontario. That \$22-million program is going to benefit farms in my riding like Chary Produce in Oakland, who is using this support to invest in a robotic hoeing machine, and to Cindy Tota of Tota Farms, a fourth-generation ginseng farm who will be modernizing their irrigation system to increase efficiency and output. These farms are family-owned businesses that have been in operation for over 50 years, and this funding will help them modernize so that they can be successful for the next 50 years.

Speaker, I am sure they and other farmers in my riding are eager to know more. So back to the minister: Could she please tell us more about this investment and the projects being funded across the province through the Agri-tech Innovation Program?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Again, I'm very pleased to be able to go across this province and listen to the people who are leading by example. Through the leadership of Premier Ford and our entire government, we're investing in the agri-food industry like we've never seen before in 10, 15 or more years.

The most important part is, we're enabling farmers and food processors alike to innovate. The Agri-tech Innovation Program will enable stand-alone assembly lines. It will enable more efficiencies and better data management,

and that is what's going to drive our agri-food sector forward for years to come.

I can tell you that we're saying yes. We are saying yes to innovation. We are saying yes to presenting the right tools and the right programs that our farmers can use to grow our sector, and most importantly, we're building this agri-food sector so consumers have confidence in Ontario-grown agri-food products.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: My question is for the Premier. One of the very first acts of this government in 2018 was to slash a much-needed raise to ODSP and OW rates in half. In four years, they have never raised them.

We have watched homelessness soar. We have seen food and housing costs rise through the roof, exacerbated by two years of a pandemic. The Daily Bread Food Bank reports that food bank use rose by 53% from 2014 to 2020, much of that driven by insufficient disability support.

I know, because I have been on the street and in encampments speaking to housing workers and unhoused Ontarians, that a great many of the newly unhoused people live with a disability. This is on this government's shoulders.

When is the government going to raise social assistance rates and ensure that people living with a disability can afford to actually live?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you for that question. I'd like to clarify, first of all, that when our government came to office, in our first year we raised the rates for ODSP and OW to make sure that we addressed this issue. It is something the Liberal government had a chance to do and waited until it was going to lose the election to raise the rates. We delivered on that promise. We delivered on \$1 billion in social services relief. We have delivered on \$8.3 billion annually in supporting ODSP and OW, and our government is committed to helping people who have lost their job or who are unable to work. They have access to the discretionary benefit, they have access to the temporary emergency support, they have access to our food banks, and we have the Ontario Trillium Foundation to provide grants to help eligible non-profit organizations, including food banks—\$83 million. The ODSP and OW are simply one part of a multi-ministry, across-government approach to this issue.

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

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Speaker, that is an absolutely outrageous, silver-spoon, out-of-touch answer. People are literally dying of hypothermia on the streets in one of the richest cities in the world. Skyrocketing rents mean that working people, as well as people living with a disability, are being forced to choose between keeping a roof over their heads and eating, and often, they're losing that roof over their heads. Many are Black, Indigenous and other people of colour. Many live with a disability.

1120

Food banks and crumbs are not a long-term solution. Livable social assistance supports are a solution. A livable \$20 minimum wage is a solution. Rent control and fixing the financialization of housing that underlies the renovations and constant rent hikes, those are solutions.

When is the government going to put in place policies and solutions, systemic change that ensures that all Ontarians can stay housed and afford to eat?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite. Our government has been looking at understanding, across ministries, how we address this issue. That's why we've been working with the Ministry of Education for child spaces. It's why we've been working with seniors and accessibility for dental care for seniors. It's why we've implemented programs through the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to address these fundamental issues. It's why we have created the micro-credential strategy through the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development—\$75 million over two years. It's why we've created the Roadmap to Wellness through the ministry of mental health and addictions, through the Ministry of Health, to improve the life of these people who are suffering.

There's no question that our government needs to continue to support people when they are vulnerable, when they have a time of need, and that's exactly what we're doing with the Ontario Child Benefit, with the CARE tax credit, with the LIFT credit. It is our vision to work with all our partners, and we are asking the federal government to come to the table to agree to their campaign—

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

GARDE D'ENFANTS CHILD CARE

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: En janvier, le premier ministre et le ministre de l'Éducation n'arrêtaient pas de dire que la province était très, très proche d'une entente avec le gouvernement fédéral pour les services de garde d'enfants.

Cependant, pour ce gouvernement, il était plus important de se battre avec le gouvernement fédéral sur des questions qui dépassaient toujours la portée d'un accord fédéral-provincial sur la garde d'enfants que d'économiser de l'argent aux familles de l'Ontario. Et, monsieur le Président, son enfantillage coûte très, très cher aux familles.

Compte tenu des contraintes financières que le premier ministre a imposées aux familles de l'Ontario, lorsqu'une entente est signée, le gouvernement va-t-il verser des paiements rétroactifs pour les frais de garde d'enfants que les familles du reste du Canada n'ont jamais eu à déboursier?

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

L'hon. Paul Calandra: Comme vous savez, quand nous avons commencé dans le gouvernement en 2018, le

système de garde d'enfants était cassé. Ça, c'est la réalité. Mais nous continuons de travailler très fort avec le gouvernement fédéral pour obtenir un accord dans le meilleur intérêt des contribuables de la province de l'Ontario.

Look, as I've said on a number of occasions, we're just not going to sign a deal that is not in the best interests of the people of the province of Ontario. We want a deal that gets us to the \$10-a-day child care, that is something that families can count on for generations to come, and not that is simply in the best interests of a small subset of people right now, Speaker. We're very close. We're very close, but we won't sign a deal that doesn't help generations of parents to come. That's our responsibility as a government, and I would hope that they would help us get to that.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Ce gouvernement a joué des jeux à la table de négociation avec le gouvernement fédéral, et ça, ça a coûté cher aux familles ontariennes. Ça a coûté beaucoup d'argent.

Le premier ministre n'a pas fourni au gouvernement fédéral des documents montrant comment il réduirait les frais de garde d'enfants en temps opportun. Il savait que le délai de cinq ans était là pour réévaluer les besoins et les progrès réalisés et que le gouvernement fédéral a réservé au moins 9,2 milliards de dollars pour la garde d'enfants à partir de 2025-2026.

De ce côté-ci de la Chambre, on reconnaît que les familles ont payé pour ça, et on leur verserait un paiement rétroactif de 2 750 \$.

Pourquoi ce gouvernement et ses élus pensent-ils qu'il est acceptable que des familles paient une pénalité simplement parce qu'ils veulent continuer à critiquer une élection fédérale qui a déjà eu lieu?

L'hon. Paul Calandra: Comme j'ai déjà dit, l'ancien gouvernement nous a laissé un système cassé, et c'est pourquoi nous avons travaillé très fort avec le gouvernement fédéral pour obtenir un accord qui est dans le meilleur intérêt des contribuables de la province de l'Ontario. Nous savons que les familles—c'est un système très court, monsieur le Président.

That is why we are working so hard. They left us a system that is the most expensive child care system in Canada, Speaker. That is the record of the previous Liberal government. We don't want to continue on with that system. That is why we are working very hard to come to an agreement with the federal government. The first offer on the table did not meet the needs of parents in the province of Ontario. It did not get us to \$10-a-day child care and the Premier said that just simply was not good enough. We are working very hard. We're very close. I think parents in the province of Ontario can be assured that what we do is in their best interests.

TRUCKING INDUSTRY

Ms. Sara Singh: My question is for the Premier. The vibrant city of Brampton is home to over 24,000 businesses classified as transportation and warehousing, which

alone contribute about 11% of the city's GDP. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the important role the trucking industry plays in serving the day-to-day needs of residents and businesses in the city of Brampton and across Ontario. Many truck drivers risked their lives to ensure that goods were delivered and supply chains were not interrupted, with little to no support from this government. Precarious working conditions, rising insurance premiums and operating costs are leaving small trucking companies unable to operate.

Speaker, when will this government step up to the plate and help truckers with the support they need, and start regulating the commercial auto insurance industry?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond, the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you to the member opposite for that very important question. Since our government was elected, we've been keeping a close watch to make sure insurance companies are treating Ontario rate-payers fairly, including the trucking industry. We're very thankful to the trucking industry. You know, Mr. Speaker, they kept our goods moving right through the height of the pandemic. They made sure that our shelves were stocked. They crossed the borders. That's why it was so important to take the action that our government took to clear that illegal blockade at the Windsor border. So a big shout-out to the people of Windsor for doing that.

Mr. Speaker, we're continuing to work with—and she knows that the commercial insurance industry is not regulated by Ontario, but we're keeping a very close eye, making sure that our truckers continue to be able to support all of us across the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Sara Singh: Speaker, New Democrats have tabled several bills and motions that call on the government to step up and help owner-operators with surging insurance costs and the underlying driver shortage that we have here in Ontario. I've spoken with members of the transportation and trucking community and they are concerned that the current cost of doing business is unsustainable, many indicating that they have already taken trucks off the road because of the rising insurance costs. The Premier needs to act now and help truckers, some of whom are paying over \$15,000 a year in insurance costs. And as my colleague from Mushkegowuk—James Bay said bluntly, "How much more does this government think that small trucking businesses can take?"

Speaker, when will the government ensure that truckers receive the supports for rising fuel costs and the insurance premiums that they are forced to pay?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Again, I appreciate the question. Mr. Speaker, as she well knows, as I mentioned in the first answer to the question, commercial insurance is not regulated in Ontario, meaning that policy terms vary from insurer to insurer and between each policy. That said, we've worked very closely and we're pleased to see the Insurance Bureau of Canada, IBC, and their members utilizing industry-developed solutions, such as the business insurance action team, also known as BIAT, which has

been very helpful to help find viable insurance solutions for small businesses in Ontario's hospitality sector, and of course in the sector that she named.

The other thing that I think is really important to truckers and to families right across the province is having a job. The House leader talked about job creation. Last month, Ontario created 194,000 new jobs. That's 194,000 more families who can put food on the table.

CANCER TREATMENT

Ms. Lindsey Park: My question is for the Minister of Health. Over the course of this pandemic, we have learned of the devastating consequences of delaying a cancer diagnosis and treatment by just a few weeks or months. I recently learned of a young woman in Ontario who developed metastatic breast cancer this past year. What's troubling is, she has waited almost a month for approval from Ontario's Trillium drug program to help pay for her take-home treatments. Then, after the delay to her access, she still has to pay thousands of dollars as a deductible while off on long-term disability.

Can the minister explain why young adult cancer patients in Ontario face these drug access issues while those in western Canada do not?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member for the question. The health and well-being of all of the people of Ontario has always been our government's primary concern, whether it's by reason of COVID, by reason of a cancer diagnosis or cardiac condition—whatever it may be. Receiving a cancer diagnosis, we all know, is very stressful and concerning for people, and we know that they need to receive treatment as soon as possible and have access to the drugs that they need to help them.

The Ontario public drug program does provide drugs for eligible recipients, as you will know. The Ministry of Health has established a science-based approach to making funding decisions, which consider the clinical effectiveness of the drug, the safety, patient input, cost-effectiveness, affordability and effects on other health services. I can advise that take-home cancer drugs are funded through the Ontario Drug Benefit Program, and the Ontario drug benefit recipients pay the usual cost-sharing amount, as per any drug benefit program claims, of up to \$2 or \$6.11 per eligible prescription and any deductible payment.

Our goal is to make sure that people receive affordable cancer drugs as quickly as possible so that hopefully they can return to full recovery. Thank you for the question.

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

VISITORS

Hon. Stan Cho: I may have missed my opportunity this morning. I want to welcome to the Legislature, visiting from South Korea, Pastor David, a former pro ball player, and the sister of my EA, Ashley, Jin Li Seo. Welcome to Canada.

DEFERRED VOTES

WORKING FOR WORKERS ACT, 2022

LOI DE 2022 VISANT À OEUVRER
POUR LES TRAVAILLEURS

Deferred vote on the motion that the question now be put on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 88, An Act to enact the Digital Platform Workers' Rights Act, 2022 and to amend various Acts / Projet de loi 88, Loi édictant la Loi de 2022 sur les droits des travailleurs de plateformes numériques et modifiant diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have a deferred vote now on a motion for closure on the motion for second reading of Bill 88, An Act to enact the Digital Platform Workers' Rights Act, 2022 and to amend various Acts.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1132 to 1137.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): On March 21, 2022, Mr. Calandra moved second reading of Bill 88, An Act to enact the Digital Platform Workers' Rights Act, 2022 and to amend various Acts. On March 22, 2022, Mr. Bouma moved that the question be now put.

All those in favour of Mr. Bouma's motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Anand, Deepak	Ghamari, Goldie	Romano, Ross
Babikian, Aris	Gill, Parm	Sabawy, Sheref
Bailey, Robert	Hardeman, Ernie	Sandhu, Amarjot
Barrett, Toby	Jones, Sylvia	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Ke, Vincent	Scott, Laurie
Bouma, Will	Martin, Robin	Skelly, Donna
Calandra, Paul	McKenna, Jane	Smith, Todd
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Miller, Norman	Surma, Kinga
Cho, Stan	Mulroney, Caroline	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Crawford, Stephen	Oosterhoff, Sam	Thompson, Lisa M.
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Pang, Billy	Tibollo, Michael A.
Downey, Doug	Parsa, Michael	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Dunlop, Jill	Pettapiece, Randy	Wai, Daisy
Elliott, Christine	Piccini, David	Walker, Bill
Fullerton, Merrilee	Rickford, Greg	

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): All those opposed to Mr. Bouma's motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Hatfield, Percy	Shaw, Sandy
Bell, Jessica	Mamakwa, Sol	Simard, Amanda
Berns-McGown, Rima	Miller, Paul	Singh, Sara
Bourgouin, Guy	Monteith-Farrell, Judith	Stiles, Marit
Burch, Jeff	Morrison, Suze	Tabuns, Peter
Collard, Lucille	Park, Lindsey	Taylor, Monique
Fraser, John	Rakocevic, Tom	Vanthof, John
Gélinas, France	Sattler, Peggy	
Glover, Chris	Schreiner, Mike	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 44; the nays are 25.

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

We now have a vote on a motion for second reading of Bill 88, An Act to enact the Digital Platform Workers' Rights Act, 2022 and to amend various Acts.

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

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1141 to 1142.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): On March 21, 2022, Mr. Calandra moved second reading of Bill 88, An Act to enact the Digital Platform Workers' Rights Act, 2022 and to amend various Acts.

All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be counted by the Clerk.

Ayes

Anand, Deepak	Ghamari, Goldie	Rickford, Greg
Babikian, Aris	Gill, Parm	Romano, Ross
Bailey, Robert	Hardeman, Ernie	Sabawy, Sheref
Barrett, Toby	Jones, Sylvia	Sandhu, Amarjot
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Ke, Vincent	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Bouma, Will	Martin, Robin	Scott, Laurie
Calandra, Paul	McKenna, Jane	Skelly, Donna
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Miller, Norman	Smith, Todd
Cho, Stan	Mulroney, Caroline	Surma, Kinga
Crawford, Stephen	Oosterhoff, Sam	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Pang, Billy	Thompson, Lisa M.
Downey, Doug	Park, Lindsey	Tibollo, Michael A.
Dunlop, Jill	Parsa, Michael	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Elliott, Christine	Pettapiece, Randy	Wai, Daisy
Fullerton, Merrilee	Piccini, David	Walker, Bill

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be counted by the Clerk.

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Glover, Chris	Schreiner, Mike
Bell, Jessica	Hatfield, Percy	Shaw, Sandy
Berns-McGown, Rima	Mamakwa, Sol	Simard, Amanda
Bourgouin, Guy	Miller, Paul	Singh, Sara
Burch, Jeff	Monteith-Farrell, Judith	Stiles, Marit
Collard, Lucille	Morrison, Suze	Tabuns, Peter
Fraser, John	Rakocevic, Tom	Taylor, Monique
Gélinas, France	Sattler, Peggy	Vanthof, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 45; the nays are 24.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): So to a committee? Government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: In continuing efforts to build bridges, we will send it to committee, out of respect for the opposition House leader, to social policy.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bill is therefore referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

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

The House recessed from 1144 to 1300.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Scarborough–Agincourt.

Interjections.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you. I've never gotten so many claps in my life.

Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Meghan Stenson): Your committee begs to report the following bills without amendment:

Bill Pr62, An Act respecting Groves Memorial Community Hospital.

Bill Pr66, An Act to revive 2704395 Ontario Inc.

Bill Pr67, An Act to revive Frolander Island Resort (2003) Ltd.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

Report adopted.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

JOURNÉE INTERNATIONALE DE LA FRANCOPHONIE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF LA FRANCOPHONIE

L'hon. Caroline Mulroney: Monsieur le Président, chers collègues, je suis très heureuse de prendre la parole aujourd'hui devant cette assemblée pour souligner la Journée internationale de la Francophonie, qui a été célébrée ce dimanche 20 mars 2022 dans le cadre de ce Mois de la Francophonie, suscitant la fierté des francophones et francophiles de l'Ontario, du Canada et du monde entier.

Cette année encore, de nombreux événements partout dans le monde ont marqué cette belle occasion, des événements d'autant plus festifs, que certains d'entre eux ont pu avoir lieu en personne—finalement. Quelle joie pour les amoureux de la langue française et de diverses cultures francophones qui la modulent.

Je saisis cette occasion de célébration pour rendre hommage à la francophonie ontarienne. Au cours de la dernière année, j'ai eu le privilège de m'entretenir avec un grand nombre de Franco-Ontariennes et de Franco-

Ontariens, que ce soit lors des consultations que nous avons menées sur les services en français ou dans des circonstances plus informelles. J'ai été à l'écoute des enjeux auxquels ils sont confrontés, mais aussi de leurs aspirations.

Il ne fait pas de doute que la francophonie représente un atout important pour l'Ontario, tant sur le plan social et culturel qu'économique. Mais cela va encore plus loin. Je l'ai affirmé à maintes reprises et je le répète : La francophonie fait partie intégrante de l'identité même de la province.

Notre gouvernement reconnaît l'apport inestimable de la francophonie au mieux-être et à la prospérité de l'Ontario. D'ailleurs, les gestes que nous avons posés pour appuyer de façon concrète la francophonie témoignent de l'engagement profond de notre gouvernement.

L'année qui s'achève a été, pour la francophonie ontarienne, une année que je qualifierais de remarquable, ponctuée de moments forts et d'avancées majeures. Elle a marqué l'aboutissement des efforts collectifs de toute la communauté, de concert avec ceux de notre gouvernement.

Permettez-moi de souligner les deux grandes stratégies qui orientent et qui encadrent désormais l'ensemble des actions et des initiatives qui sont destinées aux francophones : la stratégie pour les services en français et la Stratégie de développement économique francophone. Ces stratégies complémentaires sont particulièrement porteuses car elles reposent sur une démarche concertée entre, d'une part, le mouvement associatif, le milieu des affaires et la société civile, et d'autre part, l'ensemble du gouvernement.

Au chapitre des services en français, la réalisation la plus marquante est sans contredit la modernisation et le renforcement de la Loi sur les services en français que nous avons adoptée l'automne dernier. Il s'agit d'une étape charnière dans l'évolution de cette loi qui était restée largement inchangée depuis son adoption en 1986. Cette modernisation—un tournant certes historique—répond d'ailleurs à une demande de longue date de la communauté francophone.

En plus d'enrichir l'offre active, de renforcer l'imputabilité des ministères et de leurs agences et d'ouvrir la possibilité de nouveaux points de services, la loi modernisée s'inscrit dans le cadre plus large de la stratégie des services en français, laquelle accorde une place primordiale à l'adoption de pratiques novatrices en matière de livraison de services, du développement d'une main-d'oeuvre bilingue et qualifiée pour soutenir l'offre de services de qualité, et de mécanismes de planification et d'évaluation rigoureux.

Comme il est question de main-d'oeuvre, il convient de souligner deux avancées extrêmement importantes, voire historiques, pour la communauté franco-ontarienne. Il s'agit, bien sûr, de l'ouverture de l'Université de l'Ontario français, qui a accueilli sa première cohorte en septembre dernier, et tout récemment, la loi accordant à l'Université de Hearst le statut d'établissement autonome—deux universités gouvernées pour et par les francophones, monsieur le Président.

Pour ce qui est du développement économique, vous savez à quel point notre gouvernement en a fait une priorité puisqu'il est le moteur de la relance et de la prospérité de l'Ontario. Ainsi, notre stratégie de développement économique, une première pour la francophonie ontarienne, vise à accroître l'empreinte entrepreneuriale de la francophonie, à élargir le bassin de main-d'oeuvre francophone et bilingue, à stimuler la création d'emplois et à faciliter l'accès à de nouveaux marchés pour les gens d'affaires et les entrepreneurs francophones.

À cet effet, nous avons annoncé des investissements sans précédent qui ciblent directement les entreprises et les organismes francophones. Nous travaillons de très près avec la Fédération des gens d'affaires francophones de l'Ontario pour qu'elle puisse continuer d'offrir des services aux entreprises francophones en démarrage et en croissance. Ainsi, un investissement de 380 000 \$ annoncé le mois dernier appuie une initiative de la Fédération des gens d'affaires francophones, de ses membres et de ses partenaires visant le développement d'un écosystème d'affaires francophone ici en Ontario. Cet écosystème permettra aux entrepreneurs de se connecter à des organismes francophones existants qui les accompagneront dans les phases de préincubation, d'incubation, d'implantation et d'accélération d'entreprises.

Nous avons également doublé l'enveloppe du très populaire Programme d'appui à la francophonie ontarienne, qui comprend maintenant un volet économique. D'ailleurs, nous avons lancé, pas plus tard que la semaine dernière, monsieur le Président, un nouvel appel à projets pour cette année.

Enfin, soucieux de mettre en valeur la francophonie économique ontarienne au-delà de nos frontières, nous avons aussi resserré nos liens de proximité avec le Québec, un partenaire de premier plan de l'Ontario. À cet égard, nous avons lancé le Prix du commerce Ontario-Québec en francophonie, qui célèbre l'excellence au sein de la communauté d'affaires francophone. Les deux premières entreprises récipiendaires ont été annoncées le 8 novembre dernier dans le cadre du Toronto Global Forum. La quantité et la qualité des candidatures reçues ont fait de cette première édition un très grand succès, monsieur le Président, et ont démontré que de mettre l'accent sur notre francophonie, c'est bon pour les affaires.

1310

Enfin, dans le cadre de l'entente Québec-Ontario en matière de francophonie, nos deux provinces investissent à parts égales dans des projets et des initiatives qui favorisent l'essor de la francophonie et les échanges entre nos deux provinces. L'appel de projets de la deuxième vague vient juste de se terminer. Le précédent appel à projets, en 2021, a permis le financement conjoint de 18 projets.

Sur la scène internationale, à titre de membre observateur de l'Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, nous poursuivons nos efforts pour tisser des liens de partenariat avec les membres de l'OIF.

D'ailleurs, en septembre 2021 l'Ontario a signé une déclaration de coopération avec la Communauté française

de Belgique, visant notamment les domaines de l'éducation, la jeunesse, le numérique et, bien sûr, le développement économique.

Toutes ces réalisations, et bien d'autres, témoignent du désir fort de notre gouvernement de reconnaître les besoins spécifiques de la communauté franco-ontarienne, d'intégrer ses intérêts dans les actions que nous mettons de l'avant, et de poursuivre le travail de collaboration soutenu avec la francophonie ontarienne.

Au cours de mon mandat comme ministre des Affaires francophones, j'ai affirmé et réaffirmé à quel point j'admire la détermination, la résilience et le dynamisme inventif de la francophonie ontarienne. Or justement, demain j'aurai l'occasion de remettre, au nom du gouvernement, les Prix de la francophonie de l'Ontario. Ces prix soulignent les réalisations exceptionnelles de francophones et de francophiles qui oeuvrent de façon remarquable au rayonnement de la communauté franco-ontarienne.

Je rends donc hommage à tous ceux et celles, jeunes et moins jeunes, de chaque coin de la province qui, tous les jours, se dévouent corps et âme à la fois pour bâtir l'avenir prometteur de la communauté francophone et aussi enrichir le patrimoine social, culturel et économique de tout l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses?

M. Guy Bourgouin: En tant que fier Franco-Ontarien, j'ai l'honneur de me lever aujourd'hui pour souligner le Mois de la Francophonie. Le mois de mars est un temps pour célébrer, pour fêter ensemble la vitalité linguistique et la diversité culturelle de la communauté franco-ontarienne.

D'ailleurs, cette semaine la communauté franco-ontarienne célèbre les 25 ans de la lutte pour sauver l'Hôpital Montfort.

C'est aussi un temps de réflexion et de réaffirmer nos engagements vers les communautés franco-ontariennes. Le NPD :

—continuera de moderniser la Loi sur les services en français;

—assurera le retour du commissaire aux services en français indépendant;

—assurera l'accès à l'éducation en français à partir de la maternelle jusqu'à l'université francophone par et pour;

—donnera à la culture francophone la place et le respect qu'elle mérite dans l'histoire de l'Ontario.

Mais il faut également comprendre que si nous ne restons pas attentifs, nos droits peuvent s'évaporer comme de l'air. Pendant les quatre dernières années, le gouvernement Ford, avec ses coupures draconiennes aux services en français, a fait reculer les intérêts des Franco-Ontariens et Franco-Ontariennes. D'ailleurs, sous le gouvernement conservateur, nous avons été témoins de notre commissaire aux services en français qui a été réduit à un simple département de l'ombudsman; des points de presse et des publications techniques offertes en anglais seulement, durant la pandémie, ce qui laisse des milliers de francophones sans accès à l'information pertinente dans la langue officielle de leur choix, par exemple, les bureaux

de santé; des journaux et des radios francophones ontariennes qui ne font pas partie des campagnes publicitaires du gouvernement provincial qui préfère supporter des agences du Québec—ou même, être obligé d'attendre trop longtemps pour avoir accès aux tribunaux dans la langue officielle de leur choix.

D'ailleurs, monsieur le Président, le gouvernement Ford est poursuivi en cour par un individu qui a dû attendre 18 mois pour avoir accès à des services en français. Et pourtant la loi est claire quand ça vient aux services en français.

Des écoles qui débordent, des conseils scolaires qui ne cessent de crier à l'aide et nous attendons toujours pour notre Université de Sudbury, pour et par, et pour compléter notre réseau pour la communauté franco-ontarienne.

Aux francophones et aux francophiles de la province : célébrons notre vitalité, mais restons attentifs pour faire valoir nos droits linguistiques que nous avons obtenus par de durs combats. Soyons fiers de notre culture et de notre héritage. Nous sommes. Nous serons. Bon Mois de la Francophonie.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Monsieur le Président, c'est un honneur pour moi de me lever ici aujourd'hui en tant que fière Franco-Ontarienne pour célébrer la Francophonie partout à travers le monde et ici au Canada. Mais vous savez que je ne le fais pas juste une fois par année.

Depuis 2019, j'ai l'honneur d'être la présidente du réseau international des jeunes parlementaires de l'Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, l'APF. Dans ce rôle, j'ai eu le privilège de travailler avec des centaines de parlementaires francophones de partout à travers le monde, et laissez-moi vous dire, les francophones sont unis, déterminés et passionnés.

Yes, we're very passionate. And not just about la Francophonie, but about all things in life. It must be a French thing.

Nous travaillons sur plusieurs projets ensemble, et je suis fière d'avoir pu collaborer avec nos partenaires à travers le monde.

Ici en Ontario, la présence francophone date de plus de 400 ans. Et beaucoup s'est passé dans les derniers 400 ans. En passant par Lord Durham, au règlement 17, à Montfort, à la crise linguistique de 2018, ça a brassé, et nos luttes ont résonné partout à travers le monde. Parce qu'appuyer la francophonie, ce n'est pas juste une affaire de francophones, c'est pour tous.

Nos amis anglophones, nos alliés, nos francophiles : nous vous apprécions tellement, et nous voulons partager notre belle langue avec vous et vous appuyer dans vos démarches pour apprendre la plus belle langue du monde.

Ici en Ontario, la demande d'accès aux programmes d'immersion française ne cesse d'augmenter, et de façon exponentielle.

Canadian Parents for French reported that registration for French immersion programs in Ontario has been rising consistently for nearly 15 years at an average rate exceeding 5% per year. Accounts continue to roll in of parents lining up at night, sometimes more than one night in a row, simply to try and be lucky enough to secure a spot for their children in the coveted programs. Demand is

far outstripping supply. Thousands of parents seeking to give their child a better education by registering them in French immersion are being turned away.

Nous devons appuyer tous ceux et celles qui veulent apprendre le français. Et je m'engage à veiller à ce que l'accès aux programmes d'immersion française soit universel—pas un parent, pas un enfant, détourné. C'est un grand projet, de long terme, mais en équipe, ensemble, avec la vision, je suis confiante que nous allons y arriver.

Vous savez, ici, les francophones, à chaque matin, on se lève et on choisit de vivre en français. On choisit de vivre en français, malgré les défis, malgré l'effort extra qu'on doit faire, puisqu'être francophone, c'est au cœur de notre identité.

Moi, j'ai pu vivre et étudier en français en Ontario grâce aux générations qui m'ont précédée, qui ont lutté, qui ont sorti leurs épingles à chapeau. C'est notre responsabilité, notre génération, d'assurer que ceux qui viennent après nous puissent non seulement vivre en français en Ontario, au Canada, en contexte minoritaire, mais prospérer. Et aujourd'hui, c'est tous nos francophones qui se lèvent chaque matin et choisissent de vivre en français qui me motivent à continuer, à persévérer, à tenir le coup. Et bien sûr, tous nos francophiles qui nous appuient à 110 %.

Continuez d'être de voix fortes. Comme on l'a toujours dit—merci, Le Droit : « L'avenir est à ceux qui luttent. » Et ça, c'est nous.

1320

M. Mike Schreiner: Ce samedi passé, le 20 mars, on a marqué la Journée internationale de la Francophonie. Cette occasion fête la longue et riche histoire de la langue française autour du monde et célèbre la coopération diplomatique des nations francophones.

Ontario is home to 1.5 million francophones, the largest population of French speakers outside of Quebec—and I am obviously not one of them. But I will continue to learn, and I will continue to fight for francophones to have access to services in French, such as education, health and justice.

In order to ensure the proper inclusion of Ontario's French speakers, it is crucial that francophone organizations receive adequate funding and that all Franco-Ontarians have access to government services in French, with a French Language Services Commissioner to protect the rights of Franco-Ontarians.

Francophone culture is an important part of the heritage of this province. This resilient community continues to make vital contributions to our economy and our culture, and they deserve our support. Merci.

PETITIONS

DOCUMENTS GOUVERNEMENTAUX

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ça me fait plaisir de présenter une pétition en français, étant donné que c'est la Semaine de la Francophonie.

« Accents en français sur les cartes santé de l'Ontario.

« Alors qu'il est important d'avoir le nom exact des personnes sur les cartes émises par le gouvernement » de l'Ontario « telle la carte santé;

« Alors que plusieurs personnes francophones ont des accents dans l'épellation de leur nom »—comme moi;

« Alors que le ministère de la Santé a confirmé que le système informatique de l'Ontario ne permet pas l'enregistrement des lettres avec des accents » de la langue française;

Ils demandent à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario « pour qu'elle s'assure que les accents de la langue française soient inclus sur les cartes santé émises par le gouvernement de l'Ontario » et ce, « avant le 31 décembre » 2022.

J'appuie cette pétition et je demande à Pallas de l'amener à la table des greffiers.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I have a petition entitled “Support a Just Transition and the Green New Democratic Deal.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Doug Ford is going in the wrong direction on the environment by ignoring our climate emergency and cutting funding to deal with the climate crisis;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to urge the government of Ontario to implement the Green New Democratic Deal to:

“—achieve net zero emissions by 2050, starting by cutting emissions 50% by 2030;

“—create more than a million new jobs;

“—add billions of dollars to Ontario's economy;

“—embark on the largest building retrofit program in the world by providing homeowners with rebates, interest-free loans and support to retrofit their homes to realize net zero emissions.”

I agree with my constituents. I'm going to add my name to theirs, and then I'm going to pass it to page Ria to take to the table.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Chris Glover: This petition is entitled “To Raise Social Assistance Rates.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario's social assistance rates are well below Canada's official Market Basket Measure poverty line and woefully inadequate to cover the basic costs of food and rent;

“Whereas individuals on the Ontario Works program receive just \$733 per month and individuals on the Ontario Disability Support Program receive just \$1,169 per month, only 41% and 65% of the poverty line;

“Whereas the Ontario government has not increased social assistance rates since 2018, and Canada's inflation rate in December 2021 was 4.9%, the highest rate in 30 years;

“Whereas the government of Canada recognized through the CERB program that a ‘basic income’ of

\$2,000 per month was the standard support required by individuals who lost their employment during the pandemic;

“We, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly to increase social assistance rates to a base of \$2,000 per month for those on Ontario Works and to increase other programs accordingly.”

I fully support this petition, will sign it and pass it to the table.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: This petition is titled “Petition: To Raise Social Assistance Rates.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario's social assistance rates are well below Canada's official Market Basket Measure poverty line and woefully inadequate to cover the basic costs of food and rent;

“Whereas individuals on the Ontario Works program receive just \$733 per month and individuals on the Ontario Disability Support Program receive just \$1,169 per month, only 41% and 65% of the poverty line;

“Whereas the Ontario government has not increased social assistance rates since 2018, and Canada's inflation rate in January 2022 was 5.1%, the highest rate in 30 years;...

“We, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly to increase social assistance rates to a base of \$2,000 per month for those on Ontario Works and to increase other programs accordingly.”

I agree with this petition. I will sign it and send it to the table.

ANTI-SMOKING INITIATIVES FOR YOUTH

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas:

“—In the past 10 years in Ontario, 86% of all movies with on-screen smoking were rated for youth;

“—The tobacco industry has a long, well-documented history of promoting tobacco use on screen;

“—A scientific report released by the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit estimated that 185,000 children in Ontario today will be recruited to smoking by exposure to on-screen smoking;

“—More than 59,000 will eventually die from tobacco-related cancers, strokes, heart disease and emphysema, incurring at least \$1.1 billion in health care costs; and whereas an adult rating (18A) for movies that promote on-screen tobacco in Ontario would save at least 30,000 lives and half a billion health care dollars;

“—The Ontario government has a stated goal to achieve the lowest smoking rates in Canada;

“—79% of Ontarians support not allowing smoking in movies rated G, PG, 14A (increased from 73% in 2011);

“—The Minister of Government and Consumer Services has the authority to amend the regulations of the Film Classification Act via cabinet;

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

“—To request the Standing Committee on Government Agencies examine the ways in which the regulations of the Film Classification Act could be amended to reduce smoking in youth-rated films released in Ontario;

“—That the committee report back on its findings to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and that the Minister of Government and Consumer Services prepare a response.”

I fully support this petition. I'll sign it and give it to page Rhythm to deliver to the table.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas several provinces and territories, including British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Yukon, PEI and Newfoundland and Labrador have implemented a \$10-per-day child care program;

“Whereas Ontario has some of the highest child care costs in the country and the costs have made quality child care hard to access for many families;

“Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on the child care sector;

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

“To immediately negotiate an agreement with the federal government to introduce a \$10-per-day child care plan in Ontario; improve wages for ECEs and child care professionals; and invest in child care capacity to support the recovery from COVID-19.”

I certainly support this petition, and I will be giving it to page Brianna.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Suze Morrison: I have a petition here related to the need to raise social assistance rates. It reads, “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s social assistance rates are well below Canada’s official Market Basket Measure poverty line and woefully inadequate to cover the basic costs of food and rent;

“Whereas individuals on the Ontario Works program receive just \$733 per month and individuals on the Ontario Disability Support Program receive just \$1,169 per month, only 41% and 65% of the poverty line” respectively;

“Whereas the Ontario government has not increased social assistance rates since 2018, and Canada’s inflation rate in January 2022 was 5.1%, the highest rate in 30 years;

“Whereas the government of Canada recognized through the CERB program that a ‘basic income’ of \$2,000 per month was the standard support required by individuals who lost their employment during the pandemic;

“We, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly to increase social assistance rates to a base of \$2,000 per month for those on Ontario Works and to increase other programs accordingly.”

I fully support this petition. I will affix my signature to it and provide it to the page.

1330

SOINS DE LONGUE DURÉE

M^{me} Marit Stiles: C’est un plaisir de présenter cette pétition au nom de Marie Walker. Je vais la présenter en français, parce que c’est la journée de la Francophonie.

À l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario :

« Alors que des soins de qualité pour les 78 000 résidents des maisons de SLD sont une priorité pour les familles de l’Ontario; et

« Alors que le gouvernement provincial ne fournit pas un financement adéquat pour assurer un niveau de soins et de personnels dans les foyers de SLD afin de répondre à l’augmentation de l’acuité des résidents et du nombre croissant de résidents ayant des comportements complexes; et

« Alors que plusieurs enquêtes du coroner de l’Ontario sur les décès dans les maisons de SLD ont recommandé une augmentation des soins pour les résidents et des niveaux du personnel. Les études des normes minimales de soins recommandent 4,1 heures de soins directs par jour;

« Nous, soussignés, pétitionnons l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario de modifier la Loi sur les foyers de SLD (2007) pour un minimum de quatre heures par résident par jour, ajusté pour le niveau d’acuité et la répartition des cas. »

Je soutiens cela. Je vais la signer et la remettre à la page Pallas pour remettre à la table des greffiers.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Percy Hatfield: As soon as I don my dollar store 2.5s, I’ll read you this petition.

“Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

“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 certainly support it. I’ve already signed it, and I’m going to give this to Brianna to bring down to the table.

ENTRETIEN HIVERNAL DES ROUTES

M^{me} France Gélinas: J’aimerais remercier Lise Thomas, d’Azilda dans mon comté, pour les pétitions.

« Améliorer l’entretien des routes du Nord en hiver.

« Alors que les autoroutes jouent un rôle essentiel dans le nord de l’Ontario;

« Alors que l’entretien des routes en hiver a été privatisé en Ontario et que les normes contractuelles ne sont pas appliquées;

« Alors que per capita, les décès sont deux fois plus susceptibles de se produire sur une route du nord que... du sud de l’Ontario; et

« Alors que la classification actuelle du » ministère des Transports « influence négativement la sécurité des routes du Nord; »

Ils demandent à l’Assemblée législative : « de classer les routes 11, 17, 69, 101 et 144 comme des autoroutes de classe 1; exiger que la chaussée soit déneigée dans les huit heures suivant la fin d’une chute de neige et ramener la gestion de l’entretien des routes en hiver au secteur public si les normes contractuelles ne sont pas respectées. »

J’appuie cette pétition, je vais la signer et je la donne à Mila pour l’amener à la table des greffiers.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Ms. Marit Stiles: I’m going to present this petition entitled “Fund Our Most Vulnerable Students, Fund Dedicated Remote Teachers for Students in ISP Programs”—and I’m presenting this on behalf of Denise Oliver. It reads as follows:

“Hybrid learning forces teachers to divide their attention between students in-person and online, which will result in students not getting the attention they need and deserve;

“Intensive support programs at the TDSB are meant to provide additional supports for students with special behavioural, communication, physical and intellectual needs;

“Educators and experts have repeatedly pointed out that there is no evidence to support hybrid learning as an effective pedagogical tool, especially when offered to students with special needs;

“Students, parents and caregivers can and should expect a safe and supportive educational environment that safeguards their privacy from video cameras that could capture their likeness or behaviour;

“Students enrolled in intensive support programs ... are being forced to rely on hybrid learning to receive teaching instruction from their classroom teacher, thus leaving vulnerable young students without the supports that they need;

“We, the undersigned, petition ... the Ministry of Education” and the Legislative Assembly of Ontario “to commit to funding and providing a dedicated remote teacher to all students enrolled in the intensive support program to supplement their in-person programming.”

OPPOSITION DAY

NORTHERN HEALTH SERVICES SERVICES DE SANTÉ DANS LE NORD

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I move opposition day motion number 3 as follows:

Whereas the shortage of health care workers creates barriers to timely care in Ontario’s northern, rural and remote communities, and lack of access to family medicine, mental health care, addiction treatment resources and other important services contributes to shorter life expectancies for northerners compared to other Ontarians; and

Whereas the pandemic has exposed the problems caused by the underfunding of northern Ontario health care by successive Liberal and Conservative governments, and Ford government policies such as the Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act, 2019, previously Bill 124, intensify the staffing challenges faced by northern communities; and

Whereas vacancies for physicians and specialists have resulted in emergency departments and other hospital wings closing, cancellation of urgent care clinic services and wait times of up to 18 months for counselling and therapy services for children and youth in communities across northern Ontario; and

Whereas northern health teams have experienced difficulty retaining doctors due to high workloads and lack of access to integrated services, and emergency room patients can average wait times of up to 19 hours before being admitted to hospital; and

Whereas health care providers and advocates such as the Northern Ontario School of Medicine and the Ontario Medical Association call for an urgent and immediate infusion of over 300 doctors, 100 specialists, and a minimum of 40 mental health practitioners to address health care needs in the region, and the Northern Policy Institute calls for the establishment of a northern mental health and addictions centre of excellence to address the unique challenges of service and program delivery in northern Ontario; and

Whereas NOSM and other stakeholders cite the need for measures to attract, train and retain doctors to include increasing training spaces from 64 to 100 students per year as well as improved access to housing and family supports;

Therefore, the Legislative Assembly calls on the Ford government to immediately fund and implement a plan to attract, train and retain nurses, physicians and specialists in northern Ontario that includes the expansion of training opportunities at NOSM, supports for housing, transportation and family services, and the repeal of Bill 124.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Ms. Horwath has moved opposition day number 3. I return the floor to the leader of the official opposition.

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

We're talking about this today because I think everybody would agree that every Ontarian deserves access to timely health care, when and where they need it. But for far too long, health care in northern Ontario has not been equitably accessible to folks who live in the north. In fact, the health care system now in northern Ontario is really on the brink, and the alarm bells have been going off for some time now.

In the north, communities are desperately short of health care professionals, and it's impacting people's access to health care. Far too many people are travelling extremely long distances just to get the health care that they need, and it takes a long time for them to actually get the appointments that they require to have their health concerns addressed. In Thunder Bay, there are 19-hour waits in the emergency room before folks can be admitted to hospital; over 10 hours of a wait in Kenora, Dryden, Greater Sudbury.

1340

When I think about some of the folks who represent those people in those ridings—I think about the MPP for Nickel Belt; I think about the MPP for Thunder Bay—Atikokan, and I've heard not only from them, but from some of their constituents as well, as I travel through northern Ontario, and have been doing so for many, many years. That is why it's clear in our resolution, in our motion, that this isn't a new situation. The previous government had 15 years to make a difference, but they chose not to. They let us all down and, of course, they let the people of northern Ontario down the most, when it comes to their access to health care.

Sault Ste. Marie needs at least 20 doctors to keep hospitals afloat. In the north, overall, 300 doctors are needed: 100 family doctors, at least 40 more in urban settings, 160 specialists.

The Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre has over 25 vacancies for full-time doctors—unbelievable.

In Timmins, that community is short 20 specialists—Timmins, represented by the one and only MPP Bisson, who has been with us for a very long time and has been fighting very hard for the people of Timmins, to no avail, unfortunately, because the Liberals let everybody down, as I said. And of course, we've had years of a Conservative government that has also not fixed it.

What we are saying is that it needs to be fixed. The time is long past due to fix the lack of access to health care for northerners.

On top of that, of course, we've then seen COVID-19 make things much, much worse. During the pandemic, we have also seen the overdose and opioid crisis continue to skyrocket. I was hearing from leaders in northern communities for a couple of years, before COVID-19 hit, who were concerned about the increasing opioid crisis and addictions crisis in their communities. It has become

much, much, much worse throughout the pandemic. Last year, nearly two people died every five days from an overdose in northwestern Ontario. The Soo—Sault Ste. Marie—has the highest proportion of overdose deaths in Canada. It's really, really tragic, Speaker.

I'm going to tell you a few things about what people have had to say. Folks might know this, but likely not.

The Ontario Medical Association actually took some time to review this issue, to research this issue, to do some studies around the northern health care system. Dr. Adam Kassam, the president of the OMA, said this in regard to that work: "The northern disparities in health care have existed for many years, but COVID-19 has made these gaps more visible and the need for solutions more urgent. There are more complex chronic illnesses, and mental health and addictions" issues, "than in other regions. And the average life expectancy is lower than in the rest of the province."

The average life expectancy in northern Ontario is lower than in the rest of the province because successive Liberal and Conservative governments have refused to make the necessary investments to give people the health care they deserve to live a long and full life.

These are not new problems. As I've mentioned, they've gotten much, much worse over the decades, because neither of these former governments—the current, soon-to-be-former government, and the government before them—refused to take the action necessary to fix the concerns.

Lack of accessible health care, in fact, is reducing life spans by two and a half to three years in the north than the rest of the provincial average.

Fifteen years of Liberal governments, of course, started this crisis. It was chronic neglect, cuts, budget freezes, the firing of 1,600 nurses, the underfunding of hospitals, the underfunding of health care overall—that's the legacy and the disappointment that the Liberals left us with.

Instead of fixing it, instead of coming into office and actually making a change, this Ford government continues to make things worse. Instead of helping, they've been freezing wages with their Bill 124, which is mentioned in the motion. What has that done? It has shown health care workers that they're not respected by their government. They've worked really hard over this pandemic, and they're still working really hard. There is burnout. There is mental health stress. There's anxiety. People are actually leaving the profession in droves. That's writ large across the entire health care sector. We're hearing it's happening with doctors now. It has certainly been happening with nurses and with personal support workers. The bottom line is, they've worked their backs off and they're being disrespected by their government, so they're walking away. That should never be happening. We've been calling for a long time for Bill 124 to be scrapped. It needs to be scrapped.

What else has this government done? They closed 31 mental health and addictions beds in 2020. In 2018, they cut \$330 million from mental health care—\$330 million is one of the first claims to fame of this Ford government.

The Conservative government's cuts are not going to make things better. This government started cutting the minute they took office. They cut throughout the pandemic, and they're going to go right back to cutting, which is why we cannot let that happen. We have an opportunity in a number of weeks' time to make sure that we don't give the current Premier a chance to cut health care even more in the north. As I said, it doesn't need to be this way. We can actually fix it. We can come together and fix the problems when it comes to access to health care for northerners. I'm proud, as I said, to have been there many times to talk about that.

An NDP government will stop cutting health care. We're going to invest \$19 billion into new health care facilities, repairs and upgrades.

But as I said, we don't have to wait for an election. We can pass this motion, and maybe the current government will actually do something about the crisis that we're talking about. I'm proposing today that all parties agree that it's now time to start fixing our health care system, to help make sure northerners get the kind of services they deserve so that people aren't waiting in pain and anxiety and so that we have the doctors, the nurses, the other health care professionals, the PSWs, to provide the kind of services and supports people need so people don't have to travel long distances and wait extended periods of time for care.

My friend from Thunder Bay—Atikokan, MPP Monteith-Farrell, was talking about this in question period this morning. She was talking about the northern travel grant and how successive Liberal and Conservative governments have made it not only harder to get the health care that northerners need but also have made it more expensive and are not reimbursing people at the appropriate rates. Also, people are left to pay out of pocket, so if they can't afford it, they don't get the health care they need. That should never be happening in a province like Ontario.

I have a number of MPPs here who are representing northern Ontario ridings, as well as colleagues who are also interested in getting on the record and talking about this very important issue.

What we can do is to start undoing the damage that Liberal governments and Conservative governments have done, as I said, starting with getting rid of Bill 124, making those commitments to investments in the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, and making sure that we're providing the extra supports and a real plan to help doctors and nurses and other health professionals we encourage to go north to ensure they have the supports to thrive there and to stay there.

We want to make sure that we take care of the concerns around mental health and addictions and of course remove the arbitrary caps that this government so cruelly and thoughtlessly put on the safe injection sites—or the consumption and treatment sites, as they've renamed them.

Counselling and therapy session wait-lists should be much, much shorter. We have to hire the professionals, and we have to start looking at—people shouldn't only be

able to get mental health services if they can afford to pay for it out of their pockets. I think we all have to acknowledge that mental health needs to start to be brought into our OHIP system so that it's not about whether you can dig deep enough into your pocket to get the supports you need. Eighteen weeks for children on a wait-list for mental health services? A child loses a parent and gets no support for 18 months? Come on. That has to stop. It could have stopped, but we obviously didn't have governments—and we still don't—that support or prioritize that kind of service. We're here to say that we can fix it, that we can come together and fix exactly these kinds of problems.

1350

Having said that, we know what some of the solutions are—not only Bill 124; making PSW jobs full-time work, respectful work, work that pays the bills, work that has benefits, and making sure that they're respected in their positions, as well.

Let's do the things necessary to finally make the investments and fix the problems that we have in health care services and access to health care services for northerners. They shouldn't have to wait any longer. They shouldn't have had to wait over 15 years of disappointing Liberals. They shouldn't have had to wait another four years over a big-promising Conservative government that decided to cut instead of invest and that will continue to cut instead of invest. So let's make sure that we do the right thing and let northerners know that they can have a government that understands what's important to them and is prepared to fix the things that are important to them, which these other two parties have broken.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further debate? I recognize the member from Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Speaker. I cannot tell you how happy I am that in this House, in the Legislative Assembly, we are going to talk about how we can make sure that everybody who lives in northern Ontario, like me, has equitable access to our health care system. The NDP has brought forward solutions. How do we make this happen? Whether we talk about health promotion, disease prevention, primary care, access to hospital care, all the way to palliative care, mental health, community and home care and long-term care and everything else in between, how do we make sure that northerners get equitable access?

Don't get me wrong; equitable access does not mean that we're going to start to do double-lung transplants in Gogama. No, it's not going to happen. But the people of Gogama should have access to primary care, and they should have access to hospital care, like every other Ontarian does. So how do we do this?

Well, for primary care, it is clear that it is through integrated health teams. Whether we talk about community health centres, Aboriginal health access centres, nurse practitioner-led clinics, community-governed family health teams—all of those models work in northern Ontario. Why? Because there is a team working together. We know that some physicians will come to our community and leave. Some nurse practitioners will come and

leave; dietitians, social workers, nurses—they all do. But the centre stays. Your chart stays there. The secretary and the rest of the team who know you stay there. You have an executive director—hopefully, somebody with some background in health care—who is responsible for the recruitment, who is responsible for making sure that when a new physician comes into town, you can help with making them welcome into the town. They do not have to set up a business. They do not have to rent spaces and hire a nurse and hire a secretary. The centres are there. It works. Unfortunately, for the last 13 years—when the Liberals were there, and this government for the last four years—they have seen zero base budget increases. What does that mean? That means that the staff who work there—the hard-working nurse practitioners, nurses, social workers, dietitians, physiotherapists, RNs, physicians, everybody else—have not seen a pay increase in 13 years. That makes it really hard to compete with the hospitals, to compete with anybody else around. And yet they persevere and those centres are still there, because the people there know that if they leave, the people left behind will not have any access whatsoever.

The Canadian Medical Association just put out a report today of 4,000 physicians who say that they are so stressed out from the two years of the pandemic, from the added workload, from the lack of support, that they're thinking about withdrawing their services. For us in the north, this is terrible. We're already short-staffed. We depend an awful lot on locums. Locums are physicians who work in Toronto, who work anywhere else in Ontario, and when we're desperate they come and help us for a couple of weeks. But if they're already burned out in their job down south, they're not going to come and help us.

We also have the northern Ontario medical school university that has made it clear that right now they are limited at 64 students per year. They could easily take 100 students per year. But what did the government offer? The universities in the south get 30, 40 more medical students; we get six. We're the part of Ontario that is most in need of access to primary care, of access to physicians and nurses, and we get six more physician spots per year. Of course, it will take five to six years before they finish their four years of training, their two years of residency to become physicians. I could go on and on.

Working in northern Ontario is different. You can go to many, many of the centres I name and you will have a map with a fish lure—every body part where they've taken out a fish lure. That happens a lot to people who come fishing in northern Ontario and get a fish lure in their—that's the kind of stuff you don't see in big Toronto hospitals, but you see this in northern Ontario all the time. You see all sorts of stuff in northern Ontario that makes a practice very challenging but very interesting.

We need those solutions to be implemented. I hope the government will vote in favour.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further debate?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Speaker. It's an honour to be able to speak on this motion on behalf of the people of Kiiwetinoong.

I know the health care worker shortage—this motion is speaking to something that we continue to address in all areas of health care in far northern Ontario, specifically, in this case, Kiiwetinoong. I know that we are woefully short of doctors, we are short of nurses, we are short of dentists, we are short of optometrists, we are short of psychiatrists, mental health professionals, and even administrators to assist these professionals.

I've seen people die from a lack of dental services—last year, there were two people in my riding because there were issues with dental services.

A few years ago, we had children die of rheumatic fever.

I have young people, as young as 11, 12, 15, who die by suicide because of this lack of continuum of care for children, for patients, and gaps in preventive care.

Where I come from in far northern Ontario, in the fly-in First Nations, potentially there are thousands of children who are unimmunized and have under-monitored growth and development. Adults are not receiving cancer screening and chronic care. Prenatal programs in many communities are insufficiently coordinated. There are many areas that need attention, including but not limited to mental health and long-term care.

I always say this in the House: In my riding, there are 20 long-term-care beds for 30,000 people. There's such a need for emergency care. You guys are lucky to be able to have ambulatory services. Our ambulatory services are Ornge; you have to fly in.

The staffing crisis certainly has an impact on the physician recruitment and retention. The level of functioning of a nursing station in a fly-in First Nation affects a physician's ability to assume responsibility of the overall care. We don't have family doctors. We have community doctors.

One of the things I've learned over the years is that the health care system for Indigenous people is not broken. People used to tell me that it's broken, but it's not. It's working exactly the way it's designed, which is to take away the rights of our people to the land and resources that are in our territories.

1400

Dr. Michael Kirlew, a physician based out of Moose Factory, said recently, "With limited access to health care and, in some cases, clean drinking water, combined with disproportionately high rates of diabetes and other conditions that increase the risk for worse outcomes from COVID-19, communities can quickly reach a crisis point.

"COVID doesn't lead; it's a follower, and it follows inequity."

One of the things that needs to happen is that the process of health transformation being led by First Nation leadership across the north must be supported, and then it would implement the need for changes to the structure, the functioning of the health care system in the north. It's time to end the substandard care across the north, and the time is now. It's not the time for needless deaths. There's just too much unnecessary suffering for the people. Meegwetch.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further debate?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: It's my pleasure to be able to join in this debate on this motion today because this is the number one issue that I hear from constituents in my area—that they are concerned, they are frustrated, they are afraid, and they feel that it's totally unfair that, in Canada, under the Canada Health Act, they don't have equitable access to health care. That's how they feel.

This morning I brought forward a question with regard to the Northern Health Travel Grant Program. What is very important to know is that those rates have not been increased for a long time, and we know that costs have gone up. People are actually not attending medical appointments because they can't afford to do it. I have talked to people who are close to bankruptcy because they have had to pay for things and travel and are unable to get the reimbursement they require because of years of paying out of pocket for health care, and that's just wrong.

The other thing I hear often is that people lose their doctors. Doctors retire or, in some cases—recently, we had a great doctor in our community pass away very suddenly, and it left a number of people scrambling, phoning my office saying, “What do I do? Where do I get my prescriptions? I need a doctor. How do I do that?”

We have something called Health Care Connect. When they call that, people are telling them they're more likely to win the lottery than to get a doctor.

Then we have the smaller communities, like Upsala and Atikokan and many across northern Ontario, where they rely on, as my colleague from Nickel Belt has said, family health teams. They are coming to me and saying, “We are losing our people. We're losing our nurse practitioners. We're losing our nurses,” because they can't give them a raise. They have not received a raise since 2018. A government that talks about wraparound health care needs to realize that these family health teams are really wraparound health care in a nutshell and so important to be supported. What is the idea of not giving them at least a cost-of-living kind of increase?

We have people fundraising to try to do care at home. We have a great program, Our Hearts at Home. They're trying to fundraise to get a heart care centre in Thunder Bay, because Thunder Bay is also a regional hub for health care. Unfortunately, when that happened, we closed hospitals and didn't create a hospital big enough to support them. So we often are at gridlock.

In northern Ontario, we also have higher rates of certain chronic illnesses. We have the highest rates of amputations in northwestern Ontario than in all of Ontario. These are because people are not getting that primary care in the community, whether it's in the Far North—where there is maybe a nurse once in a while.

I spoke with a doctor who has dedicated her life, really, to providing health care in the north, and I have been talking to different physicians about solutions, because we want to know how to help these people who have dedicated their lives to providing health care in northern Ontario. What they tell me is that they're at their wit's end.

They've never seen it this bad. They're happy that we're training more doctors in this province. That's a great bit of news, but it's not enough. We need to incentivize and not pit community against community, but have a plan of action—not have one community maybe be able to pay for a house for a doctor, so they rob Peter to pay Paul. We need a plan, and we need the government to take part in that plan—not take a Hunger Games approach to health care in northern Ontario.

Lately, the PSW incentives were announced for private colleges. Well, we don't have any of that in northern Ontario, and there's no incentive or travel costs for our people to attend those things, so we're not able to participate in that.

The other thing I want to talk about is autism services and therapists for autism services, because northern autism services—the therapists who are required are leaving northern Ontario because there isn't stable funding or the ability to know that they will have a job going forward. Again, it's not consistent, and families are waiting and waiting to get that desperate early intervention they need.

I am very hopeful that we can work together to try to make a better future for health care in northern Ontario. It was a northern Ontario person who brought forward the travel grant to recognize that we can't provide everything in northern Ontario, but we can provide a lot more. Virtual appointments and some things that came about during COVID-19 are interesting and suitable in some cases, but in so many cases, we need the people to know that they have a family physician or a nurse practitioner.

I will conclude my remarks and allow my other colleagues from the north—we all have our stories. I thank you for this time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further debate?

M. Guy Bourgoïn: Je remercie ma chef d'avoir amené cette motion. Ça me fait toujours plaisir de parler de mon comté, d'avoir l'opportunité de parler de la part de mes commettants.

Si je peux parler de la situation dans mon comté, je pense à la municipalité de Hearst. Il y a une pénurie de docteurs, ce qui met souvent en danger, monsieur le Président, que les urgences peuvent fermer. Pourquoi? Parce qu'il n'y a pas assez de docteurs, puis ils sont débordés. Dans la ville de Hearst, il y a près de 1 500 patients qui sont orphelins. Ils n'ont aucun docteur. Ça représente 29 % de la population de Hearst. C'est une réalité.

Je pense aussi, quand on parle du manque de gardes dans mon comté, à l'hôpital de Smooth Rock Falls. J'ai parlé à la directrice, puis ils font des efforts. Ils font des efforts extrêmes pour essayer d'attirer des gardes dans leur communauté, dans leur hôpital. Il y a des « incentives »—ils ont des primes—mais encore, ils ne sont pas capables de trouver les gardes nécessaires, les « PSWs » nécessaires. Pourquoi? Écoute, on sait que le projet de loi 124 nuit extrêmement à la situation. On a demandé au gouvernement à multiples reprises, on martèle le gouvernement, de retirer ce projet de loi qui nuit à des

communautés comme Hearst, qui nuit à la communauté de Smooth Rock Falls pour attirer du nouveau monde dans ce domaine-là. Mais ça tombe dans l'oreille d'un sourd.

Il est grand temps que le gouvernement fasse de quoi pour les communautés du Nord. Je sais que la dernière fois, monsieur le Président, qu'on a fait une motion semblable, j'ai parlé d'une femme, une M^{me} Ouimette, qui a attendu près de sept jours pour se faire opérer, puisqu'elle est tombée et s'était cassé la hanche. Elle a attendu trois jours pour avoir un lit à Timmins. Quand est venu son temps, il n'y avait personne pour la transférer, ce qui fait qu'elle a été obligée d'attendre encore—sept jours pour se faire opérer pour une hanche brisée. Vois-tu ça dans le Sud? Dans le Nord, c'est commun. C'est inacceptable.

J'en ai un en particulier cette semaine, de la semaine passée quand j'étais dans ma circonscription. Je voudrais en parler parce que j'ai eu la chance de parler de M^{me} Ouimette, puis j'espère que ça ne se reproduira plus, des situations comme celle de M^{me} Ouimette, quand on parle d'une femme de quatre-vingt-quelque chose années qui a été obligée de souffrir plus longtemps qu'elle aurait dû souffrir.

Mais la personne dont je veux vous parler, c'est un jeune homme qui va avoir 21 ans, qui est dans le processus d'avoir 21 ans, le petit garçon—bien, ce n'est pas un petit garçon; il est beaucoup plus grand. Miguel est pris du spectre de l'autisme. Comme sa mère l'appelle, son « gros nounours ». Il est non verbal, monsieur le Président. Ils sont dans le processus d'essayer de lui trouver une place pour qu'il puisse être accepté pour y passer du temps, parce qu'ils ne sont plus capables de répondre à ses besoins.

1410

Puis la mère, Lynne—j'ai eu la chance de parler à Lynne. Je dis bonjour à Lynne, si tu écoutes. Lynne est concernée. Ce n'est pas d'aujourd'hui, là, qu'ils travaillent sur ce dossier avec les agences pour essayer de placer leur garçon. Ça fait au-dessus d'un an qu'ils essaient de trouver une place pour Miguel. Il ne faut pas oublier que, lui, le petit garçon, il comprend seulement—« le petit garçon », Miguel. Je l'appelle « le petit » parce que je l'ai vu grandir. Miguel comprend seulement le français. Il n'y a qu'une place francophone dans le Nord, qui est à New Liskeard, qui est à trois heures et demie ou quatre heures de Kapuskasing. Il y a des places anglophones plus près, mais ils n'ont pas de place non plus. On parle de Cochrane, on parle de Timmins, et une autre place—pas de place pour prendre Miguel.

Qu'est-ce qu'elles font, les familles, dans des situations de même? Je vous demande, monsieur le Président, comment les familles qui sont prises avec des enfants ou des êtres chers qui sont pris avec le spectre de l'autisme, qui sont non verbaux—quelles ressources ont-elles?

Ce n'est pas d'aujourd'hui qu'on parle au gouvernement de ces situations-là. Je sais que mes collègues l'ont fait auparavant, avant que moi je sois élu. Je sais que mes collègues l'ont amené à maintes reprises. Je pense aux critiques qui l'ont amené à maintes reprises.

Les besoins du nord de l'Ontario sont vastes, sont grands. Vous avez entendu mon collègue de Kiiwetinoong qui parle—encore plus au Grand Nord. Au Grand Nord, c'est encore pire. On a de gros manques. C'est une pénurie. Fait que, là, on parle de la route 11, de Kapuskasing, Hearst, Smooth Rock Falls, qui sont sur la Transcanadienne, puis on a ces pénuries-là, que le monde crie—ils crient à l'aide.

C'est un cri à l'aide que sa mère est venue faire à mon bureau, de me demander de trouver une place pour son garçon, son gros nounours, comme elle l'appelle, qui est non verbal. Puis même si elle est chanceuse de trouver une place dans les jours qui viennent—on espère que ça soit dans les jours qui viennent, mais la réalité, je crois, c'est que ça va être beaucoup plus longtemps que ça. Pourquoi? Un manque de vouloir du gouvernement d'avoir investi quand c'était le temps pour trouver des places pour ces personnes-là. On parle juste de l'autisme, du spectre de l'autisme. Ça, c'est sans parler des soins de longue durée, c'est sans parler de tous les autres, de la santé mentale, et la liste continue.

Monsieur le Président, on a besoin que le gouvernement vote en faveur de cette motion pour qu'on puisse répondre aux besoins de ces familles-là.

Elle m'a parlé : « Qu'est-ce qui arrive dans un cas d'urgence? » Il y en a eu, des cas d'urgences, que les familles, à qui il arrive une urgence—que la famille est obligée de répondre. Ils les ont mis dans les soins de longue durée. Ils ont fait une place dans une maison de soins de longue durée, ce qui n'est pas la place pour une personne comme Miguel ou une personne qui est prise du spectre de l'autisme. Ce ne pas sa place, là. Il a besoin d'une aide spécifique.

Fait que, je demande au gouvernement de faire la bonne chose pour les personnes comme Miguel. Votez en faveur de cette motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's an honour to rise today and speak to the official opposition motion to support funding for health care, especially in the north.

I have been listening intently to my colleagues from northern Ontario talk about the lack of access to services, especially my colleague from Kiiwetinoong. This is exactly why, when we have conversations in this House about things like licence plate stickers, for example, to take \$1.1 billion out of the provincial treasury, I want to talk about how it directly relates to the kind of conversations we're having right now, the kind of conversations that say we need more funding for the northern Ontario travel grant.

The fact is that I was just in the near north last week, and I met with a drug addictions counsellor in North Bay who talked about the fact that in northern Ontario drug poisonings are three times higher than in southern Ontario, but yet the access to harm reduction, safe supply and treatment is less. I talked to people who had less access to paramedic and emergency services and talked about the long distances to be able to access treatment and supports.

Every time we take money out of the provincial treasury for election gimmicks, that's less money that can be invested in the health care that people need throughout the province, but especially in northern Ontario. When we talk about the need to recruit more front-line health care workers—nurses and doctors, in particular—how can we have that conversation when Bill 124 limits total compensation, limits the compensation to retain PSWs and nurses and other front-line health care workers? Every time we take resources away from making those kinds of investments, people in the north have less access to services and supports in our health care system.

Speaker, my time is limited. I just want to say to the people of Ontario and to the members of this Legislature that when we make those kinds of decisions, like taking \$1.1 billion out of the provincial treasury, it directly affects the conversation we're having today about the services and supports and the care that we can provide the people of Ontario.

So I will be supporting this motion, I will be supporting the call for more funding for health care services in the north, and I will be supporting the government and the mechanisms we need to be able to fund those services.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further debate?

Mr. John Fraser: I am pleased to support the Leader of the Opposition's motion. Thank you for bringing it forward. As always, there's something in there that would make it hard for me to vote for it, because it's critical of previous governments. What I would argue, though, is that we all have a lot more work to do in health care. I'm old enough to remember when we had to fight—not me, as the member, but my predecessor—to get paramedics in the city of Ottawa. We had them in Hamilton and Toronto. I think the health minister at the time was Minister Grier. But that's not what we're here about today.

Bill 124 doesn't work. What it did is it affected not only the health care human resources in this province, but predominantly nurses, predominantly women. It's hard to understand why the government has maintained its hard stance on Bill 124. We have a huge challenge in recruiting people. Giving people a signing bonus doesn't mean you're giving them respect. It's about respect.

I do want to add one thing: We did bring in the northern school of medicine. I think that has been helpful to the north. We need to do more with it and use it as a resource.

We all have a lot more work to do.

Right now, the government is crowing about the fact they're going to make the PSW pay raise permanent, after four or five extensions, which is really a message to PSWs, who are a huge part of our health care system—not all that we need, but they do care for the people we care for most in northern Ontario, in southern Ontario, in eastern Ontario. The solution of two years ago isn't going to work. The government thinks they're solving something by making something permanent they did two years ago, but it hasn't worked yet. I don't understand how the government thinks that that's going to work to recruit and retain more PSWs, because it's not. You're going to have

to pay them at least \$25 an hour. A PSW is a PSW is a PSW no matter where that PSW is working.

Then you have the problem that's in the north and in the east and in the south and in the west, which is, different parts of the health care system pulling human resources off home care. Right now, our home care system is in serious shape, because we haven't said that a PSW is a PSW is a PSW no matter where they work.

So if the government wants to get serious about recruiting and retaining health care workers all over this province, but especially in the north, they're going to have to look at compensation, they're going to have to look at pensions, but most importantly, they're going to need to give those people respect—and that's more than just saying that they're heroes; that's actually respecting them.

1420
The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further debate? I recognize the member from Timmins.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would just say, the government sitting down and not participating in debate and waiting until the end and trying to game where they come in on the debate doesn't do anything to fix the problem that we have when it comes to doctor shortages in northern Ontario. It's only by working together, all of us—our community members, our local councils, our government, and the opposition—by coming together and deciding what can be done and voting the proper appropriations in order to fund what needs to be done, are we going to be able to resolve this issue. I know it's not a big thing, but you would hope that the government wouldn't try to game a debate as a way of trying to make a point about how we're going to fix health care in northern Ontario. I just think it's rather unfortunate.

The problem is simple but complicated. What's the problem? There are not enough physicians for the number of people in northern Ontario. All of my NDP northern colleagues—and, I'm sure, the Conservative members from northern Ontario—met with the northern school of medicine. They had a very specific proposal. They said, "We need about 100 new spaces inside our northern medical school"—and how many internships? I think it was 40-some-odd internships. The government sounded as if they might do something and, in fact, they did. It's a step in the right direction, but a drop in the bucket. They're going to give us a minimal amount of spaces in our northern school of medicine to fill the need that—we already know that what the government announced is not going to meet the need. So why go down that path?

We know that we need to train more doctors. What we know is that the northern school of medicine that has been in place for a while now has actually fulfilled much of what we wanted that school to do. That was to train people—hopefully, from northern Ontario—provide them residencies in the north, let them establish a life in some community across northern Ontario, so they will more than likely stay in those communities and make it their home.

When I look at all the new doctors we have in the city of Timmins, many of them are from the northern school of

medicine. Some of them came from Timmins and other places in the north—but we also have people who came from southern Ontario who went to the northern school of medicine, who did an internship at TDH, Timmins and District Hospital, and decided to establish themselves there.

Why didn't the government provide the northern school of medicine with what they asked for? The northern school of medicine didn't pick the numbers out of a hat. They actually did a lot of work. They travelled to all of those large communities and small communities to really try to establish what the need was, and they put forward a proposal. And, yes, the government responded; I don't want to say that they didn't. But giving 20% of what they asked for is going to give us 20% of the result that we need. So the government, quite frankly, should have done what they requested.

The only other point that I want to make is this: We've invested in family health teams in Timmins. In fact, we've opened two of them. We've invested in what we call medical clinics. We've invested in two of them. We now have four such facilities in the city of Timmins. It's a wonderful model because it allows people to work in a multidisciplinary kind of environment, so that you have the dietitian, you have the nurse practitioner, you have the doctor and others. But we cannot even recruit doctors to those. One of them—I'm not going to say which one of our health teams—has been struggling to find a doctor to fill the position within that particular institution. Northern College has put together a really good proposal by which they could work at utilizing their facilities to be able to deal with trying to give experience to doctors within their family health teams and other practices in the community.

Those are the types of initiatives that we need to support, and we need to be innovative as to how we do that. I would hope, rather than trying to game the debate, the government would say, "Yes, let's work with the opposition. Let's work with communities in northern Ontario. Let's do what's right and provide people with what they need," and that is access to primary health care when they need it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further debate?

Mrs. Robin Martin: As always, I am extremely happy to have the true privilege of being able to stand here in the Legislature and speak.

As to gaming the system, maybe my friend opposite who is making these comments, the member for Timmins, knows something about gaming the system that I don't know. I've only been here for three and a half years or so; he has been here, what, 40 years? Not actually gaming the system—but I thought it was respectful to listen to my colleagues on the opposition benches, who might want to talk about their own communities in the north, as my community is in the centre of Toronto, and I thought I should listen to what they had to say before commenting.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to this. I'm really happy to talk about all the great improvements that our government is making to improve health

care in northern Ontario and to listen to all the great ideas that will be presented.

Ensuring access to care wherever people live is certainly one of the most important objectives that our government has in health care, and we take this objective very seriously. Unlike previous governments, the Ford government does not think that Ontario ends at the 416 or the GTA. After all, this government has some great members who represent the north. Many of those members are actually members of our cabinet, including our Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade; our minister for government services; and our Minister of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Indigenous Affairs.

The north is blessed, with this government, to have powerful advocates who sit at the cabinet table and ensure that the northern perspective is brought forward on all these important issues. I can assure you that the MPPs for Kenora–Rainy River, Sault Ste. Marie and Nipissing are powerful and relentless advocates for the needs of their communities.

I don't want to be remiss and not mention two other powerful advocates who are from the near north, you could say: the MPP for Parry Sound–Muskoka and the MPP from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke—also relentless advocates for their communities.

I'm happy to speak to all the good work the government has been doing to improve health care in Ontario and in the north in particular. As we emerge from the pandemic, our government wants us to be stronger than when we entered it. Our government understands the unique health care challenges in the north, and we are committed to ensuring that everyone in Ontario has access to the health care they need.

As we all know, the past two years have been extremely challenging for everyone. That's especially true for our health care providers. With this in mind, of course, we should always acknowledge how thankful we are for all the work they are doing and for their unending commitment to providing great care for Ontarians even during these very challenging times. Ever since the beginning of COVID-19, our government has taken many deliberate actions to ensure that there is health care and human resource help for health care across the province, throughout the pandemic.

The unique challenges facing northern communities here in Ontario sometimes require unique solutions. We're pleased that studies show that physician supply across Ontario is projected to consistently exceed population growth, leading to an average annual net increase of approximately 581 physicians each year, until 2029.

We know that there are still some northern, rural and remote communities that have trouble recruiting, retaining and having physicians stay in their community to provide care, and our government is taking steps to address that.

Our government has worked tirelessly to develop, enhance and invest in initiatives to help improve access to physician services across Ontario and in the north. Investments include, for example, \$32 million this year for

resident salaries and benefits, medical education and training, allied health programs and the Remote First Nations Family Medicine Residency program at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine; \$752,600 to the Lakehead Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic in Thunder Bay to help more patients in the community access primary care services, such as family doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses, social workers and other front-line professionals. Through this funding, we're ensuring that patients in Thunder Bay have access to the care they need when they need it, right in their community.

1430

We also invested \$7.36 million for 77 new physicians funded through the Northern and Rural Recruitment and Retention Initiative, which offers financial incentives for physicians to establish practices in rural and northern Ontario. This program is a means to attract family physicians and medical specialists to establish their practice in those communities where patients might otherwise not have access to primary and specialist health care.

We're also offering medical education programs in places which are distributed all over the province, which provide clinical education opportunities outside of traditional settings to promote physician practice in rural and northern communities. The Ontario Health agency is itself helping communities with recruitment and retention and promoting career opportunities in places that need doctors.

In addition to these measures, the government is providing \$6.2 million across 32 primary care teams to provide improvements for access to primary care in high-needs communities across the province, including many communities in the north. These interprofessional primary care teams and organizations—I think they were mentioned by the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan—are crucial to bring together a diverse group of health care professionals to help meet the individual and often complex needs of patients.

These investments will help improve access to comprehensive, interprofessional primary care for thousands of vulnerable patients, including seniors, individuals with complex or chronic conditions, Indigenous and others who live in the north and haven't had access before.

Mr. Speaker, our government knows, as I said, that Ontario does not end outside of the GTA or the GTHA. Our government is focused on ensuring that all areas of Ontario have access to the resources and services—health care and otherwise—they need, which is why our government has been supportive of not only recruiting and retaining doctors and nurses in the north, but also focused on supporting northern and Indigenous communities with mental health challenges.

Now, more than ever, Ontarians need a mental health and addictions system that effectively addresses their needs with safe, evidence-based care. That's why our government, when we were elected—we came in on a promise of a \$3.8-billion investment over 10 years into mental health and addictions, and we're on track to ensure that that happens, with an increase of over \$525 million

annually in funding for mental health and addictions services.

One of the first things that I worked on with the Minister of Health in her office, upon being elected in 2018 and appointed as parliamentary assistant, was our opioid strategy. Facing an opioid crisis, we came up with a new and improved model for consumption and treatment services—a model with wraparound supports, like access to primary care, like housing assistance, like harm reduction etc. and off-ramps to treatment when a client is ready to have treatment. Our government is committed to addressing the opioid crisis in northern communities and offers a comprehensive suite of policies and programs to do so.

One such program is our Ontario Naloxone Program, which provides naloxone to residents across Ontario at risk of opioid overdose, as well as their friends and families, through eligible organizations. To make sure they have access to life-saving naloxone, the government is providing up to \$22.7 million for the distribution of naloxone. As of August 2022, there were over 165 Ontario Naloxone Program distribution sites in northern Ontario.

In addition to the Ontario Naloxone Program, our government is funding 16 consumption and treatment services sites in communities that need them across the province. This includes a site in Thunder Bay.

More broadly, the government of Ontario continues to provide funding for all 34 public health units to ensure that people have access to sterile needles, syringes and appropriate means for safe disposal of used equipment. The needle exchange/syringe program is implemented through 34 core sites across the province, with partners offering more than 400 distribution points across Ontario, including in the north and some First Nations communities.

The government continues to support 36 community-based organizations to deliver harm reduction outreach programs and services. Of these, eight programs are based in the north solely—Thunder Bay, Sudbury, North Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Timmins, Sioux Lookout and surrounding regions. In addition, one program has satellite offices in Thunder Bay, Sudbury, and Sault Ste. Marie.

Our Addictions Recovery Fund, announced earlier this year, is immediately expanding addictions services and increasing the number of treatment beds across the province. This funding will help thousands of Ontarians access enhanced specialized services for mental health and addictions treatment, including, of course, in northern and rural communities and Indigenous communities.

We recognize that the opioid crisis has been intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. More people are being harmed by and are dying from overdoses, tragically, perhaps to some degree simply because more people are spending more time alone. That is, unfortunately, when overdoses happen, as there is no one there to help or to intervene in the event of a crisis. Studies have shown that opioid-related deaths surged by 79% during the first two waves of the pandemic, with Ontarians at risk of overdose facing significant barriers to accessing treatment. This is a

human tragedy that the government is committed to preventing from continuing. To meet the demand for treatment, investments will support 396 new addiction treatment beds for adults who need intensive supports, helping to stabilize and provide care for approximately 7,000 clients per year for everyone in Ontario, including those in the north, where opioids remain a clear and present threat.

Mr. Speaker, let me be clear: The government will never stop working to ensure that Ontarians have access to the supports they need regardless of where they live in Ontario.

As part of our strategy to ensure a consistent supply of doctors for all Ontarians, the Ontario government is expanding medical school education as it continues to build a stronger, more resilient health care system, especially in growing and underserved communities. As our Premier recently said, “As our province grows, our government has a plan to build a stronger, more resilient health care system. We’ve already shored up domestic production of critical supplies like PPE and have added thousands more hospital beds. Now, building on our work to recruit and retain nurses and personal support workers, we’re launching the largest expansion of medical education in 10 years.” This plan includes expanding the northern Ontario medical school, which we heard a little bit about from the member from Timmins, which will receive not “a drop in the bucket” but 30 undergraduate seats and 41 post-graduate positions; I think that adds up to 71. This is yet another example of our government putting forward solutions for all Ontarians.

The government of Ontario is saying yes to ensuring a stronger, more resilient health care system across the province of Ontario and, especially, specifically saying yes to improving health care in northern communities.

The government recognizes that culturally appropriate care is essential for supporting improved health outcomes for our Indigenous peoples in Ontario, and our government remains committed to working collaboratively with Indigenous partners and communities to co-develop programs that will improve access to safe and effective health services.

Let me be clear: We know that First Nations communities are facing challenges. That is why we took swift action to ensure that they were designated a priority group during the pandemic. Programs and services must be designed, delivered and evaluated in collaboration with Indigenous partners to effectively meet the needs of Indigenous peoples, families and communities.

Additionally, we have invested \$37 million in support of Indigenous services during COVID-19. I think I’ve mentioned these investments before, so I won’t do that now. In addition to those, of course, we had Operation Remote Immunity 1, 2 and 3 to make sure that we were able to vaccinate as many people in remote Indigenous communities as possible. Former Ontario Regional Chief RoseAnne Archibald was appointed as a member of our COVID-19 vaccine distribution task force, which has advised the government on plans for the immunization program and delivery of vaccines.

It’s critical to point out that a First Nations and Indigenous sub-table was also established under our vaccine distribution task force to more broadly engage First Nations on the right approach of vaccination, including prioritization. Our government has made clear that we’ll do everything we can to protect our most vulnerable, including our Indigenous populations.

1440

This government is correcting the mistakes that we had seen under the NDP, supported by the Wynne-Del Duca Liberals—or the Wynne-Del Duca Liberals supported by the NDP, but at one time I think the NDP themselves made cuts to residency programs and put caps on medical schools. The Del Duca-Wynne Liberals also froze hospital spending for years and eliminated 50 medical residency positions from Ontario. The one and done NDP government of Bob Rae put a cap on the number of doctors graduating from Ontario’s medical schools, while firing 3,000 nurses.

While the government is saying yes, the opposition continues to say no. Their track record alone should tell you all you need to know. Let’s just take a quick look: They voted against \$18 billion in capital grants over 10 years to build new and expanded hospital infrastructure. They voted no to \$5.1 billion to support hospitals since the pandemic began, and creating more than 3,100 additional hospital beds and almost 500 new intensive care beds. They voted against our latest annual increase of \$175 million for mental health and addictions supports, bringing that to a total of \$525 million.

As I have said, the record of the Del Duca-Wynne Liberals and the NDP speaks for itself. However, I think one part of this motion from the opposition leader deserves some credit. They correctly point to the strong voice that the northern Ontario medical school has been for advocating for the north. Unfortunately, for some reason, the opposition seem to want to devalue this voice. The opposition voted against making the Northern Ontario School of Medicine a stand-alone institution.

Dr. Sarita Verma, dean, president and CEO of the northern Ontario medical school, said, “We are grateful to Minister Romano and the Ford government for this incredible transformation, as the first medical school in Canada founded with a social accountability mandate we are now the first medical university of its kind in the country.”

As the Minister of Health said, having a stand-alone medical school in the north “will offer students education closer to home, enabling them to better serve and provide health care that best meets the needs of the communities in northern Ontario.”

The government of Ontario continues to build on the commitment to improve access to primary care and other health care services for those living in rural and northern Ontario. Sadly, the opposition votes no each time these initiatives come to the floor of the Legislature. The NDP are not focused on ensuring Ontarians, including those in the north, have the care they need. They’re focused on politics, and they’re simply opposing our government, which is working hard to improve health care in the north.

As Ontario continues on the path to recovery, our government understands the unique health care challenges in the north, and we are committed to ensuring that everyone in Ontario has access to the health care they need.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further debate?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: It's an honour to rise in this House to speak to this important NDP motion to address the shortage of health care workers in northern Ontario and to stand in solidarity with all of those living in the north.

I've risen in this chamber many times to talk about the crisis in our health care system. I've spoken about the shortage of doctors, nurses and other health care professionals. This crisis existed long before the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been made much worse by years and years of Liberal and Conservative cuts to our health care system. The previous Liberal government froze hospital budgets for years and let go of 1,600 nurses. This Conservative government introduced Bill 124, which froze wages to below the rate of inflation.

Our doctors, nurses and health care workers have rightly been called heroes for the incredible work they have done during this pandemic. Every shift, they are run off their feet taking care of those in need.

But this government is not treating our health care professionals like the heroes they are, because they still won't repeal Bill 124. This bill has driven thousands of nurses and health care workers away from the profession at a time when they are critically needed. This government must take every action necessary to ensure that we hire and retain more health care workers, and this certainly starts with scrapping Bill 124.

People who are in desperate need of medical care have to wait hours just to see a doctor and have to wait months to get potentially life-saving surgeries, and nowhere is this felt deeper than in northern Ontario. Northern Ontario is a vast and large area that contains 90% of Ontario's land mass but just 6% of the population. It's governed by seven treaties, and it is where nearly half of all Indigenous people in Ontario live. Some 90% of the 150 municipalities in northern Ontario have less than 6,000 residents. Often, they are spread across large geographical distances, with many of these communities only accessible by air.

Right now, people in the north have to wait in pain for more than 19 hours to be admitted into the hospital. They have to wait months and months for surgery. Because of the doctor shortage, many in the north do not get enough help managing chronic conditions like high blood pressure. This could lead to more severe negative health outcomes in the future.

The wait times for therapy, counselling and addictions treatment in the north are so long that an illness can become a deadly crisis by the time they get help. The wait time for children and youth to get counselling is more than 18 months, a year and a half—unacceptable.

According to the Ontario Medical Association, northern Ontario needs more than 300 doctors and even more nurses and health care workers to deal with this crisis.

Dr. Sarita Verma, the dean and chair of the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, says it will take them five graduating classes to deal with the shortage of doctors in northern Ontario.

This government must have a real, concrete funding and action plan to hire and retain more doctors and nurses in the north so that people can get the care they deserve. Let's get it done.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further debate?

Ms. Marit Stiles: It's really a pleasure to have an opportunity to stand here and speak to this important motion. I want to thank the leader of the official opposition for bringing it forward and giving us all an opportunity to stand here to talk about these important issues, and hopefully to get the government to actually vote to support this important motion.

Speaker, every person living in this province has a right to live and to thrive with dignity. That means having a standard of living that serves their well-being, and that must include access to adequate health care. That is indisputable. But for so long now, people in northern Ontario have been waiting too long and travelling too far to get the health care that they need and deserve, the same type of health care that many of us have the privilege of accessing much more easily in other parts of this province.

In fact, people who live in northern Ontario, as others have said here today already, have a shorter life expectancy than the rest of the province. That's a terrible failure of our province. The disparities are absolutely inexcusable.

Mr. Speaker, I'm an MPP who, like the member from Eglinton–Lawrence, represents a Toronto riding. I represent a very urban, downtown Toronto community. But like so many of us sitting here today, I came from another place. I grew up in a rural community, in a part of this country which has a really desperate shortage of health care services: Newfoundland. I look around me and I see people on the government side, and they're looking down and they're not speaking to this issue. We all come from other places, and we have some experience of this—but even if we don't, surely it is the responsibility of every single one of us here to make sure that those gaps are addressed, because they are, as I said, completely inexcusable. We all know too well what it's like when we have to wait even a little bit for access to an important procedure or health care or a diagnosis. Imagine the stories that you've heard today from our northern colleagues. Imagine living through that, if you don't right now; just imagine it for a minute.

Every single day in this House, we here in the official opposition NDP caucus listen to our colleagues from the north. I appreciate that the members opposite, the government, is a little less well-represented, let's just say, in northern Ontario. Why is that? It's because they haven't ever truly addressed the disparity between the north and the south in this province, because they don't address the needs of everyday people living in northern Ontario—and boy, you see that in the results on election day—and it's the same with the former Liberal government.

There is a reason why New Democrats are elected in those ridings. It's because our colleagues here fight every single day for these issues and address these issues in their communities. I am very proud that we reflect that diversity in our province.

Interjections.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yes, I think we are all very proud of that.

People in northern Ontario should not have to wait up to 19 hours to be admitted to hospitals. Can we not agree on that? They should not have to wait 18 months, if ever, to get mental health counselling therapy, or pay out of pocket to travel to get the health care they need when services are unavailable close by. The member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan raised this today in question period, and she did not get an answer. She got more spin, more PR. She did not get an answer to her question.

1450

I want to say, years and years ago, the member from Timmins—I worked for the member from Timmins in my first-ever real job. Oh, my goodness.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Poor you.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm still paying the price for that, Mr. Speaker.

Back then, our government was making real inroads in addressing those northern health disparities. Every day in this Legislature, the member for Timmins, the member from Nickel Belt and every one of our northern colleagues have fought for those issues. It is shameful—in fact, it is shocking to me—that in those 30 years, we have not seen real solutions delivered by either the Conservative governments or the Liberal governments.

Throughout the pandemic, we have all seen how broken our health care system truly is. We have seen the inequalities between health care in northern Ontario and the rest of the province grow. It is a crisis. Our health care workers, our health care heroes—the government likes to call them heroes—are burnt out and tired, but instead of getting respect, what did they get? They got a government that capped their wages with an absolutely egregious bill, Bill 124.

We cannot afford any more of this government's cuts and underfunding. We need to value our health care workers.

I urge this government to fund and implement a plan to support doctors, nurses and specialists in northern Ontario immediately. Please support this motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to stand in the House—and today, to support the motion brought forward by my leader, the leader of the official opposition, to try to fix some of the health care disparities in northern Ontario.

On Saturday, I went to an event in Iroquois Falls and, as I'm sure we're all doing, I decided to canvass the street. Dr. Bruno, one of the doctors from Iroquois Falls, was on that street. I said, "What is your biggest issue?" She said, "I am so thankful that another doctor has come to Iroquois

Falls." She was almost shaking. That really hit home to me.

In northern Ontario, we get conditioned to how there's a different level of service in some parts of the province, and then there's us.

What's most frustrating is that there are solutions. The Northern Ontario School of Medicine is a solution. We all know, and their own figures show it, that people who are trained in the north tend to stay in the north—pretty simple—because there are things about northern Ontario that are wonderful. But there are things in northern Ontario you have to live with, and you have to know that. So we know it's a solution.

The Northern Ontario School of Medicine did a full consultation across the north and came up with a long-term solution for the doctor shortage: "Let's train more doctors at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. Let's bump them up by 40 extra students a year, 40 extra residencies a year. Over a few years, that will solve our problem." The government—oh, they listened. They gave six extra placements. Do you know why, Speaker? Because that's just enough to get by. That's good enough for northern Ontario. What's so frustrating is that there are solutions and they're ignored. That is a long-term solution. The Northern Ontario School of Medicine know what they're doing. They did a full consultation. We all went. They showed the facts. They showed the figures. We know what the problem is. And the government said, "Oh, just enough."

It's the same with PSWs, with all health care workers. The government knows that we need more of them across the province and that we need a lot in northern Ontario. They say, "We'll give them a pay bump and we'll do this. Oh, we're recruiting more," but they refuse to make it a career—and not only that, they've put in legislation that actually makes it impossible to recruit people, by capping their wages.

They say all the right things but don't carry them out. It's most frustrating that there are solutions—we know there are solutions—but this government refuses to take the action necessary, and because they don't, we're putting this motion forward, and in a few months we will.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm pleased to just wrap things up with the right of reply. I want to thank all of the MPPs who spoke so passionately not only about what is being faced by northern Ontario residents in this province—and it has, unacceptably, been the case for a very, very long time. I want to thank the member for Nickel Belt. I want to thank the member for Kiiwetinoong. I want to thank the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan. I want to thank the member for Timmins. I want to thank the member for Mushkegowuk–James Bay. I want to thank the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane, who just spoke. I want to thank the members from down south who spoke as well: the member for Humber River–Black Creek and the member for Davenport.

On this side of the House, we listen to people. I myself, as leader, and our colleagues listen to each other and try to

solve problems. We know we can fix all of these things. First, you have to know what people are identifying as the things that are important to them that need to be fixed, and then you have to put a plan in place to actually fix them.

I want to assure the people of northern Ontario that we will continue to fight to get this current government to fix what they've broken—what the Liberals broke and they have made worse since they got elected with their big cuts and their bad choices—but do know that we know you well. We've represented you well for a very long time in northern Ontario, and in a couple of weeks' time you will have a chance to make sure that a government in this province is elected that deals with the inequities in your health care, your access to health care. It's something we fundamentally believe in. We know we have the solutions. We just have to get the chance to start working on them.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Ms. Horwath has moved opposition day number 3. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

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

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. There will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1458 to 1508.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Ms. Horwath has moved opposition day number 3.

All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Glover, Chris	Sattler, Peggy
Berns-McGown, Rima	Harden, Joel	Shaw, Sandy
Bisson, Gilles	Hatfield, Percy	Simard, Amanda
Bourgouin, Guy	Horwath, Andrea	Stiles, Marit
Collard, Lucille	Mamakwa, Sol	Tabuns, Peter
Fife, Catherine	Monteith-Farrell, Judith	Taylor, Monique
Fraser, John	Morrison, Suze	Vanthof, John
Gélinas, France	Rakocevic, Tom	

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Anand, Deepak	Ghamari, Goldie	Rickford, Greg
Babikian, Aris	Gill, Parm	Romano, Ross
Bailey, Robert	Hardeman, Ernie	Sabawy, Sheref
Barrett, Toby	Jones, Sylvia	Sandhu, Amarjot
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Ke, Vincent	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Bouma, Will	Martin, Robin	Scott, Laurie
Calandra, Paul	McKenna, Jane	Skelly, Donna
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Miller, Norman	Smith, Todd
Cho, Stan	Mulroney, Caroline	Surma, Kinga
Crawford, Stephen	Oosterhoff, Sam	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Pang, Billy	Thompson, Lisa M.
Downey, Doug	Parsa, Michael	Tibollo, Michael A.
Dunlop, Jill	Pettapiece, Randy	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Elliott, Christine	Piccini, David	Wai, Daisy
Fullerton, Merrilee	Rasheed, Kaleed	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 23; the nays are 44.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GETTING ONTARIO CONNECTED ACT, 2022

LOI DE 2022

POUR UN ONTARIO CONNECTÉ

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

Bill 93, An Act to amend the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021 and the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, 2012 / Projet de loi 93, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2021 sur la réalisation accélérée de projets d'Internet à haut débit et la Loi de 2012 sur un système d'information sur les infrastructures souterraines en Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Resuming debate from this morning from the member from Mississauga–Erin Mills, we will accept questions and comments.

Mr. John Vanthof: I did listen intently to the member's speech this morning. I really appreciate that he has a background on the issue.

I would like his opinion on areas where it is never going to be commercially viable for an operator to provide Internet service. It is viable for society and they need it, but how long-term are they going to maintain that service when it is not going to be commercially viable? How is that going to work?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: It's actually a very valid question when we have infrastructure projects that need a great amount of funding, which is sometimes not viable commercially—because ROI into this infrastructure will never pay back the cost. That's why the government is stepping up and putting \$4 billion to support and distribute some funding to support this, based on the community needs.

I will also say that it is always encouraging when some of those communities—one of the associations, either the agriculture association or the business association—take over some of that burden and initiate a hub for the Internet infrastructure close by.

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

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I, too, was teaching online at a local college, so I know how difficult it can be if you don't have reliable Internet at home to be working, or learning from home as well.

I'm wondering if the member can highlight how this bill will help my constituents in the riding of Simcoe North with their concerns about high-speed Internet.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much, Minister, for the question.

As you know, when we closed for COVID-19, it was the only way, the only venue we had—and thank God we

had already been pushing for some online courses for schools even before COVID-19, which was, I think, visionary. I think the only way is to have high-speed Internet to be able to offer courses online and continue the education process without those students losing their physical year or their semester because of COVID-19 or anything that could come in the future.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further debate?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's a pleasure to stand this afternoon and join the debate on Bill 93.

By way of background, the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus has long been a champion of expanding broadband and high-speed Internet access. The board of the Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology network, or SWIFT, has done a tremendous job. The chair of that board is also the warden of Essex county and the mayor of the town of Tecumseh. His name is Gary McNamara. He was the president at AMO—and he was there when I was on the board as a vice-president—and chair of the Large Urban Mayors' Caucus, so I know him well. He's in the town of Tecumseh in my riding as well.

The SWIFT network has been working to connect 63,254 households and businesses and 345 small and rural communities, including four First Nations in southwestern Ontario—in all, about 157,500 residents who have suffered with less-than-satisfactory broadband and Internet connections for far too long. This project means that 5,221 kilometres of new fibre optic cable needs to be strung along 4,100 kilometres of roadway. It's a big project, obviously.

Speaker, I wish to put on the record a couple of letters on this subject, and I have written to the Minister of Infrastructure in support of these letters. The first came from Mr. McNamara, as warden of the county of Essex, about five months ago, in late October 2021. It was addressed to the Honourable Kinga Surma. I've misplaced my good prescription reading glasses, but I'll don my dollar store 2.5s. This letter is regarding the accelerated high-speed Internet program, the AHSIP:

“On behalf of the county of Essex, I wish to express our commitment and support in regards to the accelerated high-speed Internet program (AHSIP), and am writing you today to seek that you review our recommendations and that Infrastructure Ontario halt the program's request for proposals (RFP) process until our concerns have been strongly considered and addressed.

“Connectivity is key to the social and economic success of our communities. Broadband has become an essential service that is necessary to encourage economic growth and stability, modernize and streamline the delivery of health and social services, provide greater educational opportunities, increase capacity to administer and govern institutions, improve our environment and create fairness and opportunity for everyone.

“I recognize that universal access to high-speed broadband connectivity is fundamental to the continued relevance and future prosperity of small urban/rural communities in southwestern Ontario.

“The county of Essex would like to see the province of Ontario's AHSIP maximize the amount of fibre deployed with the funds available, provide a level playing field that allows high participation of local and regional Internet service providers (ISPs) and ensure equitability of funding and outcomes between all municipalities in southwestern Ontario (lower and upper tier).

“We support the province of Ontario's program and want it to be as effective as possible. Therefore, the county of Essex is recommending that Infrastructure Ontario pause the procurement process until the following recommendations have been addressed:

“—Lot sizes are reduced to an average reserve price of \$10 million with no single lot having a reserve price greater than \$20 million;

1520

“—‘Wired’ and ‘wireless’ designations are removed from the lots in line with Infrastructure Ontario's amendment to allow hybrid bids in all lots;

“—Reserve prices are recalculated for all lots and are based on hybrid solutions rather than ‘wired’ or ‘wireless’ solutions;

“—A clear/transparent formula for evaluating proposals that balances bid price with higher fibre content bids is created and communicated to participants;

“—The RFP, when issued, be made visible to the public given that it contains no proprietary ISP information;

“—Immediately release the lot maps to all municipalities in Ontario so that they can review and comment;

“—Ensure that small ISPs in southwestern Ontario are consulted directly and their input is considered;

“—The details of the procurement be re-evaluated and Infrastructure Ontario consider the following changes:

“—Allow for progress payments to the recipients rather than holding 100% of the funding until customers are in service;

“—Eliminate the bid bond requirements;

“—Seriously reconsider the position that the Construction Act applies/eliminate the bonding requirements called for by the act (especially if no progress payments are being made);

“—Eliminate the plan to hold back the final 10% and pay 100% of the project cost by the time the project is complete.

“On behalf of the county of Essex, we are recommending that Infrastructure Ontario pause the procurement process until the above recommendations have been addressed.”

As I said, Speaker, it's signed by Gary McNamara, the warden of Essex, and Mike Galloway, the chief administrative officer. It went to the Ministry of Infrastructure and was copied to the Premier as well as a bunch of others.

The second letter is dated January 25, 2022. It comes from the town of Tecumseh, where the warden is the mayor. It's regarding the immediate changes to the proposed accelerated high-speed Internet program, and it went to the Minister of Infrastructure:

“The town of Tecumseh has established a Rural Broadband Advisory Committee (RBAC) to investigate,

identify and advise on broadband high-speed Internet coverage in rural areas of the town and act in an advisory role to town council.

“At the December 8, 2021 RBAC meeting, discussion was held regarding the Ontario government’s recent efforts to help bring high-speed Internet access to every community by the end of 2025, including launching a request for quotations (RFP) as part of a new competitive bidding process.

“The importance of focusing on how broadband high-speed Internet is being delivered and the allocation of government funding as part of the Ontario government’s next steps was identified.

“The purpose of writing to you is to advise of the RBAC and the council of the town of Tecumseh’s support at their December 13, 2021 meeting of the Western Ontario Wardens’ Caucus October 22, 2021 resolution entitled Accelerated High-Speed Internet Program (AHSIP) and letter to you dated October 28, 2021, recommending Infrastructure Ontario pause the procurement process of the AHSIP until the following recommendations have been addressed:

“—Lot sizes are reduced to an average reserve price of \$10 million with no single lot having a reserve price greater than \$20 million;

“—‘Wired’ and ‘wireless’ designations are removed from the lots in line with Infrastructure Ontario’s (IO) amendment to allow hybrid bids in all lots, with ‘wired’ connectivity as the preferred option;

“—Reserve prices are recalculated for all lots and are based on hybrid solutions rather than ‘wired’ or ‘wireless’ solutions;

“—A clear/transparent formula for evaluating proposals that balances bid price with higher fibre content bids is created and communicated to participants;

“—The request-for-proposals (RFP), when issued, be made visible to the public, given that it contains no proprietary Internet service provider (ISP) information;

“—Immediately release the lot maps to all municipalities in Ontario so that they can review and comment;

“—Ensure that small ISPs in southwestern Ontario are consulted directly and their input is considered;

“—The details of the procurement be re-evaluated and IO consider the following changes:

“—Allow for progress payments to the recipients rather than holding 100% of the funding until customers are in service;

“—Eliminate the bid bond requirements;

“—Seriously reconsider the position that the Construction Act applies/eliminate the bonding requirements called for by the act (especially if no progress payments are being made);

“—Eliminate the plan to hold back the final 10% and pay 100% of the project cost....”

Mayor McNamara concludes with, “We greatly appreciate both you and your government for its continued partnership and commitment for better connectivity for all Ontarians. Thank you in advance for your favourable consideration of these recommendations.”

The letter was copied to about 20 others, including the ministers of transportation, colleges and universities, agriculture, food and rural affairs and the Solicitor General.

I’ve only been here nine years. At every meeting I’ve ever held with the Eastern Ontario Wardens’ Caucus, the Western Ontario Wardens’ Caucus, the Rural Ontario Municipal Association, the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the Good Roads Association and many others, including the association of clerks and treasurers, everyone has always highlighted the need for better broadband services, a fair price and essential services. As a job creator we have to do more, and this bill can be improved.

Thank you for your time this afternoon, Speaker.

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

Mr. Michael Parsa: I want to thank my honourable colleague for his presentation. It’s always a pleasure to be able to listen to him, certainly with his extensive experience here.

When I look at the numbers from the previous government from 2007 to 2018, in 10 years they spent \$530 million for broadband and Internet service across the province. It’s really shameful, when you think about how important, how vital, this service is to so many individuals, families, businesses—just all around the province.

Whenever this initiative has come forward, the NDP has continuously voted against us. I know this honourable member, and I know that he knows how important this service is, so I’m wondering if perhaps at this time the NDP would consider supporting such an important investment of \$4 billion that will connect every corner of this province and bring services to every Ontarian.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I’ll tell you what I will support. I’ll support a better bill. I’ll support a bill that responds to the letters I’ve just read and want to put on the official record to make sure that everybody is aware, all the ministers who received letters in their offices—maybe they didn’t get to the minister’s desk, but they were certainly received in their offices—that the wardens across the province are saying, “We know our local people. We know our local providers, and we are saying to you, listen to us so we’ll have a fair and a better deal and we’ll bring better broadband, better connectivity, to everybody across Ontario.” If they do that, if they listen to the people on the ground, they’ll be rewarded with a much better bill and support in Ontario.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I’d like to thank the member from Windsor–Tecumseh for bringing the voices of rural Ontario to the Legislature. Oftentimes, we know that the consultation is very sparse when creating legislation because this government is very much in a hurry to push legislation through. Thank you for bringing those voices and those letters to the Legislature.

They were very concerned about procurement. They’ve asked this government to halt procurement until those recommendations were made.

One of the things that's not in this bill is the word "rural." Can I ask the member why this government is digging in their heels and not listening to rural Ontario representation? What is the reason, what's the motive, what's the advantage not to hear from representatives who actually live in the communities they want broadband brought to?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: That is a great question, and I congratulate the member from London–Fanshawe for picking up on that. Nobody knows. You have rural members—I'm looking at several right now—and yet the word "rural" is not in there.

You know very well, as the member from Perth–Wellington knows, being a former parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, that "rural" is big news in Ontario. And we need it for health care, we need it for education, we need it for agriculture—better broadband, faster service.

One of the ironies of all this is, people who have a lousy service right now are paying among the highest rates in the province. They are paying more than urban rates for a crappy rural service. I don't know why "rural" isn't in there, but it certainly should be, and they should be paying more attention to the people in rural Ontario.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I know the honourable gentleman, before he came here and made such a great contribution to this place, was a prolific broadcaster as well as an icon in his community. I wonder if he could help share some of the challenges—I believe he also served on council, if I'm not mistaken—early on when it came to expanding Internet capacity and high-speed Internet, and also if he could have ever imagined in the early part of his career where we would be at today and the ability to work in the way that broadcasters are.

1530

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you for that question.

We can roll back the clock. I think when I started in television, we still had black-and-white TV cameras as opposed to colour cameras to record the news, and you had to use an eight-track tape to put in the audio machine to record your voice and push the play button on the tape as well as roll the film. That takes me back a while.

The problem—the former Liberal government didn't pay a lot of attention to the rural parts of the province that needed a good broadband service. We know economic growth can't all be in the major urban areas. And thank you to the government for the big announcement today down in Windsor on the electric battery plant to augment the automotive industry. The economy will grow, with industry, with better broadband, faster service and affordable rates.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh. I listened to your comments.

As the tech and innovation critic, I'm deeply concerned about the lack of broadband and the lack of progress on

getting broadband into our rural communities, because not having access to high-speed broadband is a huge economic drag on our rural economies.

The member from Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill was just mentioning that we voted against a previous broadband bill. But the reason we voted against that bill—and it's a bit of a political game to say we voted against it—was because with that bill, the broadband section was excellent, but what they added into it was a schedule to override the restrictions on paving over Duffins Creek in Pickering, to have an MZO to allow them to override this.

When you hear about that kind of gamesmanship in something as crucial as getting broadband into rural communities, how do you feel as a representative of a rural community?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I thank you very much for that question, my good friend from Spadina–Fort York.

Yes, there was a previous bill, and it had a poison pill. We talked about it, I think, at the time. One of the major players, one of the Amazons or somebody, wanted to build a parking lot in a protected wetland, and this ended up in a broadband bill. We in this House know that as a poison pill. It wedges the opposition party to vote against something, because you cannot support destroying the environment for the sake of a parking lot in a broadband bill.

We all want better broadband. If we worked together, if we collaborated, we could have the best broadband service, the best Internet service in North America, if not the world.

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

Mrs. Robin Martin: As a daughter of a former farmer, I know that Ontario farmers are also depending on broadband infrastructure, just like they do highways and railways, to ship food and fibre across the country and around the world, and they rely on high-speed Internet services to use new and emerging technologies that allow the farming business to be more efficient, environmentally friendly and economical. Access to high-speed Internet is crucial to the use of precision agriculture techniques when making decisions that impact crops, the amount of fertilizer etc. and how much water they need, which is always an important concern for farmers. In fact, the need for reliable high-speed Internet is so critical that the Ontario Federation of Agriculture has come out and stated that reliable high-speed Internet service should be considered an essential service and is vital to these farmers.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the member for Windsor–Tecumseh: Can you explain why the NDP continue to vote against legislation that will bring Ontario's farmers the high-speed Internet they depend on?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you for that question.

We were just talking about gamesmanship and playing games and politics. The NDP has been here forever supporting the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. Farmers have told us, time and time again, that they have a great need for better broadband service, better Internet service, higher connectivity at an affordable, reasonable price, and

we've always supported that. If you put that on the table, boom, you have support. But when you lump it in with a bunch of other things, like paving over environmental wetlands, boom, you don't have support.

It's common sense. New Democrats have always been with the farmers, always been with the need for new technology, for improved services at affordable prices. We've been with the working people.

The government says they're the party of the working people, yet they put a 1% raise on nurses. Give me a break. But thank you for the question.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): We don't have enough time for another question or comment.

Further debate?

Mr. Joel Harden: It's a pleasure to rise today to talk to Bill 93. I'm going to be talking to the merits of Bill 93 from an accessibility and disability perspective. It's a job I'm proud to have here, as the provincial critic for persons with disabilities and accessibility. Access to the Internet is a disability issue. Disproportionately, people who can't access the Internet, the research tells us, are lower-income and they are persons with disabilities.

AlphaPlus, an advocacy organization in the province of Ontario that does work for folks who have literacy and basic skills concerns, tells us that 42% of people who fall into that category of Ontarians who have challenges reading or challenges with basic skills tend to be on some form of income assistance, normally the Ontario Disability Support Program or Ontario Works. That is seven times the rate of the general population in the province of Ontario. So when we talk about the digital divide, I think it's really important that we realize that is disproportionately impacting some of the lowest-income folks—folks living in poverty in this province—and those folks disproportionately tend to be people with disabilities.

However, despite that challenging, difficult context, I want to talk to you, Speaker, about people who succeed through their resilience and through their community organizing. It's going to be difficult for me to get all this out, but I'm going to make a best effort, because we just lost somebody at home who fits this category. His name is Blaine Cameron.

Blaine Cameron is an organizer with Ottawa ACORN. I'm sure people know who ACORN is, but for the benefit of Hansard and the record, ACORN is a working-class organization that fights for lower-income people in this province and persons with disabilities in particular. Blaine was one of our leaders in Ottawa ACORN. Blaine lived with Becker muscular dystrophy, a degenerative condition, and we lost Blaine during this pandemic.

What's important for me and why I'm remembering him today is that Blaine was a leader in the ACORN campaign known as the Internet for All campaign. ACORN just released a report not long ago—about a year ago—called Barriers to Digital Equity in Canada. What they found through work in 21 cities in five provinces was that half of the survey recipients to their report indicated that they were paying more than \$70 a month in Internet.

What I want to stress to you and to this House is that for folks who are on the Ontario Disability Support Program, ODSP, the maximum benefit for which you can qualify is \$1,169 a month, and the housing allowance portion of that income is somewhere in the \$490 range. I defy you, in your community or in mine or in any across Ontario, to find housing at that price and then to think about how you would pay Internet costs—which effectively, are an essential service in the digital age—on that income.

Blaine and so many lower-income folks with disabilities have had to put up with this context, but they got behind the Internet for All campaign. They rallied and they organized in 21 cities in five provinces across Canada. Blaine led the fight in Ottawa, and I'm proud to say they compelled many of the major corporate digital media providers to offer \$10-a-day Internet programs which, at this point in this country, at least 200,000 people are taking advantage of.

Those companies didn't just willingly put that on the table; it was communities getting together with city councillors, with business leaders, with people from the labour movement, faith communities, who got together in meeting after meeting, effort after effort, to say to these digital giants making massive profits that it's time to offer affordable Internet for people—and that exists. That exists right now, but not from some kind of benevolence from the Rogerses and the Teluses of the world. It happened because people like Blaine stood up and demanded better.

With your indulgence, Speaker, I read a testimonial when we got together for Blaine's ceremony of life, and I want to do my best effort to—I actually sang the testimony, but we're still in a pandemic, so I'm not going to sing and project my voice across this chamber. I'm just going to remember the words I shared in honour of Blaine and the work he did for the Internet for All Campaign. It's a paraphrasing of a great old labour song from the 1920s.

1540

I dreamed I saw Blaine Cameron last night,
Alive as you and me.
Said I to Blaine, "You're three months dead."
"I never died," said he.
"I never died," said he.

Your disability took you, Blaine.
It took you away too soon.
Your massive heart could hold up no more;
With grief we are consumed.
With grief we are consumed.

He smiled and said, "Hey, Joel,
"In person, I am gone.
"But there's so much trouble left to cause,
"The struggle carries on.
"The struggle carries on.

"Besides," he said, "where I am right now
"I've finally met Joe Hill.

“And the angels are organizing a union.
 “We’re organizing still.
 “We’re organizing still.”

Bless you, Blaine.

Here’s the thing: At this point, where we are in the COVID-19 pandemic, we’re debating a broadband-for-all bill. The government has said through this legislation that by 2024 there will be Internet everywhere in Ontario. I can tell you, not only for my friends in northern Ontario or where the member for Windsor–Tecumseh was talking about in southwestern Ontario, when I jump in my car share and I drive down here from Ottawa, if I take Highway 7, which is my preferred route—I love Highway 7; you pass by Silver Lake, you pass by Charleston Lake, you pass through some gorgeous communities—you can’t get access to the Internet. And at this point, the people I work with, to whom I’m attached, upon whom I rely, have told me, “Joel, you must take the 401,” because invariably there’s some crisis back home that I have to deal with on my drive to Toronto, and I cannot. For big stretches of Highway 7, I cannot be contacted. Part of me likes that, and I prefer Highway 7, but the reality is, even in eastern Ontario, rural eastern Ontario, access to broadband and access to reliable broadband is a major issue.

I want us to think for a second about what a House like this—I understand that access to the Internet and access to the digital infrastructure of this country is a federally regulated issue. But when you think about what we could do as a province to offer particularly low-income and working-class people real help so they didn’t have to, on their own, approach some of the digital giants in this country, who are making millions, perhaps billions, in profit if you look at the collective scope just for maintaining an infrastructure that was publicly designed, what could Ontario do to offer low-income folks, persons with disabilities real help so they could be active participants in the digital age? I have some thoughts.

There are countries in Europe that, through their postal offices, maintain access to sponsored and affordable Internet that’s available in every region of some major European countries—rural, urban or suburban. There are other countries—actually, let’s forget other countries for a moment. There are other provinces in this great country that have looked at the pandemic differently in how you give people with disabilities income.

I think about the province of British Columbia, where we had an NDP government that decided not to claw back for the small minority of disabled British Columbians CERB income, the Canada economic recovery benefit. They stacked on top of CERB income what was available to them through an emergency pandemic benefit, an extra \$300 a month. Think about how that put more money in the pockets of disabled folks.

What the research shows us on poverty is that when you give people direct help to maintain their everyday livelihoods, that goes directly into the local economy. It goes directly into the local economy, directly into small businesses that those folks may patronize. It goes directly

into their livelihoods, their ability to participate, their ability as a person with a disability to have part-time employment and to advance themselves.

So the province of British Columbia, led by an NDP government, decided to not only not claw back the CERB from disabled British Columbians, they stacked on top of that a \$300-a-month benefit. What did we do here in the province of Ontario, Speaker? For four measly months, we gave people with disabilities on ODSP the right to ask their worker for a \$100-a-month temporary COVID benefit. And in four months, we took it away. The pandemic continued for two more years, but we took it away. I think that’s an awful legacy. When I think about many of the legacies of the pandemic, the fact that our province could only see fit to offer people a measly 100 bucks for four months, to claw back CERB for the minority of disabled Ontarians who qualified for it, how are we helping them? How are we helping our communities? How are we helping people have incomes so they could have reliable access to the Internet to be full participants?

I hope the government looks towards this bill and amends it so it can have a much more inclusive perspective for people with disabilities.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak this afternoon.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Question and response? I recognize the Minister of the Environment and Parks.

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate it. I was rising to speak, but I’ll ask a question.

Thank you to the member opposite. He’s always very passionate and I appreciate his advocacy. Just back on the broadband and Internet piece: I know for families of a number of incomes—I think to a good friend of mine, Lisa in Cobourg, who has a son, Connor. She spoke to me about her struggles with the pandemic and staying at home doing everything that was asked of her by public health officials, and problems with broadband. Our county, supported by the province, is treating broadband as a utility, whereby it empowers the homeowner to—rather than be held hostage by big, multinational Internet companies, they are able to pick and empower them. She has seen a reduction in her Internet costs; her son’s connected. Does he not support these sorts of bold endeavours that this government is taking?

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you to the member for that comment. I’m just going to warn the member: In that rhetoric, you’re edging towards Bernie Sanders populism in some of the anti-multinationals rhetoric. I hope you’re fully vetted for the election, my friend, because you may end up on this side of the House before long.

In all seriousness, kidding aside, I think any ways in which we can empower people with the right to be true arbiters of their digital future, whether it’s giving them a way to leverage against these multinational giants—which, as the member correctly stated, have way too much control over our access to the Internet—I think is a good thing.

But I was spending my time today speaking to the lack of access persons with disabilities have to the Internet. So

I'm not sure, in that case, if the member wants to ask another question. If this is about a child with disabilities having issues with access—because that's a major issue, and I would love to talk about that this afternoon too.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to thank the member from Ottawa Centre for his presentation. My condolences to Blaine, his colleague in Ottawa, and to thank them for all the work that they've done with Internet for All and with the ACORN organization.

He's mentioned that this bill promises Internet everywhere in Ontario, but we know that the FAO reported that the Ford government cut in 2021-22 the rural broadband budget by \$207 million, which is more than half, and they only spent 0.6% of this reduced budget. And public accounts, actually, also reported that this government only spent—

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I just want to know: With all this not spending, how are we going to get Internet for all, let alone affordable Internet for people like Blaine?

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you to my friend from London. I'm just going to speculate: Maybe money was being set aside in a grand overture that they were going to work in a coalition with the federal Trudeau government to nationalize the major telecoms of this country, to make sure that lower income folks—no, I think I'm barking up the wrong tree over there. It doesn't appear like that's the plan.

I think it would be great if that money was dispensed as soon as possible to make sure that persons living in poverty—as I mentioned in what I had to say this afternoon, particularly persons with disabilities—got the help they needed to get access to the Internet. Ontario is a rich province. We can make sure that everybody can be a fully fledged digital citizen.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I enjoy listening to my friend from Ottawa Centre so much because he's one of the most passionate orators in the House.

He talked about Blaine, who he's mentioned before in this House, and his relationship with ACORN. As a former critic for municipal affairs and housing, I dealt with the ACORN people in Toronto quite a bit.

We're talking about affordable Internet. Last fall, I was reading petitions in the House from my local brain injury association who were asking us, for anyone on ODSP or Ontario Works, to give them free Internet access.

1550

In planning, there's inclusionary zoning. If you want to put up a big high-rise, you will put some of those apartments or condos up at affordable rents or an affordable purchase price—affordable inclusionary zoning. Why not in Ontario, if you want wire a high-rise broadband, you make sure you have inclusionary affordable Internet access for those who can least afford it?

Mr. Joel Harden: It's a great question, and I'll give you a best practice, Speaker, just so it's in the record. The community office I'm proud to take a role in in Ottawa Centre is at 109 Catherine Street. It's part of Beaver Barracks complex built by the Centretown Citizens Ottawa Corp., the biggest non-profit houser in Ottawa, and when they build a building, they do what the member just suggested. They make sure that building is correctly wired, easily enabled to have the highest speed possible and they're even willing to work with non-profit digital providers—we have some good ones in Ottawa—to make sure everybody in that building gets access to the Internet.

We're building housing that's mixed-income housing so folks like me who have great salaries could live in a building like Beaver Barracks alongside folks who are living on much more fixed incomes: seniors, persons with disabilities. It ends up being more of a fun place to live, where we're less segregated from each other, where our kids will play with all kinds of kids from all of these backgrounds based on exactly what the member is saying.

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

Mr. Michael Parsa: I thank my honourable colleague. It's always good listening to him. Mr. Speaker, the question that I had for him, and I mentioned this earlier when I was talking to one of my colleagues, is that during the pandemic there's a lot of things, especially when it comes to our small businesses—I think a lot of us saw the need in certain areas. Certainly I've heard my colleague across, and others have as well, on the need to make sure that our communities continue to thrive, our economy continues to grow, and part of that includes support through these vital services for our businesses because, now, they're no longer competing in local communities. They're no longer competing just in our province or in the country. They're competing all around the world, and they're going to need Internet to be able to compete against that.

I was just wondering if my honourable colleague has had an opportunity to speak to some of those small businesses in his community to see if they would want the support so that this \$4-billion initiative will then interconnect all of us across the province and help these small businesses.

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you for the question. What I will say is this: We have some fantastic, as I mentioned, local non-profit Internet providers in Ottawa, but the downtown has the capacity to look after itself. If we can deal with issues of chronic poverty, if we can deal with issues of chronic underemployment and employment, in the downtown we're okay. Where we're not okay, and the member knows this too, is when we venture out into rural areas—even in eastern Ontario. It's been explained to me that if you go up to northern Ontario, go to rural eastern Ontario, we have big pockets of unserved areas that simply aren't financially viable. With a capitalist financial mindset, nobody is going to bring Internet to these places. In other places of the world, the government then takes responsibility to ensure the Internet gets there.

When I read Wired magazine and I hear about the Starlink digital satellite movement, we may be getting

there somehow through the private sector, but until that happens, government has to step up. I want this government to talk to the federal government in Ottawa to say, “Hey, step up.” Make sure, as the member said, that everybody has an opportunity to be a full citizen digitally with no holes in the province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Questions or comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: I listened intently to my colleague from Ottawa Centre, and one of the things he focused on, and something we know in rural Ontario, is the digital divide. It's one thing for the Internet to be—even if the government is successful—available, another huge obstacle is for it to be affordable because now you can get lower earth satellites that are available, but the cost is out of reach for many people and, as a result, they are still not going to be able to participate in our modern society. I didn't see really anything in the bill or in the opening statements anything about affordability. Could the member comment about that?

Mr. Joel Harden: It's a really great question. I suggest you look at the Barriers to Digital Equality in Canada report that ACORN put out. What they find is that 16% of adults right now in the country do not have access to Internet at home. When you go out of this building and walk down the street, even in a major city like Toronto—as the member just said, when you think about cost, one out of every seven people you're going to run into on the street doesn't have Internet at home. How did that help them when their kids were trying to learn at home in this pandemic? How did that try to help them if they were trying to start up a business from home or apply for a job at home? They go to the library, they try to do whatever they can to get access to the Internet, but that's not fair. It's not fair that someone like me who has so much access to affluence and privilege can do whatever I want, so can my children, so can other people in our neighbourhood, but other people don't have the same shot.

As the member said, it should be the public's role to give everybody an equal opportunity. We need to push the federal government to do more than talk. They need to fill the gaps of the digital divide all over this country and reduce the costs. If the private sector won't do it, I think the government has to be imaginative and step into that breach.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further debate?

Hon. David Piccini: It's an honour to rise to speak to Bill 93, the Getting Ontario Connected Act. I'd like to just start off by especially thanking my colleagues Minister Surma, Minister Romano, MPP Sandhu, who's the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Infrastructure, and PA Bob Bailey.

When we put our name on the ballot, we do so—I think members all across this Legislature, to the best of our abilities, serve the people who cast ballots for and against us, the people who we serve in our communities. I've been honoured to have Minister Surma down in my community to see, to look in the eyes of the farmer on Centre Line

Road—by the way, we're widening that road, making critical infrastructure investments to support them—to look into the eyes of single parents who are rushing down Centre Line Road to drive for an hour to take their son or daughter to hockey practice. We've got their backs. We've said yes to them. After decades in which these men and women who were working longer hours and getting less were clamouring for a voice in this place, not only do they now have it, but they've got a Premier, a minister, a team that's listening. I'm proud to be part of a government making these investments.

I remember it all started in Roseneath. Then-Minister McNaughton, who joined us for a massive announcement where I was with regional colleagues MPP Smith, MPP Kramp, the other MPP Smith, just to name a few, where we in Roseneath—why were we across from Mr. and Mrs. Robins, Robins convenience? If you're ever up in Roseneath, I highly encourage you to stop in. Why were we there? We were there because, for years, the new joint fire hall-paramedic base there with Northumberland county, people were losing service right as they dipped there. You couldn't make a phone call, you had no Internet access. Not only did the challenge pose a risk to health and safety, but it fundamentally made that vibrant area of my community less competitive. I heard stories time after time—I remember a good friend Andrew McConnell there; he and his wife were telling me about all the issues getting connected. Farmers said, “We have to go to the Timmies just to place critical orders or join critical meetings with the agricultural community.” That was wrong.

I don't want this to be about previous governments, but I really do just have to wonder why in the 21st century—I remember getting a first cellphone when I was in university, and then it became an iPhone, of course, and I flash forward 20 years later and still folks in my community lived as if it was the 1980s because previous governments of this place just utterly ignored them.

I'm really proud that our government's making these investments. It's not just in Northumberland–Peterborough South; it's 700,000 households and businesses—700,000. That's how many households and businesses across the province didn't have access to reliable high-speed internet.

The stories of those men and women, of those farmers, of those businesses, are no different than those stories I alluded to in Northumberland–Peterborough South. Having video calls with family across the country or overseas? They couldn't do it. Shopping for important goods and services online? They couldn't do it. Connecting to school or work from home? They couldn't do it. Mr. Speaker, that is changing today, right now. On Friday, I'm going to be in Brighton, Ontario with the Minister of Infrastructure for a critical announcement.

1600

I remember inviting picketers—members across the aisle, I'm sure, would know many of them—in front of my office, into my office to have a great dialogue. I remember my friend saying to me, “Dave, 30 people at your office,

that's a big crew." We had a good round table. We reached consensus and had a great conversation. It really opened my eyes up to a number of issues, and I value that. But if you think of that 30, many of whom are, of course, paid activists, and you juxtapose them with the packed Codrington Community Centre, hundreds of people, standing room only—we were sweating buckets; it was ridiculous—all of whom were there to speak loud and clear to our government—Mayor Ostrander, Councillors Bateman and LeBlanc, just to name a few—to speak loud and clear to say, "We want the dignity of broadband. We want the dignity afforded to those who live in downtown Toronto. We want it in Codrington." We listened, and the minister is going to join me this Friday for a massive announcement.

And, I'm pleased to say, the hard-working men and women of Northumberland county, for example, have been working on broadband as a utility. It's really, really, really cool work that they're doing to empower men and women.

That member across, he talks about raising the roof. Yes, the people are raising the roof because, for once, they have a government that's listening. They have a government making these investments: High-speed Internet, empowering residents to make the choice, not to be held over the pork barrel by Rogers or Bell, but empowering them to be able to say, "We don't like what you're billing us. We're going to go with another provider." Xplornet, Nexicom, you name it—we're empowering the people. We're empowering them to make that decision, and we're working with telecom providers.

Yes, I would love the feds, the CRTC and others to allow more competition, but I'm telling you, competition is alive and well now in rural Ontario, thanks to investments that this government is making.

Why this matters is because this is a convenient alternative now that we're seeing, an alternative to stressful and lengthy commutes. I think if we just flash forward to the good folks in Clarington, who saw the cost of everything go up, the cost of their licence plates, or their driver's licences, of hunting and fishing go up under the previous Del Duca government—now we've waived the tolls. But if you don't want to drive that nasty, lengthy commute, we're connecting you with reliable high-speed Internet, too.

This is a massive departure from, honestly, the Stone Age that we lived in, under the previous government in rural Ontario. I am so proud that we're listening, that we're working—we don't have all the answers and we're not afraid to say that. But we're working with the municipality of Brighton. We're making that announcement this Friday. We're working with the folks in Clarington who have said, "Get off our back, help us put a little more money in our pockets, give us the dignity of a job and the ability to provide for our families," and to do it on 2nd, 3rd, 4th Line, Concession Road. We've said yes. We said we're widening that road.

Infrastructure is more than just bridges and roads, and we're making those investments. Infrastructure also

means laying the fibre to connect those families to reliable high-speed Internet. For too long, people in Norwood, in Kendal, in Keene, in Codrington were ignored by this place. Not anymore.

But we're not doing it alone. We're partnering with all levels of government. We've got a Premier who is going to leave no stone unturned to connect the hard-working men and women of Northumberland—Peterborough South. We're working with Northumberland county on a massive, massive investment. Stay tuned, folks, if you're watching at home. If you're not, because you don't have reliable high-speed Internet, that's changing soon as well, Speaker.

And I'm so, so excited. I'm excited, as I approach the end of my first term and as I reflect back on things that I have done: partnerships I have made, round tables we have had. The job's not done. We can build a better Ontario. We are building a better Ontario. That starts with saying yes to fibre in ground. It starts by saying yes to building high-speed Internet, which we're doing.

It starts with saying yes to farmers, to say that we know, and this pandemic has shown us, the value of the hard-working men and women in my community who provide us with the dignity—I mean, through the very challenging times of the pandemic, we had food on our table. We had reliable supply chains—which were disrupted, without question. But we're saying to farmers that we're going to help you. We're going to help you with reliable high-speed Internet.

To the small businesses in my community who have had to go to farmers' markets—we've had some great conversations, but who have said to me, "Dave, you know, as great as it is to be here with you on a Sunday in Codrington, we'd love to sell our products to the world." To the Indigenous entrepreneur in Alderville, we're saying yes. You can go online—you can also do it on the online parks store now; big shout-out to the team at MECF. You can also do that, and we're going to empower you to grow your business, to stay connected. It's the dignity of a job, Speaker, and we're doing it to build a better Ontario.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: It's always a pleasure to be able to stand in the Legislature to speak on behalf of bills that come before the House. Several concerns have been raised in my constituency of Hamilton Mountain. I'm not a rural area, but there are several concerns when it comes to broadband and Internet connections that leave people without access to Internet services, and a lot of that is built into costs.

With the plan that we're seeing before us, we have definitely raised concerns about whether it will be monopolized or whether it will be open to smaller companies, to ensure that there is affordable access to Internet services. Could the member speak to that, ensuring that Internet is available to all income folks within the province?

Hon. David Piccini: That's a great question from the member opposite. Do you know what, though? When the opposition had the opportunity to ask those very important

questions when they held the balance of power under the previous government, we didn't see the commitment to the 1.4 million Ontarians without the dignity of Internet service.

As I mentioned in my speech, which I hope she was listening to, broadband is a utility, a utility empowering individuals and low-income families to make the choice. Supporting them with expanded competition; working with small, medium and large providers; the reverse auction that this minister has done: These are all solutions.

We don't need more of the naysaying and the negativity that have too often plagued this place. We need solutions. That's what this government is doing: bringing high-speed Internet to people's homes—1.4 million Ontarians.

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

Mr. Michael Parsa: I thank the Minister of the Environment for his presentation. I always listen to his passionate speeches on various issues.

My question to the Minister of the Environment is—first, though, before I go any further, I'd like to commend the Minister of Infrastructure and her parliamentary assistant for putting this bill forward, for bringing this very, very important legislation in.

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Parsa: Absolutely. She's a true champion, and Ontarians already recognize that.

My question to the Minister of the Environment, my colleague, is on the collaboration between us and the municipalities. Have we addressed and listened to the concerns of municipalities? Because there are still jurisdictions like in my riding—and it's not very far from Toronto. There are still areas in my riding that are very underserved, so I'm wondering if he can talk about the collaboration between us and the municipalities.

Hon. David Piccini: That's an excellent, excellent question from a true champion for Ontarians. We're taking a whole-of-government approach. I think back to the days of the NDP and the Liberals, and I might as well go back to Camelot, because that's when we were digging up roads, building roads, and then we realized after we paved it, "Oh, shoot. We could have laid fibre, but we didn't." Back to the days of upside-down bridges—those days are done; gone; see you. Today we're building roads with fibre connectivity, upgrading sewer—it's all being done with a whole-of-government approach working with municipalities to say we're not going to be held over the pork barrel of Hydro One poles, all the gatekeepers. We're bringing everybody in a room, we're pushing every one around in that room and saying, "We've got to come out united, working together." I'm proud that we're doing it, because that means that all the new developments are coming with all these modern upgrades and a whole-of-government approach, because after all, we're here to work for you, the people. So thank you, that's a great question.

1610

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

Mr. John Vanthof: I listened intently to the member from Northumberland–Peterborough South, and he's an excellent speaker, I've got to say.

Would he agree that when the NDP put in the motion—and I remember that motion distinctly. When the government was first elected, we put forward a broadband strategy and we mentioned the number \$1 billion. I will agree it's not enough, but we did that. We also put forward a bill demanding that broadband be an essential service. It should be an essential service in Ontario. I believe the government actually supported that bill in second reading. Would you agree with the NDP that broadband should be an essential service?

Hon. David Piccini: I've got a lot of time of day for that member opposite, because unlike some of his colleagues who are just, "No, no, no," negativity, negativity, he brings forward some good ideas and I know proudly represents good folks of rural Ontario. He knows the plight of farmers.

We're saying yes, it's essential for farmers to have reliable broadband access. We're saying yes to single parents in rural Ontario who have to drive an hour. Some members opposite think that you can hop on your bike and drive from Norwood to Cobourg with your kids and a full bag of hockey equipment. That's not the reality in rural Ontario and that member opposite knows that. We're saying yes to the entrepreneur, yes to the farmer, yes to the mom and dad, that we're going to connect you, and yes to the 1.4 million Ontarians who previously were told no. Now we're saying yes, empowering them with reliable connectivity.

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

Mr. Michael Parsa: Again, I thank my colleague for all the answers that he's providing. One of the areas that I'd like to highlight and perhaps ask my honourable colleague about is, during the pandemic, we saw a lot of people having to address—whether it was work, or in the cases of students, they had to study online. Many of the parents voiced their concerns just due to lack of accessible high-speed Internet, many of it because, obviously, the previous government had failed for the time that they were in power, over 10 years, just over—the amount that they had spent for connectivity at a time when it was absolutely important—the minister alluded to it. When they could have, they didn't.

Can my honourable colleague address why it's so important for us to be able to put the infrastructure in place now, in every corner of the province, for students, for workers, for businesses, for them to be able to compete and get on with their daily lives?

Hon. David Piccini: That's a great question. I'm going to provide the answer through the story of Kate, who lives in Hastings. Kate's got a small business on the side and hasn't been able to get connected, but thanks to investments by this government, she knows that by 2024—because I know they're going east to west in Northumberland—she will have reliable connectivity. We've said yes to Kate for her tuition and for her studies. We've

said, “Yes, you can stay connected to learn.” We’ve said, “Yes, you can stay connected to grow your business.” We’ve said, “Yes, you can earn while you learn with expanding micro-credentials”—something this government has done, making them OSAP-eligible. We’ve said “Yes, you can afford to do it because we lowered tuition and have frozen it.” Tuition is lower today than it was when we first took office. They could have done it; they didn’t. We did, Speaker.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Northumberland–Peterborough South for your presentation. I was listening—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: You’re at the wrong mike.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Sorry, is my mike on?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: No, it’s over here.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Oh, sorry. Oh my gosh. Sorry. My error.

I was listening intently to what the member for Ottawa Centre said around the need for broadband Internet to not just be accessible to everyone in Ontario but also the need for broadband Internet to be affordable. What is this government’s plan to make Internet more affordable for Ontarians?

Hon. David Piccini: That’s an excellent question, and I’m glad that member asked that question. When you have gatekeepers that prevent competition, that prevent small providers—the members opposite have talked about the importance of having small providers. That member knows about gatekeepers because she came to me the other day with a mosque in her riding who was subject to gatekeepers and couldn’t get the important work that they were doing done. And we worked together, and that’s an example of working together to jump those hurdles. That’s what we’re doing.

I’m saying we’re laying the foundation to push those hurdles aside, if you will, to allow smaller providers to enter the market, who are really catering to the niche needs of low-income families in our community, to partner with upper and lower tier, with the broadband as a utility example I mentioned in my speech. These are but some of the many examples that are driving costs down, that are getting people connected and that are leaving no stone unturned to the bright ideas of everyday Ontarians.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Not enough time for another question and response. Further debate?

Mr. Chris Glover: It’s a real pleasure to rise and speak on this issue because I’ve been doing research on rural broadband for some time. It’s an issue that I’m very passionate about. It’s one aspect of the digital divide in this province. There’s a huge divide between urban and rural access to broadband; there is a huge access gap between people without disabilities and people with disabilities, as my colleague from Ottawa Centre mentioned; and there’s a huge digital gap, digital divide between rich and poor in this province. And all three gaps need to be addressed,

This one does take some steps towards addressing the digital divide in rural broadband. The first schedule is

actually about mandate. It mandates co-operation between municipalities, utilities and broadband providers, and this is something that I support. This makes a lot of sense.

Before being an MPP, I was a trustee with the TDSB. We had a contract to get broadband, to get fibre linked to all of our schools, 600 schools in the TDSB. We had the budget. We were getting the fibre connected to all of those schools so they would all be one hub.

The challenge was that every utility pole that you wanted to run fibre on, the company that we contracted with needed a separate permit. You can imagine connecting 600 schools across the city of Toronto and how cumbersome it was to get all those permits for those poles. It delayed the project by years—completely unnecessary. So this schedule in the bill makes a lot of sense and I’m glad that’s in there, because you need to move fast with broadband.

Speaking of fast, that’s the next topic I want to talk about: speed. There’s been a lack of transparency from the government, from Infrastructure Ontario and in this bill on what people are going to get. What speed are people going to get, and how much are they going to pay for it?

The CRTC standard right now is 50-megabits-a-second download and 10-megabits-a-second upload. That is obsolete. I hope that’s not what this government is rolling out, because that is obsolete before you put it in the ground. A gigabit download and 100-megabytes upload, that is barely adequate.

I have a resident in my riding. He’s a VFX animator. He does major, major films, including *The Shape of Water*. I interviewed him recently. He lives in Toronto. His family is from Haliburton. He would like to live in Haliburton, but he can’t because he can’t get the Internet speed he needs in order to do the work. His company that he works for is actually in Montreal, but he’s living in Toronto because he needs the thousand-megabits-a-second upload and symmetrical download. He needs that speed just in order to do his work.

So you can see that not having access to high-speed broadband is a huge economic drag on rural communities and that includes not just my friend who’s a VFX animator; it includes every business, every teacher, every student in rural communities across this province. We absolutely need to roll out high-speed broadband at affordable rates for everybody in this province.

The other thing that the government keeps announcing and they keep talking about is that they’re going to spend \$4 billion on rural broadband. When you look at the budget, there’s nothing like that in the budget. This is another example of this government’s funny figures, the Ford funny figures. They’re always making up these figures, and then the budgets don’t reflect them.

The reality is the FAO, the Financial Accountability Office of the government of Ontario, says that in 2019-20, this government spent nothing on rolling out rural broadband. In 2020-21, they budgeted \$45.7 million, and they spent 1.37% of that. In 2021, they cut \$207 million from the budget, and spent only 0.6%. So the question is, where is this \$4 billion? It’s not in the budget, it’s not

reflected in any of the spending to this point. “Is it just an election ploy?” is one of the questions. Or is it part of a P3 project? I’m going to come back to that in just a minute.

1620

It’s like the \$29 billion of transit that this government keeps mentioning. They keep talking about how they’re going to build \$29 billion worth of transit, but in the last four years of budgets from this government, they’ve never had anything like that in a budget to build that kind of transit. Where is the money that you keep talking about? That would be one of my questions to the government.

The solution that the member from Peterborough-Northumberland mentioned is to treat broadband as a utility, and I wish we’d done that. I wish we’d done that 25 years ago when broadband was a new thing. When electricity was rolled out in this province 120 years ago and they were building power stations at Niagara Falls, the government nationalized electricity and created Ontario Hydro. Ontario Hydro was a great utility that provided four-cent-a-kilowatt-hour electricity from 1910 to 1995, when the former Conservative government broke up Ontario Hydro and started selling off the pieces, including Bruce nuclear. Then the prices have been going up ever since. The former Liberal government finished off the work that the Conservative government had started and sold off the rest of Ontario Hydro. Now we’re paying anywhere between eight and 16 cents a kilowatt hour for electricity.

Electricity has gone from being a competitive advantage for Ontario—which is what Ontario Hydro was intended to create. It’s now become a competitive disadvantage. Not only is it a competitive disadvantage, we’re actually spending \$6 billion a year in taxpayers’ dollars to subsidize and now privatized Ontario Hydro to keep our hydro rates low. So we’re actually subsidizing—we’re giving taxpayer dollars to pay for profits for the private companies that now own what was our public utility.

When you look at this 100 years later, we should have treated broadband as a public utility, and we should be treating broadband as a public utility, at least now in the rural communities. I spoke with AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, recently, and they said the market model for rolling out broadband is successful in urban areas where you have dense populations and it doesn’t cost too much to run fibre from one home to another.

I live in a condo tower. I’ve got \$39-a-month unlimited broadband and very high-speed, and never had an issue with it, because I’m in a condo tower with 600 units. They only have to run the fibre an extra 15 feet and you’ve got another customer, whereas if you’re in a rural community, you may have to run it for miles before you get to your next customer. It’s worked well in the urban areas and the market model has not worked well in the rural areas. That’s what this government needs to really address.

And they need transparency on, when the government is rolling this out now—and they have a procurement process that includes a reverse auction process. AMO and

many critics are very concerned about what this actually means, because it seems to be squeezing out the smaller providers, some of the smaller providers that the member from Peterborough-Northumberland was already mentioning. Those small rural communities that actually have treated broadband as a utility, they could get squeezed out of this procurement process. And there’s no transparency with this process.

The question that AMO is asking is, what is the balance of public and private funding? What is the ratio of those? Who is going to be responsible for the maintenance of this? Who is actually going to own it? When the government is spending this \$4 billion, are you just giving \$4 billion to major corporations, to Rogers and Bell and Telus, and then saying, “Okay, you’re going to own it; you’re going to control it”? And it’s going to be a completely privatized system, just like you privatized the 407, and then the new owners of the 407 jacked up [*inaudible*]. Subjecting the people in rural communities to a privatized broadband—and that’s one of the real concern that they have.

There are 700,000 underserved people in Ontario who need access to broadband. This bill could do a lot to address that concern, to make sure that everybody does get access to rural broadband. It is an essential service, especially in this century. But this bill doesn’t do enough. There’s one small piece about mandating the co-operation to get the broadband rolled out quicker, but you need to actually put the budget forward, and you need to be completely transparent on what you’re going to be building, who is going to pay for it, who is going to own it, and in the end, what the residents will be getting. What speed will they be getting, and how much will they be paying? I’d ask for much greater transparency.

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

Mr. Michael Parsa: I listened to my honourable colleague, and I thank him for his presentation. He talked about the divide within the province.

When the previous government neglected, really, the investment that we needed in the province to be able to connect everyone to high-speed and proper Internet, when they didn’t—and, of course, we know the opposition at that time was supported by the NDP. Well, this particular member was not there; I understand that.

I’m hoping that now that these investments are being made by this minister, who has spent so much time connecting every corner of this province to high-speed Internet—I’m wondering if the opposition now realizes that there really is a need for this and for them to now support this bill going forward.

Mr. Chris Glover: I will just correct the member opposite from Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill. I appreciate the question, but the NDP have recognized the need for rural broadband for decades.

My colleague from Timiskaming-Cochrane was telling me about communities in his riding where the phones don’t work when it rains, let alone broadband. So there’s a desperate need. He’s a farmer, and farmers need access

to broadband. We have known for decades that there has been a need for rural broadband.

This government keeps talking about the investments that they're making, but the budgets do not reflect any investment in major terms. You keep talking about \$4 billion, but where is it? Show me the budget line that says, "\$4 billion for rural broadband."

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

Mr. Joel Harden: I always enjoy hearing my friend from Spadina–Fort York talk in this place. He speaks with such passion.

In the past, the member has talked about when government gets involved in procurement, and making sure projects are not only happening quickly but they happen with due accountability and scrutiny.

Something in Ottawa that is perplexing us a lot is public-private partnerships. We've had a huge debate over our light rail transit system, shrouded in secrecy. Thankfully, the government has given us a public inquiry into that mess.

I'm wondering, on this issue of broadband, my friend, what insights you have about the potential perils of public-private partnerships in this area, too.

Mr. Chris Glover: I thank the member from Ottawa Centre for the question.

This is one of my real concerns with this—that the rural broadband this government is going to be rolling out will be through a public-private partnership, so the government, the taxpayers, will end up paying for decades. We will end up paying far more and receiving far less.

The Auditor General reported that the taxpayers of Ontario paid \$8 billion in additional costs on 74 P3 projects run by the former Liberal government. It's an average of 28% in additional cost for a P3 project rather than if the government just did it itself.

So if you are going to spend \$4 billion on rural broadband, that means that \$1 billion of that, of taxpayer dollars, will be squandered because of this P3 funding model that you champion. I would strongly encourage the government just to build broadband themselves.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Questions and responses? I recognize the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you, Speaker. It's nice to see you in the chair.

I grew up in northern Ontario, and I have a cottage in rural Ontario. Internet access is very, very difficult. Often, we see, being in northern Ontario—and we saw it with COVID-19—that they rely on Internet access for education, for farming, for businesses, but it's just not reliable.

1630

I understand that you have some reservations about what we're proposing today, but we're giving these people in northern and rural Ontario an opportunity to get better broadband. Why is your party and why are you continuing to reject this proposed legislation to give people outside of the greater Toronto area the same access to broadband that we enjoy?

Mr. Chris Glover: I just want to correct the member opposite. The NDP absolutely supports the rollout of broadband in rural communities.

I've also lived in northern Ontario. I lived in Geraldton on and off for four years, and this was in the 1980s. On the TransCanada pipeline, they were actually putting in fibre optic cable across the country at that time, and this was only a few miles from Geraldton itself. So why is it taking so long to tap into those main lines, those fibre optic cables that are available? Why has it taken 25 years since they really started rolling out broadband in this province? That's the question.

As far as it goes, my concern with this bill is that if you're going to roll out broadband, which is great, then you have to do it as efficiently as possible. You have to give people the best price possible, and you have to be completely transparent. What this seems to be doing is doing it through a P3 process that will cost the taxpayers of Ontario an additional 28% more than what it would cost if the government were to deliver it directly.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: This bill before us has two schedules, so it's kind of just like a technicality for tweaking something that was maybe forgotten in the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021. I read the purpose of that act: "The purpose of the act is to expedite the delivery of broadband projects of provincial significance by removing barriers and streamlining processes related to infrastructure that may result in delays to the timely completion of these broadband projects, while enhancing coordination and engagement with and being fair to public and private sector stakeholders."

The fact that it doesn't mention rural or northern Ontario in these bills or they don't have Internet as an essential service—how fair is it to the public?

Mr. Chris Glover: A couple of years ago, this government brought in Bill 257 to roll out broadband, to expand broadband, and it was a bill we generally supported, but then they put a poison pill in there because Amazon wanted—I think it was Amazon or Walmart wanted to pave over Duffins Creek, so they put that schedule in there.

We're very supportive of rolling out broadband, but we absolutely need to know, taxpayers need to know, the residents of rural Ontario need to know what they're getting and how much they're going to pay. There's no transparency from Infrastructure Ontario. There has been no transparency from the government, from the minister, about what they're getting, what speed of fibre optic is actually being laid on the ground, who's going to own it or who will be paying for the upkeep of it. Unless there's transparency, people don't know what they're getting, but we will be on the hook for the cost.

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

Hon. Stan Cho: Thank you for the debate from the honourable member today. It's a very interesting debate, of course, on broadband.

The member mentions that there was a poison pill in the legislation that led him to vote against building infrastructure of broadband in this province. I'm curious, then; if there was indeed a poison pill, why were no amendments put forward to make a constructive suggestion through official channels? Why was there no effort by the opposition to say, "Why don't we try to add this to the legislation to make it better?" Why was it completely ignored?

Mr. Chris Glover: If the member actually checks the committee records—and I was in the committee when that bill was being debated a couple of years ago—we put in dozens of amendments. One of our amendments was to strike that section where you're going to actually pave over protected wetlands in Duffins Creek. That was one of the sections we asked to have struck from that bill.

The other thing we kept asking for—and it was my colleague the member from Oshawa who kept saying we need to add in here "for rural, northern and Indigenous communities." We kept bringing that forward as an amendment because that's what the government said—this bill is for rural, northern and Indigenous communities. That's what they said when they were speaking about it. But the bill never said those words, and this bill never says those words. "Rural" does not appear in this bill. We're happy to bring forward an amendment to add "rural" so that this government will actually be forced in writing to do what they're saying that they're going to do, which is to make sure that broadband is rolled out to rural, northern and Indigenous communities.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Questions and responses? There's very little time. We could get a quick one in. Going once, going twice—gone.

Further debate?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: It's an honour to speak today on this important legislation that our government is bringing forward to help the people of Ontario have access to high-speed Internet connectivity.

Speaker, I think that everyone in this chamber will agree that over the last two years the COVID-19 pandemic has changed so many aspects of our lives, including how we interact, work and learn. As Minister of Colleges and Universities, I have heard directly from students doing online learning, and as my colleagues have highlighted, the pandemic has emphasized the need for rapid and reliable digital communication so that all Ontarians have the same opportunities to interact, learn and work with one another.

Reliable connectivity enables individuals the flexibility to work in ways that better suit the needs of their families, their employers and their lifestyles. By supporting high connectivity for all Ontarians, we are supporting Ontario's economic resilience and ensuring that no one is left behind. Under the previous government, it took too long to build the better infrastructure necessary to have high connectivity. We are working to change that.

We know that too often it takes far too long to get shovels in the ground. This is in part due to delays with municipal permits and getting the necessary information

about the location of the underground infrastructure, such as telecommunication lines and gas and water pipes. I'm delighted to be part of a government that takes tangible and concrete actions to remove barriers and address these concerns facing many Ontarians. Specifically, with the action taken through the Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act, 2021, and the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021, we are getting to work to expand high-speed Internet access sooner so that no Ontarians get left behind.

Our commitment to broadband and connectivity does not stop there. In November 2021, we also introduced the Building Broadband Faster Act guideline and committed, through a statement of intent, to propose changes to strengthen the legislative and regulatory framework to expedite high-speed infrastructure expansion. We also enhanced the process for locating underground infrastructure to support more timely construction activities in this province. That is why our government has proposed the Getting Ontario Connected Act, 2022, which will help make it easier to construct high-speed Internet infrastructure across this province. That would be great for Ontarians across the province and for my constituents in the riding of Simcoe North.

I'm proud to work alongside a government that invests in both urban and rural communities alike to make sure that no Ontarians are left behind.

I'm sure many of you in this House receive many emails from your constituents about the need for broadband and high-speed Internet. I just want to read you a piece from one of the emails I received. This is from a constituent in Severn Bridge. He said, "I'm writing this letter because the provincial government is keenly aware of the deficiencies of Internet services in rural Canada. The government's recent announcements that have focused on getting high-speed Internet installed in rural locations demonstrates that the government is determined to achieve the goal of access to high-speed Internet to underserved communities. I agree wholeheartedly that this is what is needed." It's great when we hear from our local people about the desperate needs.

I can tell you, I live in a rural area as well, and I was quite excited during the pandemic at one time when a new tower went up a couple of fields over from my place. I was hoping that my Internet was going to be just a little bit faster.

The proposed legislation is not only a great idea, but it is critical in the year 2022. Ontario is investing \$900 million in more than 180 broadband, cellular and satellite projects across the province.

1640

Ontarians can count on our government to get shovels in the ground as early as this summer through the proposed Getting Ontario Connected Act, 2022, which builds on our progress of keeping Ontario connected. Our government is saying yes to reliable high-speed Internet through an investment of \$4 billion to provide to people and businesses at home in our province. Our goal is to ensure

that everyone, no matter where they are, can get connected in the digital world, and that includes rural Ontario.

Like many of you, I'm hopeful for these proposed legislative amendments to pass so we can provide more certainty to our broadband partners while further reducing barriers, duplication and delays in deploying high-speed Internet faster to people in underserved and unserved communities, which will ultimately help meet our government's commitment of 100% connectivity by the end of 2025.

We're working hard to improve Ontario One Call's process of determining the location of underground infrastructure like telecommunication lines, water mains and gas pipelines, known as locates. Through eliminating duplicative inspections and extending the validation period for locates, this legislation will significantly reduce waiting periods for builders, enhance safety for workers and improve results, which will enable projects across Ontario to be completed faster and more efficiently.

Our government is delighted to help build better infrastructure faster and strengthen communities, while laying the foundation for future growth, renewal and long-term economic recovery and prosperity. We are the government that will keep saying yes to ensure a strong Ontario. We will continue to look for ways to say yes to increased connectivity and the flexibility for Ontarians to learn, work and grow.

As I mentioned, I read a quote from one of my constituents. But I do hear from many people, as I know we all do. I hear from those people who are at home learning, with the opportunities now for mature students to be able to do online programs at home, as well as students who, whether they were in the K to 12 education system or whether they were in colleges and universities, had to pivot and do online courses—for those faculty members who were teaching online at home. I know in my house, I was Zooming and using Teams at my table while three of my daughters, early in the pandemic, were all home trying to find areas in the house, using the Internet satellites that we have to ensure that we had some connectivity.

One thing that does stand out, and I know we've talked a lot about it here today, is the rural component as well. A couple of years ago, prior to the pandemic, the Simcoe County Federation of Agriculture in our area—many MPPs on this side of the House participate. They have an annual barbecue. We were at a dairy farm. It was actually in the riding of Barrie–Springwater–Oro–Medonte. It's amazing to see the technology that's happening in agriculture, and just in this dairy barn alone that day. There are cows that have sensors on them, and they walk in and they're automatically milked, and it's good for the well-being of the animals, but it also increases the productivity of the farm. There were robots that were feeding the animals, and there were robots that were cleaning up after the animals. This is all dependent on the technology that's available and having access to high-quality broadband. Beyond just the animals alone, you see the technology and the equipment that's being used: the GPS systems on the

tractors now; the equipment that's being used for the fertilizers and the pesticides to ensure that you're not using too much and you're ensuring the quality of the agriculture in the area. That's something that I see in my area alone, and I've witnessed first-hand the agriculture component for Internet broadband.

On the other side of things, in my Ministry of Colleges and Universities—how important online learning has been and will continue to be in the future. This is not something that we just did during COVID-19, but it's something that we're going to continue to use. I think it's so important to have access. It makes the world more accessible for people when we are able to do online learning.

The work that my ministry has been doing with the digital learning strategy—some of the partners that we work with, too, and I'd like to give a shout-out to Contact North, who ensures that e-learners in rural and northern areas have access to computers and have access to Internet so that they are not left behind and they have the same opportunities as somebody who lives downtown in the GTA.

I think we can all agree on the benefits of Internet broadband, how much it's needed. It's definitely been highlighted during COVID, but we have the technology and the availability and we have a government that is committing \$4 billion to ensuring that, by 2025, there is access to Internet across this province. We know that will benefit all of our constituents, all of our families, our children in the future as well, to have the same opportunities and access that anybody living in any area of this province will have.

I'm very excited about this act and it moving forward.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: I appreciate the comments from the member from Simcoe North. I've got a very simple question. You just mentioned that this government is going to be spending \$4 billion on rural broadband. It's not in the budget. There's no line in the budget that comes anywhere near spending \$4 billion. If you're going to be spending \$4 billion taxpayer dollars, then the government should be—I think you'll agree with me—completely transparent of where that money is going to be spent and what the taxpayers of Ontario are actually going to get for it.

My question is very simple: Is the rural broadband rollout going to be funded through a public-private partnership?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for that question. Four billion dollars: We've never seen this kind of investment in rural broadband across the province and the commitment of this government to ensure that everybody has access by 2025. I can tell you my mother is a deputy mayor of one of our local rural municipalities who has been very excited about the reverse auction and waiting for the results of that, as have other rural municipalities in my riding, to ensure that they are getting the access for people in their municipalities, to ensure that we all have access and the ability to have Internet and to learn, to run our businesses, to run our farms etc. with those opportunities.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Throughout the pandemic, the people of Ontario have worked together and made significant sacrifices to stop the spread of COVID-19. In March 2020, we saw schools right across Ontario close their doors to keep students, our teachers and families safe from this very deadly virus. As students were expected to continue their studies online, many parents voiced concerns that their children would have difficulty accessing and completing their courses, as there was limited to no Internet connection at the time. Despite various calls on previous governments to invest in broadband infrastructure across Ontario, they ignored these calls and failed to invest in broadband infrastructure that would have put students in a better position to learn from home through the pandemic.

Speaker, can the minister please tell me how our government is cleaning up the mistakes of the previous government to ensure all Ontarians have access to the reliable high-speed Internet services they need to learn and further their education?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member for that question. She's very correct. It's something that I know I've heard in my office many times, as I'm sure many others did: those folks in rural areas who were having to go to the local Tim Hortons or McDonald's to have access to Internet in those early days—and some people still continue to do so—and having adequate Internet when classes were pivoting online.

We want to ensure that no students are left behind. We need to ensure that the investments are made, that we're moving quickly. We have a promise that by 2025 there will be access to Internet across this province, and I thank the Minister of Infrastructure for the hard work that she has been doing and the work of this government to ensure that we commit to that promise.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: I appreciate the member's response to my last question, but you didn't answer the question. The question was: Is the \$4 billion going to be spent through a public-private partnership, a P3? And it's not just my question: When I was speaking with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario a few weeks ago, they wanted to know how this is going to be paid for. How is it going to be rolled out? Who's going to own the fibre optic when it's actually in the ground? Will it be the taxpayers who are paying for it, or will it be a private company? And for the end users, what speed of Internet are they going to be getting and what cost are they going to be paying?

My question is—and I'll narrow it down; all those questions are important—is the \$4 billion going to be spent through a public-private partnership?

1650

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member again for his question. I guess I would ask you back: This is a competitive process, and do you want to ensure that companies are part of this? The \$4 billion is a historical investment in

Internet infrastructure across the province, ensuring that we all have equal access by 2025. We hear in all of our ridings, especially in northern and rural areas—I'm on Zoom calls with some of my colleagues who are even just outside of Toronto who don't have the best access. I sometimes look at what I have, and I'm rural but not northern. So you can imagine how difficult it is for some of those areas that don't have that same access. So ensuring that we have equal access for all Ontarians across the province is the priority of this government.

We want to ensure that no one is being left behind—equal opportunities: equal opportunity for running your business from home, doing your online learning, and the rural and urban aspect is very important.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member for Oakville North–Burlington.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: My question is directed to our Minister of Colleges and Universities. In my own riding of Oakville North–Burlington there are a number of people in the agricultural sector and they are concerned about the limited access to high-speed Internet. They've managed to operate their businesses, but unfortunately it has been very difficult for them in their day-to-day lives, as well as in their farm operations. They rely on the Internet for information to make business decisions, operate on-farm technology, maximize farming techniques, market their products, gain access to new markets and communicate with the community and their customers.

Minister, can you tell us what our government is doing to help these farmers and others across the agricultural sector access reliable high-speed Internet services?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member for that question. I gave a couple of examples in my speech about the things I've seen first-hand on some of my farm tours. It is very important and such a huge piece. I don't think people probably understand the impact of the technology that is happening in farming these days. Maybe if some of our young people did, they might get more excited about farming and look at that as a career because it's such an opportunity. I know I've heard that for every student graduating from the University of Guelph in the agriculture program, I think there's four to five jobs that are sitting vacant waiting for them. There's a lot of technology and that need for broadband.

I hear it in my own riding, and I know you're hearing it—I'm sure we all do—that having that access for all people in agriculture as well is very important. That's an economic driver in our province, and something we cannot ignore.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: My good friend the Minister of Colleges and Universities, if you're ever playing legislative, rural or Trivial Pursuit, you will know that she was born on a day in February, on the same day as the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and the same day as the member from Windsor–Tecumseh—three of us—different years of course.

She represents a rural riding, as her father did before her. My question is, perhaps you can tell us the oversight in this bill: that the word “rural” does not appear.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member for his question and those comments. We’re all Aquarians, so that must say something about us.

Yes, I do represent a rural riding and very, very proud to do so. This commitment by the government is access to Internet across the province by 2025. That includes everywhere from the GTA to the rural and northern areas. This is access for every one to ensure that we are all able to have that Internet, to be able to run our businesses from home, to learn.

One thing I have heard from the agriculture sector as well and from people living in rural areas is how important having that access is. I was speaking with a few farming ladies from the federation who were talking about the fact that now when there’s conferences they have access to be able to virtually go to these conferences, where it may have been more difficult in the past due to travel and to worry about family obligations and household obligations and have that access. So this is for all areas across Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): There’s not enough time for more comments and questions. Further debate? Further debate? Further debate?

Ms. Surma has moved second reading of Bill 93, An Act to amend the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021 and the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, 2012. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I declare the motion carried.

Shall the bill be ordered for third reading? I heard a no. I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: The opposition has requested that the bill be sent to the general government committee. Again, as part of its reaching out and building bridges, the government agrees.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Is it the pleasure of the House that the bill be referred to the—oh, I’m sorry. I’m going to clarify my record. It is referred to general government.

HOUSE SITTINGS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Just on a point of order, I think if you seek it, you’ll find unanimous consent that when the House adjourns today that it stand adjourned until 10:15 tomorrow for morning routine.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent that when the House adjourns today that it stand adjourned until 10:15 a.m. tomorrow morning for morning routine. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): The government House leader has sought agreement of the House to see the clock at 6. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Agreed.

Report continues in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-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 (IND)	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 (OP)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	
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, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associée déléguée aux Petites Entreprises et à la Réduction des formalités administratives
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
Vacant	Ajax / Ajax	
Vacant	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Vacant	Elgin—Middlesex—London	

**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, Mike Harris
Faisal Hassan, Jim McDonell
Sam Oosterhoff, Laurie Scott
Vijay Thanigasalam
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, Jim McDonell
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
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
Sara Singh, Donna Skelly
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell