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of Ontario



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Mercredi
13 avril 2022

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ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 13 April 2022

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 13 avril 2022

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PANDEMIC AND EMERGENCY
PREPAREDNESS ACT, 2022

LOI DE 2022

SUR LA PRÉPARATION AUX PANDÉMIES
ET AUX SITUATIONS D'URGENCE

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 12, 2022, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 106, An Act to enact two Acts and amend various other Acts / Projet de loi 106, Loi visant à édicter deux lois et à modifier diverses autres lois.

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

Ms. Jill Andrew: I appreciate the opportunity to join in this conversation, as we debate government Bill 106.

I'd first like to start by thanking all of the labour organizations, the unions, the workers, the families who paid attention yesterday to Equal Pay Day and who reflected on what women's economic liberation means to our province of Ontario. As people have said repeatedly, economic justice is gender justice, and this is something that we should all be considering in this House.

As we know, April 12, yesterday, marked Equal Pay Day. Equal Pay Day is dedicated to raising awareness of the gender pay gap. It highlights how many extra months into 2022 the average woman must work to earn what the average man earned in 2021.

Bill 106 has many schedules. I'm going to speak predominantly to schedule 7. I'm going to speak particularly around pay equity and the consistent need that we have raised as official opposition throughout our time here of the invaluable leadership and work and labour that women bring to our province of Ontario. And yet, time and time again, we see a government in this Conservative government that fundamentally does not respect that level of work, and therefore, does not remunerate that level of work equally. To think that women are essentially working for free for several months into the year in order to make what their male counterparts made in 2021, this is absurd. This is the 21st century.

And while we consistently speak of women, we know that taking an intersectional lens to this notion of gender

equity means that many women fall even under the 32% pay gap, on average. We know that Black women, Indigenous women, racialized women, women with disabilities and trans women are also disproportionately impacted, where many are locked into, quite frankly, caring professions: professions that require plenty of skill and patience, but they're just simply not receiving the pay that they deserve, receiving the working conditions that allow them to be safe on their job—safe and respected, quite frankly.

I want to share—let's see, where is it here? I've lost my note. Anyway, I'll skip to something else while I find it.

I wanted to share some statistics from the Ontario Equal Pay Coalition that were quite surprising for some of us—maybe not all of us, but I think it really helps to situate the fundamental importance of why women's economic survival, women's economic liberation must be seen as a priority to this province.

“In March 2022, the coalition”—the Ontario Equal Pay Coalition, for clarity—“worked with Environics Research to explore Ontarians' knowledge of women's pay inequalities and to gauge opinions on proposed policy solutions to address the economic disparity.”

Here were some of the highlights:

—85% of Ontarians stated that it is important for the Ontario government to do more to promote women's economic equality, with 60% stating that it is very important;

—87% of people thought that an affordable housing strategy was seminal to addressing women's inequality in our province;

—81% of folks said that we must mandate permanent paid sick days. We have spoken ad nauseam in this House about how crucial paid sick days are as not only a policy, not only a stance in humanity, but, frankly, a feminist response to systemic sexism and to discrimination against women based on wages;

—77% of folks felt that increasing funding must happen to promote well-being for Indigenous women and their communities;

—81% of respondents said we must implement the Pay Transparency Act;

—81% of Ontarians agreed that to rebuild the economy after the pandemic, the Ontario government should increase funding to public services that provide care to Ontarians; and

—76% of Ontario agreed that to rebuild the economy after the pandemic, the Ontario government should increase taxes on the wealthiest Ontarians.

Now, I want us to paint a day in St. Paul's, where Laurie, one of the many nurses who we have spoken to, gets up in the morning, takes care of her family responsibilities and

then goes into the hospital and works. She works 12 hours, 16 hours, 18 hours, 24 hours, sleeps on a cot or sleeps on the couch or on her floor in her health institution. She did this for many, many, many years—quite frankly, decades; she’s an elder in the community—but, especially, she and many women were on the front lines in our health care system during this pandemic. What this government has said to them is that they are heroes, but, when we stood here fighting for paid sick days, when we stood here fighting to ensure a permanent wage increase for many of our front line health care workers, the government wasn’t there for their heroes.

I want to read verbatim from CUPE Ontario, the tag line being, “Front-Line Workers Deserve Permanent Pay Increases, Not More Spin: CUPE Ontario Calls Bill 106 a Crass Political Ploy before an Election.” When I read that, I instantly think of the licence stickers: just another ploy to buy votes. “Don’t be fooled by the”—name of the Premier—“Conservatives’ saying they’re increasing wages for personal support workers,” says the Canadian Union of Public Employees Ontario. “Imagine the excitement that burnt-out, underpaid, and incredibly vulnerable personal support workers in health care and developmental services felt when they saw headlines saying the ... Conservatives would supposedly be permanently increasing their wages,” said Fred Hahn, president of CUPE Ontario,” and an adamant activist and friend and ally to workers across the province.

0910

“But the terrible reality is that no such thing is happening. All that this legislation does is allow the government to pick and choose who gets pay bumps that might, insultingly, only be temporary. And to make matters worse, it pits workers serving side by side against another by only applying to some of the many heroic front-line workers and not to every single worker in these settings.”

CUPE Ontario continues to say the bill “would override collective agreements between employers and unions by allowing the Ontario government to ‘arbitrarily’ pick and choose who gets wage enhancements that are not guaranteed to be permanent. One section of the bill would even go as far as preventing workers or unions from lodging complaints.”

And I don’t remember which bill it was, many, many moons ago, from this government that literally tried to attack workers’ rights to sue, to pursue their right for justice. This is by no means how we show workers respect. It is by no means how we protect workers, and this isn’t fooling anyone in Ontario.

It’s not fooling Laurie. It’s not fooling Tanya, a mom of ours who has a son who is “medically fragile,” and because of the nurses shortage in Ontario, her son is unable to go to school. And I tell you, her son is not the only one in St. Paul’s or in the province.

“Additionally, the union is saying that permanent wage enhancements should occur for all broader public sector workers. In health care alone,” as our member from London said yesterday in her fantastic one-hour lead on this, “dietary aides, laundry, registered practical nurses, cleaners, and all

other job classifications ‘work as a team in these facilities’ with personal support workers subject to Bill 106, said CUPE Ontario.

“If this government had any concern for the wages of personal support workers or developmental services workers, they would repeal the unconstitutional wage restraint law, Bill 124, and just permanently increase funding to increase wages,” said Hahn. All broader public sector workers have had their wages artificially capped, and because of rising inflation, are falling further and further behind.”

As we know, we cannot ask women to do the double, the triple-day work that they do and expect them to go at it alone. That is a very neoliberal way of thinking. It is one that erodes our social safety net. It is one that disregards the responsibility of the government, of all decision-makers, to put policies in place that actually amplify and uplift women’s opportunities across the province.

But it also seems that it’s clear that this government has a history. Quite frankly, this and previous governments have a history of anti-women legislation. Whether it was the Liberals slashing, what was it, 1,600, 2,000—what was it, 1,600? Anyway, maybe no one remembers it at this moment, but about 1,600 nurses, at a time when our health care system was already buckling under the pressure of burnt-out workers.

And then we come to 2018, we come to the current government that’s taking midwives to court, for goodness’ sake, fighting their constitutional right for them to advocate for their labour rights, for them to be able to benefit from pay equity. While the government may have lost that fight, I would argue that having that fight at all said something about the devaluing of women’s work, especially work within the care economy, that seems to happen over and over and over again with this government.

Many, many months ago, I joined the picket lines at Hillcrest Reactivation Centre in my riding, where PSWs were literally the lowest paid PSWs in Ontario. We stood there fighting for the repeal of Bill 124. We stood there fighting for workers’ rights to a permanent wage increase; to paid sick days; to respect; to conditions that are safe; to conditions where, if they report violence on the job, they don’t have to worry about consequences from employers and they don’t have to worry that they will be out of a job or that they will be “blacklisted” in their institution. We must protect the rights of women. We must protect the rights of trans women. We must protect the rights of BIPOC women, of disabled women. Some are working, yes, and they’re making pennies, Speaker—they’re making pennies.

We know that ODSP and OW is a broken system. We know that many folks on that system are not able to cover their rent, their food, their meds. They’re having to make very difficult decisions that, frankly, no one should have to make.

I would like to highlight, in the last few moments I have, the very words of the Ontario Nurses’ Association in their submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. And you know what, Speaker? I’ve realized in this House that when the official opposition

speaks or when we suggest amendments to bills, it's often ignored. I think that in this time, especially with the election so soon, we need to reinforce the voices of this government's constituents, quite frankly.

"The Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA) is the union representing more than 68,000 registered nurses (RNs), registered practical nurses (RPNs) and health care professionals, including personal support workers (PSWs), as well as over 18,000 nursing student affiliates, providing care in hospitals," home care, "long-term care facilities, public health, the community, clinics and industry....

"Over 90% of" these "members are women. Many are racialized" and many are immigrant workers. "Their work is care work on the front lines of this pandemic. Many are in workplaces with the worst RN-to-population ratio in Canada," and, as we've seen in our communities across this province, nurses are leaving in droves. I understand us to be approximately 22,000 nurses short.

ONA has expressed, as we have, that "Bill 106 is an omnibus bill. It is a bill which legislates what are essentially budgetary decisions in a manner that overrides and undermines nurses' constitutional rights."

Again, Speaker, the government will say they've consulted. The government will say they've spoken to this person or that person, but if one of the largest unions is saying that it "overrides and undermines nurses' constitutional rights," I think we should listen to them.

"Bill 106," they go on to say, "continues the current government's unconstitutional approach to dismantling"—these are strong words, Speaker—"workers' rights and women's equality rights. This bill is unconstitutional. ONA makes six main points regarding schedule 7, schedule 1, schedule 5 and schedule 6"—I mean, really, the entire bill, we know, is an anti-worker piece of legislation:

"(a) Bill 106 violates ONA members' right to free collective bargaining." Again, it's a flashback to Bill 124.

"(b) Bill 106 undermines ONA members' right to equality and pay equity rights, which ONA just had affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada in *ONA v. Participating Nursing Homes*. ONA was successful in this 15-year-long battle to maintain pay equity rights for RNs working in nursing homes. Bill 106 attempts to erase nurses' hard-won rights and violates women's equality rights guaranteed by s. 15 of the charter.

0920

"(c) Bill 106 does not repeal the infamous and unconstitutional wage suppression legislation—Bill 124."

ONA goes on to remind all of us that the successful outcomes of care for the sick and vulnerable depends on excellent work conditions.

And I will end with a personal note, as I have many family members who are PSWs, who are in the health care profession. I cannot stress it enough—and it is the same with our education workers, which I am one of; it is the same with our teachers; it is the same with our ECEs, with our child care workers: You simply cannot do your best job if your working conditions are substandard.

It doesn't matter what hard work you put in. It doesn't matter how great of a person you are. If you are not

supported by your employer, if you're not supported by the government of the day, you break. You buckle and you break under the pressure of being one or two nurses, or being one or two education workers with a classroom of kids, or a floor of patients, all with competing needs, all who want to get better. And God knows, every front-line health care worker wants their patient, wants their resident to be taken care of, but we've got to take care of them first, and Bill 106 falls flat.

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

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you, member, for her comments on Bill 106. Bill 106 will allow foreign-credentialed health care workers to begin practising sooner in Ontario by reducing barriers for registering with and being recognized by the health regulatory colleges.

I recently just met with the consul general from the Philippines and with educational representatives from the Philippines, and that was their number one issue. They wanted to talk about what they could do in their colleges in the Philippines to make sure that nurses and other health care workers trained there will meet standards in Ontario. And, of course, it's an issue, certainly, in many ridings.

So I wonder if the member opposite has foreign-credentialed health care workers in their constituency who would value these supports.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you to the member from the Conservative side for the question. We all have foreign-trained professionals in our constituencies. In my family, many of us were foreign-trained professionals before coming here.

I want to say this: Of course, the Ontario NDP wants to support foreign-trained professionals. We've been demanding this from the government for quite a while, and I must say thank you to our member from Scarborough Southwest for her trailblazing legislation that addresses just that: foreign-trained professionals and making sure they can get the Canada work experience that they need as soon as possible. But you cannot do one cute thing in a bill that's disastrous. This is called an omnibus bill for a reason. The government does this time and time again: one good aspect; the rest of it not so good.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to congratulate the member for Toronto—St. Paul's on her remarks on Bill 106. I wanted to ask her opinion on something that we have heard repeatedly from the government side, who says that schedule 7 of this bill is necessary to provide that pay bump for PSWs and DSWs and the retention bonus for nurses.

From her review of this legislation and her knowledge of the way things work in this place, does the member agree that legislation was necessary, or does she think that the government could simply have made that pandemic pay increase permanent and provided that retention bonus for nurses or something for nurses without this anti-democratic and unconstitutional bill?

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you to our wonderful pay equity critic from London Centre. The answer is simple: We did not need this particular omnibus bill. We did not need this wage-suppressing, anti-worker, anti-woman, quite frankly, legislation. We did not need this to ensure that our front-line health care workers received their permanent wage enhancement.

Please let me say on the record, Speaker: This has been a demand for workers for a very long time, and the pittance some of them received—some people still didn't receive their pandemic pay. They still haven't. So it is very convenient for this to be happening moments before the election.

But Ontarians and the folks of St. Paul's are not fooled. They will not be bamboozled. They know that this government is not in it for workers.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues.

Hon. Jane McKenna: Is the member opposite aware of everything our government has done to support women? Is she aware that we have provided wage enhancements for PSWs or that we have provided a \$5-million RAISE Grant to help Black and racialized women to be entrepreneurs? I'm just curious if she's aware of those.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Notably, the government has promoted the idea in the lead-up to this bill that this bill would usher in permanent wage bumps for PSWs and DSWs, but, as the associate minister for women's issues—the irony—knows, in fact, no class of employee is specified here and all the details are left to regulation.

Again, wonderful speaking points, excellent headlines in the papers, but when you look at the leads, when you look at the fine print, we are seeing a government that is making it actually possible to pit workers against each other and to pick and choose who gets these enhancements. They're not all getting the enhancements.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member for Brampton North.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I want to thank the member for her speech talking about Bill 106, the Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness Act.

I just want to shift gears a little bit and talk about PPE and how the government has mismanaged the supply and the rollout of PPE. In Brampton, there's a company called Avocet, and originally their role was to make parts for airplanes, but, of course, with the airline industry at a standstill they had to pivot to start making PPE. They started making PPE, and the goal was to distribute the PPE to industries and to schools. However, they were at a roadblock, because the government was not utilizing them. They were utilizing other countries and cheaper markets.

My question to you is, how do you feel that the government could have better utilized Canadian companies in resourcing and using PPE?

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you to our member from Brampton North for that excellent question and for reminding me that this bill also laughs in the face of many front-line health care workers who were desperate, Speaker—desperate for PPE. I spoke to nurses from my

riding of St. Paul's who were in tears, telling me that they were being forced, because they had no products, they had no PPE, to go from one room to the next using the same PPE for days.

The reality is, this government should have worked much faster once this pandemic hit. They could have made products here in Ontario, here in Canada. We had fashion designers demanding a chance to make PPE for this province. The province sat on its hands as many folks had no PPE during this pandemic, and some folks still are paying for PPE in St. Paul's, as we speak, out of their own pockets.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member for Niagara West.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the member opposite and her address this afternoon.

I'm wondering if she could speak a little bit about the importance of the expansion to the clinical education grant. What we've seen is that the funds which remained fixed and were not indexed to inflation or program growth are now increasing by \$41.4 million for the clinical education grant, which supports the clinical education component of nursing programs, publicly assisted colleges and universities, expanding laboratory capacity, supports and hands-on learning. So my question to the member opposite is: Does she support the expansion of the medical education grant by \$41 million?

0930

Ms. Jill Andrew: I sound like a broken record. I am willing to review, I am willing to consider any piece of legislation that is making a meaningful investment in the lives of Ontarians, especially those who are most vulnerable. Bill 106 does not do that. It does not gain the attention of our community in that it is not helping our community's most vulnerable: those who have been on the front lines, those who have been protecting us.

This bill needed to do more, and instead, what it did is laughed in the face of women over generations who have been fighting for gender equity, who have been fighting for pay equity. And they had the nerve to do this right at this period of time in history, as we're acknowledging Equal Pay Day.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): We have time for a 30-second question and a 30-second response. I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I honestly thought it was their turn, Speaker. But that's fine. We'll ask a question.

It's kind of ironic that the member says that we're waiting so long to bring the bill forward, given the fact that we're in the pandemic and these are the lessons learned from the pandemic.

Also, the member is incorrect. Of course, we have brought back all PPE manufacturing here because of the great work of the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. Thankfully, he's giving a speech next and he can really highlight all of the good work.

Speaker, I don't really have a question. It's more a comment that I have as opposed to a question.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Response?

Hon. Paul Calandra: No, I actually don't need a response from the member opposite. I just wanted to highlight that we are doing it for our PSWs. We're giving them a pay raise. We are ensuring that PPE is done right here in the province of Ontario—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Answer?

Interjection.

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

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity. Look, this was a perfect segue, listening to that commentary on the PPE status—

Interjection: Editorial.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: The editorial, for sure. So I'm going to jump a few pages into my thoughts and talk about PPE.

The member has to realize that when the pandemic first struck, we, like the rest of the world, discovered that other jurisdictions, like the US and others, were going to hold back their PPE from us. And the very first week, Premier Ford said, "Never again will we be caught without the proper PPE here in Ontario." And so, immediately, we put the \$50-million Ontario Together Fund out there, and companies in Ontario—it was like a call to arms. They answered the call. They pivoted their companies: companies like Linamar, who make parts for 10,000 life-saving ventilators; companies like Canada Goose, who stopped making coats and began making gowns for hospitals; companies who were making injection-moulded plastics that made face shields for our front-line health care workers; companies who were sewing and made masks, and millions and then billions of masks.

And then we saw various companies—I'm going to read from a couple of these, because they were so exciting, these opportunities that we saw. The companies that we saw—I remember the very first one, Virox in Oakville, a company that turned from their injection-moulding to making these tubs with sanitized wipes. Twenty million of those things were spiralling through their factory. That's the kind of thing that we needed here in Ontario.

We saw Abatement Technologies down in Fort Erie invest \$20 million in Fort Erie to be able to make air filters right here in Ontario.

Ophardt Hygiene in Beamsville: This was a \$7-million investment. MPP Sam Oosterhoff and I were there to cut a ribbon at their place. They produce these sanitized soap dispensers. It was 160,000 of them that were made there.

Myant in Etobicoke: The member from Sault Ste. Marie introduced us to them. They make a fabric, so they make undergarments, but in them are woven technology to be able to send your biostatistics to your health provider. It's fascinating. Whether it's your blood oxygen level, your blood pressure, all kinds of your vitals—imagine that. Seniors can stay in their homes and have this Myant technology wrapped around them. It was a phenomenal \$2-million investment.

When I think about Kawartha Ethanol putting a \$20-million ethanol plant in MPP Scott's riding, it was a

spectacular opportunity to grow corn in the area, to harvest that corn and make ethanol out of it to make hand sanitizer.

Or just in Minister Clark's riding, Greenfield Global, a \$75-million investment: They've become Canada's largest producer of high-grade ethanol for hand sanitizer. They're pumping out 114 million litres of hand sanitizer. While we're in Minister Clark's riding, at the other end of it, in Brockville, of course, 3M produced the vaunted 3M N95 mask—made right here in Ontario, Speaker. Those are the products we're shipping.

Kontrol BioCloud in London—I remember going down there—\$4 million. It's a real-time blood analyzer to measure the COVID virus in the air. It was a really spectacular and important investment.

Siemens in Ottawa: a \$20-million investment to do a test card. It is a way to analyze your blood monitoring. Speaker, the list goes on and on—pages.

There's \$50 million to Dimachem—this was my favourite trip because now, in Canada, for the first time, they make Pine-Sol here in Windsor. Who doesn't love Pine-Sol? It's made here now, Speaker. These are the kinds of things that we were on-shoring.

I don't know what province that member lives in, but I can tell you, I can stand here for the rest of the day talking about companies who make PPE here in Ontario. Yes, like many other jurisdictions in the world, we shipped those complicated PPE to Asia to be made, and we went on with other things. Never again, Speaker. We went from almost zero PPE to, this morning, making 74% of all the PPE we buy in Ontario right here in Canada, and most of it here in Ontario. And thanks to that great minister of MGCS, we are about to go to 92% of all PPE that we buy—

Hon. Ross Romano: Ninety-three.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Ninety-three per cent? It's 93%. Thanks to the Ministry of Government Services, that's where we're going. That's where we're headed. We're headed to 93%.

I can tell you that there are other programs that we've put in place, the regional development programs, and through those programs we have \$100 million to invest, and we have been putting it from one end of the province to the other, all through. From Windsor to Cornwall, company after company after company is making products here in Ontario, the medtech products that we're seeing.

Just a couple of months ago, we put in AMIC, the advanced manufacturing and innovation competitiveness program. We've had unbelievable—I can't tell you how exciting it is to leaf through these applications and study them every night. You'll hear of these awards in the next days and weeks from all of the members.

We also put in an Ontario venture capital program, and it's a big part of our life sciences venture, so I'm going to move from PPE and talk to the bigger picture now: life sciences. I'll get back to our Life Sciences Venture Capital Fund, but I do want to say that our life sciences sector is the largest in Canada. We have 66,000 people in the province of Ontario who wake up every morning and go to work in a job in life sciences. About 54% of all Canadian life sciences jobs are right here in Ontario, and we

provide almost \$60 billion in revenue, about 60% of Canada's total.

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So over the last year and a half, we've seen some big global players invest really serious dollars. I recall sitting in an office in Paris with Sanofi and talking about the possibility of them making a massive expansion in Ontario. One year later, just before the pandemic, we saw Sanofi announce a \$1-billion investment to make Fluzone. It's the flu vaccine for seniors.

It's not just because I turned a senior last year that we fought so hard for this; it's also because they brought along an additional \$500 million into Ontario for research and development. This is a \$1.5-billion investment. Then we saw Resilience, with a \$400-million investment. Roche Pharmaceuticals made a \$500-million investment, hiring 500 engineers in Mississauga. Some \$1.4 billion of that is going toward building new facilities just to develop and manufacture innovative medicine and vaccines. This is exactly how we're going to strengthen our industry.

Because of all of this investment attraction—we've been doing them one by one by one—we have now recently announced a life sciences strategy, Speaker. This is the first provincial strategy in the life sciences sector in more than a decade. This is a \$15-million life sciences innovation program and this is going to help position the sector for long-term growth, for more investment, for job creation, for success and, quite frankly, at the end of the day, for what it's all about: better health outcomes for the people of Ontario.

Our strategy now sets a lofty goal. Remember, we have 66,000 people who work in life sciences. Our goal is to have 85,000 people working in life sciences by 2030. That is an exciting and lofty goal that we fully expect to achieve, growing Ontario's bio manufacturing footprint, building more—thanks to the minister of MGCS—domestic PPE supply chain resiliency, so that, as Premier Ford said, never again will it happen to Ontario. We're pretty locked in that it's not going to happen so far and with the changes that we know are coming, which I'll talk about in a moment, we know we're going to hit all of these goals.

We're going to boost the commercialization capacity of our small and medium enterprises. That means through our regional development programs and through our advanced manufacturing program, we're going to give them the tools they need to take it from research to development to commercialization. That's a big part of the plan, but an even more important part is, we're adopting Ontario innovations to improve health care.

What does that mean, in English? A lot of times companies, whether they're worldwide companies or Ontario companies, can't break through, can't get an order from Ontario Health. It's a big organization. They have a lot of systems, they're buying \$60 billion, \$70 billion. So we set up Supply Ontario. Supply Ontario is like a mini Amazon, if you can call it that: click and buy. Why? Why should each of our offices buy pencils? Why should each of our offices buy furniture? Why can't we buy it centrally from

Supply Ontario and click on what you need? That is basically, in a nutshell, what we've done.

Supply Ontario has a mandate: \$29 billion is what their budget is. They're tasked to buy \$29 billion worth of supplies. Now, thanks to the associate minister of MEDJCAT, her red tape bill put in place legislation that a minimum \$3 billion of Supply Ontario's budget must be bought in Ontario—made-in-Ontario products. That is the real difference and that will help these innovations come to commercialization.

The Minister of Government and Consumer Services also put part of that bill together. It's called BOBI, the Building Ontario Businesses Initiative. That means that we are going to help our Ontario companies sell to the Ontario government. It's all within our international thresholds, so we are keeping our worldwide partners happy; but we are taking \$3 billion to make sure that when there's research done in Ontario, we can have those products developed in Ontario, and Ontario Health and other agencies can buy those Ontario-made goods.

In fact, take it out of health for a second. As we, the province of Ontario, repurchase our automotive fleets, every single Ontario fleet vehicle will be a made-in-Ontario electric vehicle. That's what you must buy from Supply Ontario. Those are the kinds of changes we're making that are going to ensure that our Ontario-made program flourishes, that our life sciences sector flourishes, that never again will we be caught without PPE, made-in-Ontario PPE.

Today, we make masks, gowns, face shields, wipes, hand sanitizer, ventilators. We make all of those products right here. There are one or two products left on the list, and I'm pretty sure that the Minister of MGCS has a couple of tricks up his sleeve yet to get that from 74% to 93%. I'm very excited to hear more from that minister.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Another sneak peek.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: It is a sneak preview of what's happening.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Like a cliffhanger.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: It is a cliffhanger. We're very eager to hear more news from that minister.

Hon. Steve Clark: He's very excited.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Yes, I can imagine. He should be now.

Speaker, as you can see, our vision is to establish Ontario as a global leader in biomanufacturing and life sciences. This is incredibly important.

Not only did we announce our life sciences strategy, but we did it at McMaster University with a phenomenal company called Omnia Bio. Omnia Bio is investing \$580 million—\$580 million—at McMaster University for a gene and cell therapy facility. That is the kind of success that we're seeing in Ontario, where we've created a climate for companies to come to Ontario.

We've reduced the cost of doing business by \$7 billion a year. That's why Sanofi, that's why Resilience, that's why Roche have invested \$2 billion, and that's why Omnia Bio announced last week the \$580-million investment in Hamilton. It's the first of its kind and will now be the biggest, obviously, in Canada.

It's really interesting that our Invest Ontario, the agency that we set up over the last year—this, too, was their first investment. It's a \$40-million loan that was made after good due diligence. Following the framework that we developed, they've invested \$40 million into this Omnia Bio program. We're going to continue making the right investments to support critical industries in our life sciences sector. But I can tell you again, they came here because we lowered the cost of doing business. It isn't just the auto sector that was attracted by that; the life sciences sector has asked us for the same thing.

WSIB was reduced by 50%, saving \$2.5 billion annually without touching the benefits. An accelerated capital cost was put in, much like the States, and it helps us compete with them—except our taxes are lower, so it makes us have an advantage. You can write off your equipment in-year, which saves the business community \$1 billion a year.

Our commercial and industrial hydro rates were reduced by an average of 15%. We took the price of the Ontario government's share of your local property taxes and reduced that by \$450 million. The associate minister of MEDJCT has put several bills forward; the President of the Treasury Board has also, in his previous role, put several bills forward—eight bills in total of red tape and burden reduction, saving businesses \$400 million. Altogether, it's a savings of \$7 billion annually, and that is why we're seeing the growth that we're seeing.

It didn't happen by accident. We heard loud and clear from business—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Did they vote for it?
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Hon. Victor Fedeli: Sadly, to the member's point, the opposition has voted against every single one of our bills that have reduced the cost of doing business and saved so many tens of thousands—and in fact, it appears to be hundreds of thousands—of jobs.

Speaker, think about it: In our first two years in office, we created the business climate for 300,000 new jobs to come into the province of Ontario, and through the pandemic, throughout those two years, more than 200,000 further new jobs came into the province of Ontario. This morning, we have 500,000 men and women who went to work at a job that did not exist when we took office four years ago—500,000, with 200,000 throughout the pandemic. These are the kinds of investments that are being made. We're supporting them in every way that we possibly can.

That Ontario Together Fund that we put \$50 million in? It was so successful we put a second \$50 million into that; \$100 million into the Regional Development Program to help these businesses, to spur them on, to hire people and hire people and hire people every single day. The advanced manufacturing, \$40 million: That is going to hire hundreds of people. We'll hear about those in the next few days.

The final thing I would say in the life sciences sector is the Ontario venture capital programming. This is \$65 million of venture capital that is dedicated to the life

sciences sector. This is something that we know, through our stakeholders—we've had all of the meetings with them. We know that our \$65 million in venture capital will leverage about a half a billion dollars in investments. Take Omnia Bio, that fabulous new company that's going to employ so many people in Hamilton, and add that number again. That's what's coming down the pipe.

We've partnered with MaRS. We've partnered with OMERS. We've got something called the Graphite investment accelerator fund. It, too, has money in it to help these businesses grow and hire people. It's all about the hiring. That's why we're standing up here to fight for the working people.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I would like to ask the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade a question about the constitutionality of Bill 106. During committee input on this bill, legal experts told MPPs that the bill is unconstitutional. It violates section 2(d) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as section 15. It overrides collective bargaining rights and attacks women workers, equality and pay equity rights.

Did this government get a legal opinion on the constitutionality of Bill 106 before they decided to ram it through on the eve of an election?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: We give every single bill the same vetting, one by one by one, and I certainly hope that this particular bill, with all of the resources it will provide for working families—I hope that you will support it.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the minister for his speech this morning that laid out so clearly the kinds of things that we have done in our time in office to make Ontario the great economic engine once again.

And I really appreciate when you came to my riding and visited SRB Technologies and presented them with funding to produce face shields. SRB Technologies primarily produces tritium, emergency tritium lighting, a lot of it for the armed forces, but they were able to pivot, at your request, to be able to produce PPE. You've laid out just some of the things that we've done to produce PPE.

But I do have to ask you a question, Minister. I think I heard it in your speech. Are you telling me that on every one of these initiatives, the opposition voted against them each and every time? I have to ask you that, Minister.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I guess the short answer would be, yes, they voted against the funding that was for life-saving PPE production. They voted against it every time. They voted against the funding that supported businesses. They voted against the funding that brought us through the pandemic. In every case, they voted no.

I can tell you, to the minister, I had a really great visit with you at SRB. I learned so much about what you end up using from—I call it the leftover components of our nuclear world. These are signs that in the pitch black, they light up. I never saw anything like that. So I was very excited to be able to—

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm getting my face done in one.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Yes, I can imagine.

I can tell you, it was an exciting trip to see our money hiring people, buying brand new equipment and putting people to work.

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

Ms. Jill Andrew: I want to make it clear and remind Ontarians that it was this government, the Conservative government, that literally was saying no—they were literally saying no—to workers, our front-line health care workers, who were dying because they did not have access to N95 masks during much of this pandemic.

It's one thing to pat yourself on the shoulder weeks before the election, but call up any of the people who have dead family members, who weren't able to have masks because your government screwed up on distribution of masks, and tell them that there's somehow a celebration in this bill—too little, too late.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I appreciate the opportunity. Again, this pandemic was a horrible worldwide tragedy. The moment it happened, the moment the Americans and others said, "No, everybody is protecting their stock," Premier Ford stood up and announced a call to arms. He said, "We need your help" to every industry.

I can tell you, in North Bay, families were sewing masks together until, as they said, the big companies could get producing. This is the kind of Ontario spirit that Premier Ford talked about, and that Ontario spirit shone every single day, Speaker. As I said, now here we are: 74% of all PPE is proudly made here in the province of Ontario, including the 3M N95 masks.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the associate minister of children and women's services.

Hon. Jane McKenna: I just wanted to mention, when the minister and I sat in opposition, every business—it was 325,000 manufacturing companies that were gone. I think it was Maclean's magazine that wrote that businesses that were here were so worried about the government that was in at the time that there was \$500 million they weren't reinvesting in their own businesses, because they were so unsure with what was happening here with the province.

If you could just elaborate a bit more on how our economy has turned around, how people are investing back in Ontario because they are so confident with this government and what we've been doing to where we are today, even with the tragedy of the pandemic. And I wanted to point out that since the pandemic, pre-pandemic, we have 36,600 women who have gotten jobs in the last two years.

Could you elaborate a bit more on a few more companies that have invested here?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Well, I can certainly do that, Speaker. We saw \$12 billion in auto alone, just one sector now; in 17 months, \$12 billion alone.

The Premier and I were at General Motors in Oshawa a couple of weeks ago. They have two shifts, 1,800 men and women—and I say men and women because 50% of the employees on the shop floor at General Motors are women

today, which is a spectacular move with General Motors. They are going to 2,600 people. They are putting a third shift on. They're moving from the heavy-duty Silverado, adding the light-duty Silverado. So we've now got a great announcement coming out of there with another group of 800 employees.

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

Mr. Gurattan Singh: Let's once again talk about the real party of no. The Conservatives have said no to permanent paid sick days, no to lowering car insurance rates, no to building another hospital in Brampton. But what did they say yes to? They have said yes to giving \$1 billion away to the 407 highway, the private corporation behind the 407. They said yes to giving more rapid tests to private schools than to public schools. They've said yes to whatever their insider friends and buddies want.

The Conservative Party is the real party of no. They're the party of no when it comes to helping Ontarians when they need it the most.

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Hon. Victor Fedeli: Well, you know, if we want to talk yes and no, we can hear a lot of noes coming over from the other side. We can hear a no to the Minister of Long-Term Care's 30,000 new beds and 28,000 reconditioned beds—58,000 altogether. We heard a big no coming out of that side.

We heard no to every single one of these programs, whether it's the municipal affairs and housing program—we heard a no. Whether it was anything to do with the Minister of Government Services who's sitting here—we heard a no. We heard a no at every step of every single business investment that we wanted to make and ended up making that saved the lives of so many families and their businesses. We heard a big no.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'm glad that the minister is speaking and I'm glad that I get to ask a question after that, because I think you really see the difference between the Conservatives and the NDP. The NDP, of course, believe that people should work for government, right? That's what government is all about: You should hand over everything to government, and they know best.

Whereas we believe that government should be working for people, and the difference when government works for people is hundreds of thousands of jobs coming back. So I wonder if the minister could highlight additional reasons why people are making these investments in the province of Ontario, despite a global pandemic; why we are doing so much better than any other jurisdiction in North America in bringing jobs back to this province.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I could talk all day about these companies, these mom-and-pop businesses, these family-owned businesses, these companies that have grown. I visited a company just south of Ottawa, Beau-Roc. They make 14 dump truck bodies a day. Well, they're spending \$14 million to double the size of their facility and make 28

dump trucks a day, because that's how much business they've got.

Ontario's economy is just sizzling: 500,000 new jobs. We visited a company in Oxford that makes stroopwafels—it's a cookie; you can buy them at Metro—

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

I recognize the member from Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to be able to weigh in on Bill 106, the Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness Act, which the government has brought forward. Once again, we have a great title, but inside this bill are severe damages to the workers of this province. The schedules inside of this bill will hurt workers in this province more than it will help them. I know this government has claimed that this bill is about providing PSW workers an increase to their wages; we heard the hype for quite a few days as we were waiting for this bill to come about the PSW increase. But yet, when we see the bill, there's no actual mention of the PSW workers and the concerns that we have seen when it comes to equal pay. The pay equity amendments in here are quite concerning.

So I would really like to thank the many workers' unions who have come forward regarding this bill. The bill was dropped in a very short time. It did not leave a lot of time for people to have the opportunity to weigh into it, but workers, knowing this government, went through this bill very quickly and were able to find the poison pill unfortunately within it, and that is definitely when it comes to pay equity.

And so I want to thank the member for London West, who did the lead on this bill and has truly been a champion for workers throughout this pandemic. We've seen her come forward with the paid sick days and several opportunities that the government could have taken and really done well for the workers of this province, but instead they continuously voted against those options, those reforms, those real, true benefits for the workers of this province. And let's not forget that mainly women workers—and we heard yesterday, on Equal Pay Day, the attacks that women feel, women in the work field, how they feel about this government's proposals and legislation that they put forward on a regular basis that attack women workers. The government can deny it and say that we're fearmongering, but it's the women who have brought these issues forward very clearly.

This started with Bill 124, which, as you know, Speaker, was a 1% pay increase hold since 2019 for mainly a high profession of women: nurses, DSWs, PSWs, teachers. People who worked in any public sector were faced with that 1% pay hold, which goes completely against inflation and the cost of living for what we've definitely seen. It has held those workers quite tightly there, and it's something that they're not happy about.

We've seen that affect our nurses in hospitals, our nurses in community, PSWs, people who have burnt out and who have worked so hard throughout this pandemic, being told that their collective bargaining rights are being taken away and that they don't have the ability to bargain

as we have throughout this province for many years. That was a major hit on those workers. They felt that. And now they're seeing, once again, within this legislation how they will be affected again.

Pay equity has been something that the Liberals failed to achieve, and now we're seeing the Conservative government just buckle down on that even further by putting legislation and wording within this bill that would say that any increase of money would go towards pay equity, which is not what pay equity is supposed to do.

Yesterday being Equal Pay Day, women were very clear. They actually held a debate last night to be able to raise the issues of equity in the workplace for women across this province. It's really unfortunate that the Premier did not show up to that debate. He decided that he was too busy to show up to talk about the needs of our female workers in this province. The other leaders were there, and I believe they had a good conversation. I believe wholeheartedly that our leader, the leader of the official opposition, definitely came out on top, showing that she definitely understands the workers' needs in this province and how to move women forward. It's unfortunate that the Premier didn't see that it was an important issue to stand up to, and I'm sure the women of this province will hold him accountable for his attacks against women's wages in this upcoming election.

I want to do a quote from the Ontario Nurses' Association about this bill.

“Premier Ford's Bill 106 further dismantles workers' and women's equality rights....”

“With Equal Pay Day on April 12, Bill 106 does nothing to close the gender pay gap because it erodes workers' rights and does not address systemic gender discrimination. In fact, the bill is an attack on fundamental pay equity rights and gender equality.... Premier Ford is using this bill to avoid paying out court-won pay equity compensation to ONA members.”

That sounds like an attack on women. That sounds like an attack on workers who have worked so hard in this province forever—being nurses, they are the core and centre of our health care system—but mainly throughout this pandemic, who have worked tirelessly day in and day out in the worst possible environment that they could have been in: in hospitals watching people die without family members, be sick and really in an unknown environment, as they were trying to work their way through that. I've definitely seen the works of that throughout the pandemic in my riding, at Grace Villa.

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I know this bill also talks about PPE, and we've just heard from the minister about making sure that we have PPE going forward, and I'm truly pleased to hear that. We definitely need to ensure that we are ready for a pandemic—and I know schedule 1 addresses this—because we did not see that when it came to this pandemic.

In 2017, I believe it was the Auditor General who was already releasing reports and audits on the province's emergency management system and warned them then—which was the Liberal government, in 2017—that things

were not in place, that supplies were expired and that there were huge concerns: “One of the critical objectives for the timely implementation of our recommendations from 2017 was for the province to be better prepared for the possibility of a major emergency, which occurred with the COVID-19 pandemic.”

So the AG has spoken out very clearly about this. We can definitely take this back to the previous government, under the Liberals, allowing our prepared emergency response to be inadequate, but we cannot forget that this government took place in 2018 and already knew that there were concerns from the Auditor General, and they did nothing to address it. So they can blame the Liberals all they want about not being prepared, and about the expired PPE and equipment that was required, but this government is just as much at fault.

Like I said, I’m happy to see that there’s new preparedness that’s going to be available, that there are new companies making masks, and I am so grateful to all of those folks who decided to take business into ensuring that we are prepared for PPE protective measures going forward. But we’ve also heard from many companies that have not been able to get into that procurement plan, and that are sitting on the sidelines and have products available that they’re not able to get to market—so lots of concerns there.

One of the schedules talks about—and I want to get on this, because I know we’ve had a lot—where is it? Which one is it? Sorry. The Regulated Health Professions Act: again, something that’s a really great measure to ensure that foreign workers are able to get their credentials quicker in this province, something New Democrats have been fighting for for years. We brought forward a bill—thank you to the member from Scarborough Southwest—Bill 98, which she tabled in March. This government did nothing to address that bill. It’s sitting in committee and wasting time, when we have a plan right there to help foreign workers.

And when we talk about foreign workers, we have to also remember that previous legislation that was brought forward by this government actually hurts those same workers who are trying to get into the health care workforce. We have people who come to this country—I know I’ve been in many a taxi where those taxi drivers are doctors and scientists and engineers, and they were not able to get into their workforce. Those same workers are now those same gig workers who are working at Uber and Just Eat, and Bill 88 actually takes away money from those same workers.

So in one bill they’re saying that they’re trying to lift foreign workers up, and in the other bill—of course, New Democrats voted against that bill, proudly, because it hurts gig workers in this province. The government needs to maybe have a fulsome plan that would actually work for people, instead of on one hand talking about giving them something, and on the other hand they just clearly took it away from them. We heard from many gig workers across this province of how Bill 88 will affect their bottom line and the—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I apologize for interrupting the member. You will have time to finish your debate at another time.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS’ STATEMENTS

MEMBER FOR TORONTO–ST. PAUL’S

Ms. Jill Andrew: This is my last member’s statement in this House for this session. I want to take the opportunity to sincerely thank my community of Toronto–St. Paul’s for giving me the opportunity to stand in this House, to work hard for you, to work with you, to laugh, to cry with you, all the various emotions that we have experienced together over the last four years. For trusting me with your stories, for trusting me with your hope for a better future, I want to say thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I want to thank my beloved partner, Aisha; my mother; my friends, who are literally my family; my colleagues; my staff, present and past; and the hundreds of volunteers who have helped build our NDP movement in Toronto–St. Paul’s. This is an experience I will never, ever, ever forget.

And as we all go into our ridings, as we all get into election mode, may we please remember the crucial need of a social safety net without holes. We have seen the folks who have fallen through the holes disproportionately, especially during this pandemic, but long before. Every single one of us, as elected officials or simply as citizens in our communities, must prioritize ensuring that we have a strong social safety net. And we cannot—we must refuse—to use austerity measures as an excuse for doing what is necessary and what is right to protect Ontarians across this wonderful province.

CADETS

Mr. Toby Barrett: On the heels of the 105th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, April 9 to 12, I wish to report to the House that An Act to proclaim Ontario Cadets Week passed final reading and was enshrined in law Monday, April 11, upon receiving royal assent. Ontario’s cadets will now receive ongoing recognition for their outstanding service to the province beginning this October.

Ontario Cadets Week will commence the first Saturday every year in October. The week will highlight cadets, their programs and the volunteers, as corps and squadrons begin their local training programs, traditionally in the fall. The timing ensures there will be no interference with the support cadets provide for our veterans for Remembrance Day events and ceremonies in November.

In Canada, we have a dynamic cadet program. It exists with numerous corps and squadrons. The Air Cadet League of Canada, Ontario Provincial Committee; the Army Cadet League of Canada, Ontario; and the Navy League of Canada, in partnership with the Canadian Forces, provide programs for air, army and sea cadets 12 to 18 years of age. The navy league also sponsors the Navy

League Cadets, a separate program for young people nine to 12.

We now have an opportunity in October to provide our support to these young people who support us.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: As we approach the eve of the final budget before we dissolve Parliament, I want to hopefully reflect on where we have been and where we need to go forward. I am hopeful that our older adult population get the solutions they deserve after fighting tooth and nail through this pandemic.

We have an aging population in Niagara. We are one of the top three oldest communities in the entire country. This is not just numbers on the page; these are residents, our mothers, our fathers. They are the ones who built this great province from the ground up and gave us the tools to succeed. How can they be so neglected by the generation they raised?

It should go without saying: Seniors deserve respect and deserve care. That is why the official opposition has fought so hard for hospital funding, for policies that support our worn-out front-line health care staff, that have pushed back against cost-cutting in these areas. It is why home care needs to be revamped in this province. Seniors deserve to age with dignity in their homes, and if they move into a nursing home, that home should provide four hours of care today, not kick the can down the road.

I am hopeful that this next budget will be the budget that will finally close the gaps for seniors and older adults in my community—one that they have been waiting for and one they definitely deserve. I want it to be one I can take back to them and wholeheartedly support.

1020

2022 NEW HOLLAND CANADIAN UNDER-21 CURLING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Late last month, the city of Stratford and the Stratford Country Club hosted the 2022 New Holland Canadian Under-21 Curling Championships. The best junior curlers from across Canada came together in a display of skill and teamwork, and they did not disappoint.

The event took place at the Stratford Rotary Complex over seven days, and 18 teams took part. These events are so important for host communities for the community spirit they build as well as the economic benefits they generate. Officials say the curling championships was expected to generate over \$1.5 million in revenue, including meals and hotel rooms. It's exactly what our area needed.

Again, thank you to the staff, volunteers, the city of Stratford and the Stratford Country Club for cohosting this event.

Speaker, as we are approaching the end of this Parliament, I want to conclude my statement today with a very important message: Hurry hard!

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I'd like to highlight some priorities that the city of Brampton's delegation shared with me last week.

The city of Brampton has grown significantly in population, yet it has not yet received any significant public transit funding from the federal or the provincial governments for over 10 years. The last major provincial commitment was for the Züm bus rapid transit service in 2007, for which the federal and provincial governments each provided \$95 million and the city contributed well over \$95 million.

Between 2009 and 2019, Brampton accounted for 70% of the population growth within the Peel region, and Brampton's transit ridership doubled from 25 to over 50 per capita. Each person in Brampton is taking twice as many rides per year compared to a decade ago.

Brampton has seen the highest increase in ridership in the GTA over the last decade; however, it remains significantly underfunded. The city of Brampton is asking for provincial funding for an LRT along Main Street, from Steeles to Brampton GO, worth \$850 million. This is a compelling candidate for Ontario's investments in key infrastructure. It would help Bramptonians have a reliable alternative to travelling by car, reducing carbon emissions.

SENIOR CITIZENS' HOUSING

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: It is always an honour to rise in this House on behalf of my constituents of Scarborough–Guildwood.

Today, it is with concern that I acknowledge an issue that has been deepening in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood and all across the province of Ontario. The tragic stories and scenes from long-term-care homes in 2020 caused the collective attention of Ontarians to turn to our seniors and how they live. Today, two years later, the income and affordability crisis faced by many Ontario seniors seems only to have gotten worse.

An example in my own riding is that of Naomi, a senior who reached out to my office for help. Naomi is on the list for affordable housing, but she has been told that the wait will be 10 to 15 years.

At close to 70 years of age, this is a harsh reality that she shares with far too many others in Ontario. With only her CPP and OAS, she had been surviving by renting a basement unit, but the pandemic forced the homeowners to sell.

Naomi's request for assistance in finding a place made one thing very clear: This woman, who spent her working years helping others and who now simply wants to live with dignity, cannot afford to do so in the province of Ontario. With desperation in her voice, Naomi explained that she's priced out of Scarborough, that her monthly income is not enough for even a studio. But even where rooms are going for \$900 a month, seniors cannot afford this.

Seniors matter, Naomi insists. Seniors are members of society, and yet now, it's just a reality that is escaping them.

Speaker, these are the Ontarians who built the province. As provincial leaders, we have a moral duty to ensure that every senior can live with dignity. I hope to see that in the budget when it is tabled.

JIM JONES
KARL MOHER

Mr. Dave Smith: Today, I'd like to express my thanks to two individuals for their contributions to public service.

Jim Jones, affectionately referred to as J. Murray Jones, was elected to Douro-Dummer council back in 1998. He served as a councillor, deputy reeve and reeve, when it was still called that, as well as mayor in Douro-Dummer. He has also been the warden of Peterborough county for an astounding five terms. J. has spent a great deal of his time serving on the Eastern Ontario Regional Network as well and he was instrumental in the expansion of cellular phone service and high-speed Internet throughout eastern Ontario.

Serving alongside J. for just slightly longer has been his long-time friend Karl Moher. Karl was first elected to Douro council in 1994, prior to amalgamation, and has continued on long after Douro amalgamated with Dummer. Karl has served as a councillor and as the deputy mayor for Douro-Dummer, and, as deputy mayor, he has had a seat at the county council table. Karl's accounting background has meant that he has always done a tremendous amount of research on any topic, and you can be assured that when he speaks up about something, it has been well thought out.

J., Karl, thank you for all that you've given to our community. Your combined 50-plus years of experience and knowledge will be missed. But I know that you're leaving our community in good shape for those who will follow, and I know you're always a phone call away for advice and the odd bad joke.

PROVINCIAL ELECTION

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm pleased to have the opportunity, which may be my last statement in this House in the 42nd Parliament, to thank my community for the amazing experience that I've had as I've been here at Queen's Park over the past 10 years. I am looking forward to the election and I have been participating in that already. Talking to my neighbours and talking to my community has definitely been an uplifting experience.

Life here at Queen's Park can be quite difficult with the arguments and the animosity that happens between parties and between different thought processes, but I know, at the end of the day, that we will work towards the best interests of the people who we serve. I know when I speak to my community, they're highly concerned about the high cost of housing, the high cost of auto insurance and the high cost of gas. These are some things I hear on a regular basis. They're very concerned about their children's education and ensuring that there are educational assistants within the process. They're visiting food banks that they've never

had to visit before, Speaker. I hope that, come this election, we can definitely show Ontarians that we can do things differently.

I want to take a quick moment to thank everyone, and to say good luck to the people who are not running again in this election and wish them well in their next endeavours.

RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL
SCHNEERSON

Mrs. Robin Martin: I'm taking this opportunity to mark an important occasion for members of my community of Eglinton–Lawrence. Yesterday, April 12, was a very special day for the Jewish organization known as Chabad, which now boasts over 5,000 community organizations around the world. On April 12, thousands visited the Ohel, the resting place of the spiritual leader of the movement, the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, on the 120th anniversary of his birth.

The Rebbe took a people decimated by the Holocaust and inspired them to believe in God's providence again. The Rebbe's teachings impart a sense of responsibility to God and to one another. He was a leader who exemplified true selflessness and whose altruism inspired others and continues to do so.

This great modern Jewish sage was born in Ukraine, a country that today is an example of moral clarity and strength in the world, a country where Chabad's humanitarian effort is nothing short of heroic. The Rebbe engineered a global Jewish renaissance committed to caring for the spiritual needs of all Jews wherever they could be found, including here in Toronto.

Today, Jews around the world are influenced by the Rebbe through his thousands of emissaries, through his teachings and through his actions. It was not only the Rebbe's birthday yesterday, but it was also a day of virtue for Chabad in my community, across Canada and around the world.

1030

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Introduction of visitors? Introduction of visitors? Oh, the Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know there's a lot of motion here and it's hard to see all the way down to the end.

I want to introduce Tyler Jensen. He's the head of litigation in the ministry office. He has been working like a dog all through COVID. I'm really pleased to have him here, for his first time, to the Legislature.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: We have a few friends in the gallery today. We have Angela Ranger and David Gibbons from Ottawa—welcome.

And we have—I'm going to say from North Bay but I know she's going to say she's from Ottawa—Stephanie Delorme.

SPECIAL REPORT, AUDITOR GENERAL

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I need to inform the House that the following document has been tabled: a special report entitled Preliminary Perspective on Laurentian University, from the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Sara Singh: My first question is for the Premier. Yesterday, the Premier refused to explain why he told Ontarians that Dr. Moore, our Chief Medical Officer of Health, was working 24/7 and never took a break, when Ontarians learned that simply wasn't the case.

The Premier also refused to explain why he indicated that Dr. Moore—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Stop the clock. Is this how we're going to start?

The member for Brampton Centre has the floor. This is question period. She has a chance and an opportunity and she's going to be able to place her question without interruption.

Start the clock. The member for Brampton Centre.

Ms. Sara Singh: The Premier also refused to explain why he indicated that Dr. Moore was meeting with all of the local chief medical officers of health when, in fact, as we've learned, that was not true, and he was actually out of the country on vacation.

Ontarians deserve answers and they deserve transparency. When did the Premier know that the Chief Medical Officer of Health was away on vacation?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, is that really the leadoff question in question period today? Is that really the leadoff question? Is that what the NDP have to ask about, Mr. Speaker? But it shouldn't surprise anyone, right? Because it was them, with the Liberals, who actually tried to fire the Chief Medical Officer of Health because they think they know better.

We would rather focus on all of the great things that the Chief Medical Officer of Health—this one and the previous one—has done to help Ontarians. We have one of the highest vaccination rates in the world—in the world. We are doing better than almost any other jurisdiction in North America.

Perhaps the NDP are so focused on one person, but here's a news flash: There are a lot of people who help advise us. There is an entire medical team that helps advise us, including the great work of Dr. Moore, including the public medical officers of health across the public health agencies, and including me, when I ask my doctor or the president of my local hospital. I know all of our members do that. Perhaps the politburo might want to expand who they talk to every once in a while and not just be focused on their leader.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: This is not about Dr. Moore. This is about the Premier's tenuous commitment to the truth, transparency and accountability. That's what Ontarians deserve.

In 2020, we know that the Premier's finance minister was out of the country, but the Premier pretended otherwise. So it's strange that when the Premier had an opportunity to be transparent last week, he suggested that Ontario's top doctor was hard at work and meeting with other health officials, but as we've learned, that was not the case.

If there was nothing to hide, why didn't the Premier just tell Ontarians that Dr. Moore was away on vacation rather than pretend he was hard at work?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to remind all members to be judicious with their language and be careful with what they say, including the member for Brampton Centre.

The response?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member opposite says it's not about Dr. Moore, but it has been about the Chief Medical Officers of Health in the province from day one, because the NDP have not agreed with them from day one. This is a party that stood in the chamber and voted against a Chief Medical Officer of Health, wanting to fire him because, somehow, they know better than the medical officials.

They know better than the Chief Medical Officer of Health. They know better than the public health officers across the province of Ontario. Somehow, they know better. But we know, Mr. Speaker, they flip and they flop. One day they want vaccinations, the next day they don't. One day they want masks, the next day they don't. One day they say things should be open, the next day it should be closed. One day they vote against supports for our small businesses, and then the next day they say that it should be expanded.

They're all over the place, and that is why people never trust them to form a government. That's why the people elected a strong, stable, Progressive Conservative majority government and they know that to continue the progress, a strong and stable Progressive Conservative majority government will deliver.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: Well, here's the reality in Ontario: Due to this government's inaction, schools have started closing, as of last week, because there are not enough staff; doctors and nurses are worried that there will not be enough staff in our hospitals to handle the sixth wave. This is what is happening right now in Ontario. Yet the Premier didn't think it was prudent to simply tell the truth and explain that the Chief Medical Officer of Health was away on vacation.

Speaker, at this stage of—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to again remind the member to be careful with the language and not cross the line. Complete your question.

Ms. Sara Singh: Thank you, Speaker.

At this stage of the pandemic, what we need is leadership, we need transparency and we need accountability. Why is the Premier unwilling to tell Ontarians the truth and be transparent that Dr. Moore was on vacation, rather than at work?

Hon. Paul Calandra: What an absolute load of garbage that is coming from the member opposite. Mr. Speaker, let me tell you this: Over 90% of Ontarians have been vaccinated—over 90%. You know who said that couldn't be done? They did. We said it could be done, and we got it done. Why? Because we work with the Chief Medical Officers of Health—the same Chief Medical Officers of Health that they wanted to fire.

But we went even further. We went even further than that. We said that we had to do so much more to improve health care capacity. When we were adding nurses to our health care system—8,000 new nurses—and paying for their education, who was voting against it? They were. When we were building long-term-care homes—30,000 new, 28,000 upgraded—who voted against it? They did. And 27,000 new PSWs: Who voted against it? They did. New medical schools, in Brampton—in her own riding, in her own community—who voted against it? She did.

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I sense there's a lot of excitement in the House today for some reason. I would ask the members to raise their questions and provide their responses in a manner that is appropriate and consistent with the rules of the House, and not be overly personal, not attacking each other.

Please start the clock. The next question.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Sara Singh: My next question is also for the Premier. Doctors and nurses are very concerned that this sixth wave will result in more surgeries being cancelled in the province. Patients have already gone through enough. Waiting for surgery and other diagnostic procedures can be excruciatingly painful. The chief medical officer expects that ICUs will start to fill up with over 600 COVID patients in the coming weeks. When the ICUs fill up, hospitals have no choice but to redeploy critical staff resources away from surgeries.

Why is this government continuing to claim that everything is fine, when the risk of surgeries being cancelled is so high?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Well, in fact, the risk of surgeries being cancelled is not so high. We are able, because we created 3,100 additional beds since the beginning of this pandemic in order to care for COVID patients, but also to care now for the people who need to have those surgeries done.

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Our ICU rates have remained relatively stable over the last several weeks and, as Dr. Moore himself has said, we have tools that we did not have just two years ago and in previous waves, including highly effective vaccines that have changed the course of the pandemic, and high vaccination rates that continue to improve as more and more Ontarians see the value of getting boosted to protect themselves, their families and their communities.

In addition to that, we have the antivirals coming online in large numbers. Starting today, people can access antivirals with a prescription through pharmacies. We have 4,700 pharmacies that are participating in that. That's also going to help us keep our hospital numbers down so that we can continue with the surgeries that people have been waiting for.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: In my community of Brampton, families are concerned that their long-delayed surgeries will be even further postponed. Even prior to this pandemic, in Brampton we did not have the hospital capacity for our growing city, making surgery wait times horribly long. In fact, at Brampton Civic Hospital, patients wait more than two times the provincial average for things like hip replacements.

No one in Ontario should have to wait endless months for the care that they need, but the reality is that there is risk that these procedures will be cancelled yet again because we don't have the staff to actually handle all of these surgeries.

Why is the government not listening to the medical experts and ICU doctors, and taking action to make sure that we don't overwhelm our health care system?

Hon. Christine Elliott: First of all, with respect to the people of Brampton, they have been ignored by the previous Liberal government, aided and abetted by the NDP; however, we are bringing a new hospital to Brampton with many more beds, with another emergency department, with more surgical suites. Not only a new hospital but also a medical school is coming to Brampton through Ryerson University, so I think we are delivering for the people of Brampton, unlike the other side.

With respect to recoveries, though, we have created the beds; we've got the 3,100 extra beds. We've also put over \$500 million into allowing for surgeries to be done on evenings and weekends and so on, so that we can catch up, and that's what we are doing.

Whatever happens with respect to the pandemic, we know we can continue to care for the people with COVID, but also to continue with those surgeries that many people have been waiting for for a long period of time. We don't want them to have to wait any longer.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: It's clear that we have a health care system that is in crisis. Projections from leading experts have made it clear that we're in for a brutal sixth wave. If no action is taken by the government, more surgeries are

going to be cancelled in order to care for the COVID patients in our ICUs.

In Hamilton, for example, St. Joseph's Healthcare hasn't been able to clear out its backlog of surgeries. They announced last week that they have paused any ramping up because they are short-staffed already due to COVID-19.

In Toronto, at the University Health Network, leadership is worried that their hospital admissions are creeping up and they simply do not have the health care resources to keep up.

What is this government going to do to ensure that no patient has their surgery cancelled yet again because of this government's inaction?

Hon. Christine Elliott: In actual fact, we are taking every step possible to safeguard the health and well-being of all Ontarians. We have one of the highest vaccination rates in the world right now. We're continuing with the vaccination rates. We have the fourth doses now available to people. We also have large quantities of Paxlovid and other antivirals. There is another antiviral that is out there that has to be done intravenously. We're continuing with that.

We want to make sure we have everything possible out there to protect people. Even if they contract COVID, if they're properly vaccinated, most people will not have to be hospitalized. That's very important. And with the antivirals now on the scene, that's going to save lives as well and also prevent hospitalizations.

So with the number of beds that we now have, with the antivirals, with the money that we've put into increasing surgical volume but also diagnostic volumes for CTs and MRIs, we will be able to care for all of the health needs of the people of Ontario.

NORTHERN HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr. Jamie West: In 2018, the Premier promised that he could do what former transportation minister Steven Del Duca couldn't: He promised to tender the final 68 kilometres of Highway 69. He hasn't done that yet.

Mélanie Fox and Alicia Dupuis asked me to read this to the Premier:

"On February 2, our beautiful parents, Suzanne Pharand and Aimé Giroux, were tragically killed on Highway 69 ... on that small stretch of the undivided and unfinished highway expansion.

"It wasn't just our families that were affected. The poor transport truck driver ... has probably been forever changed.

"This could have been avoided if our government had finished the job of properly dividing the last stretch of Highway 69. Then, there may have been a ditch or a barrier to stop the collision between our parents' vehicle and the transport truck.

"Highway 69 is one of the gateways between the north and south of this province. Why not ensure that all occupants, whether personal or commercial, can travel safely?"

Speaker, my question: When will the Premier finally tender the 68 kilometres of Highway 69 so that we can move towards fixing the highway so that nobody else is killed or injured?

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

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I thank the member opposite for the question. He's right: The Liberals, under Steven Del Duca, did make a promise to deliver on this important project over a decade ago, but it's our government that is bringing it to the finish line.

The people of Sudbury don't need any more empty promises like the ones that Steven Del Duca made. They need action. That's why completing the final section of Highway 69's widening project is a priority for our government, and the progress that we have made to date is testimony to this. Seventy kilometres of the project are already complete, and MTO is working diligently to get the approvals needed to complete the remaining 68 kilometres of the corridor.

In December, I was so pleased, with my parliamentary assistant, to announce the opening of a new 14-kilometre stretch expanding into the French River area. It's bringing us even closer to completion of this project.

Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the member opposite that it is a priority for our government and we will get it done.

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

Mr. Jamie West: Speaker, all the work that she spoke about was already tendered before they took government.

Soon after losing Aimé and Suzanne in February, another terrible accident occurred on Highway 69. There were three injured and one death in that one collision.

Mélanie and Alicia were devastated to hear this news. They asked me to say:

"These fatalities would have been avoided if the highway had been finished and divided.

"Please don't let the pain and sorrow happen to any other families. Don't let any other drivers walk away with the horror of having taken a life.

"Just before Christmas, our parents had seen the birth of their seventh grandchild. They still had so many plans and dreams to accomplish."

Now, "we still reach for the phone to call home but ... there's nobody there. Please don't let any other calls go unanswered. Finish the highway. Protect those you swore to protect when you agreed to be members of this government. Protect us," protect Ontarians.

Northerners are tired of paying for broken promises with their lives. When will the Premier offer an apology to these families and all the families and loved ones who have been injured and finally keep his promise to protect Ontarians on Highway 69 so that the people of Sudbury and across the north can come home safely?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I thank the member for the question. Road safety is a priority for our government, in particular in the north, where winter driving conditions make driving on our roads even more challenging.

Ontario does have a very good record in road safety, but there is so much more that we need to do. One of the things that we have been focused on is repairing the damage that was done under 15 years of Liberal mismanagement. We have been working on repairing their winter maintenance record. We have done a great job in the last four years, but we know we need to do more.

We're investing in our highways. Last year, we committed \$641 million to expand and repair our highways in the north. That work is expected to support more than 4,400 jobs in northern Ontario.

We know that there is more to do. Highway 69 is a priority. I was pleased in December to open a 14-kilometre stretch, but we're committed to getting the rest of the work done.

NORTHERN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Norman Miller: My question is for the Minister of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry. There is no doubt that this government has done a lot to improve the overall quality of life for northern Ontarians. Whether it's by investing heavily in community infrastructure and education projects, or by investing in small and medium-sized businesses, we can see that northern Ontario is a priority for this government.

1050

Of course, many of the job creators in the northern region are in the industrial sector, employing thousands of northern Ontarians. Speaker, through you: What recent efforts have the minister and this government made to assist the industrial sector in the north?

Hon. Greg Rickford: There is widespread enthusiasm across northern Ontario in a number of key sectors. We had an opportunity with the Premier and the member from Sault Ste. Marie to announce the Northern Energy Advantage Program. Now, this isn't just a rebrand for its sake, Mr. Speaker. This is a significant new investment in energy costs for industrial users in northern Ontario.

Four things you need to know: The escalator has increased up to \$56 million by 2025-26; we've removed the \$20-million cap; we've created a new investor class; and the fourth thing, Mr. Speaker, at a moment when our forestry and mining products are in high demand from around the world, the NDP voted against it.

We're going to continue to meet the demands of our industrial class across northern Ontario, and that includes lower electricity costs.

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

Mr. Norman Miller: To return to the minister, I'm sure that it pleases industry leaders to work with a government that understands the relationship between industry and community, between investment and job creation. And I am sure that they are even more pleased to see a government that understands that life and business in northern Ontario is different from here in the GTA. The previous Liberal government abandoned the north's transit, its economic future and, most disheartening of all, its people.

Speaker, through you, could the minister please share what he's heard on the ground and how the Northern Energy Advantage Program will help the north's vital industries?

Hon. Greg Rickford: I mentioned a new investor class, and this isn't just about offering reduced electricity prices for those electricity-intensive industries. The member from Sault Ste. Marie, an outstanding MPP, knows that Algoma Steel was not part of the program. They are now, and with the incentives that we have, they're investing in an electric arc furnace. That's not just going to increase their capacity; it's a greener form of technology for them to produce larger amounts of steel. That's outstanding.

Alamos Gold up in Dubreuilville last week had to find out two pieces of news: (1) that electricity is not going to cost as much; but (2) the member from Algoma-Manitoulin voted against those resources for that program. I didn't want to miss an opportunity at the podium to remind his constituents of that, Mr. Speaker. They were shocked to learn that and thank this government for standing up for the miners in northern Ontario—

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

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Kevin Yarde: It's an honour to rise to give my final question here at question period.

Applause.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Thank you.

My question, I think, is fitting because of what's happening in Brampton. Health care is still a huge concern, a huge issue. Brampton needs a cancer care centre, and we've gone on far too long without a cancer care centre. We're already dealing with hallway medicine at Brampton Civic, which is in my riding of Brampton North. People have to travel to Toronto and other areas for cancer treatments. Building a cancer care area is only the first step. We need at least three fully functioning hospitals in Brampton; not an additional wing to Peel Memorial, but three fully functioning hospitals.

My question to the government is: Will you commit to the people of Brampton and provide their fair share in providing three fully fledged hospitals?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member very much for the question. I wish you all the best in the future.

With respect to Brampton, we are giving the residents of Brampton their fair share, finally. They've been waiting for far too long. They did not get it under the previous Liberal government, which, sadly, was helped by the NDP. But our government is going to get the job done.

First of all, with the cancer care centre, a stage 1 proposal for the new stand-alone cancer radiation treatment building at the Brampton Civic Hospital was submitted to the Ministry of Health, and it's currently under review.

Secondly, we are creating a new hospital that is going to be able to stand alone and serve the people of Brampton. They have been waiting too long with one hospital. We are

creating a second hospital that will serve the needs of the people in Brampton.

And, of course, Brampton is also getting a new medical school through Ryerson, which is also going to help with the recruitment of physicians and other staff in the future. So we—

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

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Again to the Premier: If we look at other cities in Ontario with a smaller population, we can get a better picture of how Brampton is not getting the quality of health care that we need. Cities with smaller populations like Hamilton and London have a minimum of three fully functioning hospitals. This is why the people of Brampton feel that they are being treated as second- and third-class citizens. They're having to drive to other cities or wait hours to be seen in the ER, and this is not acceptable.

So my question, again, to the Premier: Will this government commit to Brampton with three fully functioning hospitals, including an emergency room?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I would say to the member opposite, through you, Speaker, that the only people we're hearing from who indicate that Brampton needs three hospitals are the members opposite. The people of Brampton are very, very happy that they're going to be receiving this additional hospital. It is going to be fully functioning.

Also, we're reviewing the cancer care centre for the Brampton Civic Hospital. We're also working to make sure that we provide all the other supports that people need in order to catch up with some of the backlogs of surgery that had to happen as a result of COVID.

We are going to get the job done for the people of Brampton. We're going to make sure that they have all of the medical supports and services that they need so they don't need to travel to other areas, but can stay within their own home city and surrounding area.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Stephen Blais: Mr. Speaker, since first taking office, this government has shown their disdain for publicly funded education. They quickly cut \$25 million from special education. They attacked teachers and their qualifications. They increased class sizes. We all know these cuts and others led to the largest teacher strikes seen in a generation—not since the previous Conservative government, Mr. Speaker.

Now we learn that while this province was struggling to get teenagers and children vaccinated, while health and education leaders and parents were pleading for safer schools, while we saw spikes in cases, exposures on school buses and in classrooms, and lost learning time, and while denying parents and their children access to rapid tests, this government provided 175,000 rapid tests to private schools.

Can the Premier explain why he chose to prioritize kids in private schools over those in our publicly funded school system?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It is a great opportunity to contrast the record of our government and the former Liberal government, which has the shameful record of closing 600 publicly funded schools in the province of Ontario. That has left a significant impact on rural, suburban and, increasingly, even in urban communities of the province of Ontario that felt the reduction in focus and prioritization and investment. This government, this Premier, is increasing investment in public education by over \$600 million, year over year, to ensure children get back on track—the largest Ontario learning recovery plan, \$175 million to ensure tutoring is expanded, and mental health expansion to the largest level, 400% higher than under the Liberal government.

Mr. Speaker, we are investing more. We are sending 40,000 HEPA units and seven million rapid tests every single month to ensure that children remain safe and we get them back on track, academically, in our schools and in our classrooms.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: The government's contempt for publicly funded education doesn't end at primary and secondary school. The government has also shown contempt for our publicly funded universities and their students. They've made it more difficult and more expensive for many Ontarians to attend university by cutting OSAP. Their decisions have ensured that more and more students will only graduate with crushing levels of student debt.

So let's summarize: They've cut special education funding. They've attacked teachers and their qualifications. They've made class sizes bigger. They're forcing students into mandatory online learning and making university more and more expensive every day. And now we find out that they're prioritizing private school children, with 175,000 rapid tests, over the millions in our publicly funded education system.

Mr. Speaker, why does this government have such disdain for publicly funded education in Ontario?

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Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be part of a government that actually cut tuition for the first time in a generation in this province. It rose dramatically under the former Liberal government. I'm also very proud to be part of a government that is increasing investment to the highest levels ever recorded in Ontario's history, over \$630 million more to ensure quality education for Ontario's two million children.

In this province, we are deploying 40,000 additional HEPA units, in addition to the 73,000 in schools. We are continuing to prioritize seven million rapid tests every month for public schools in this province. We have \$300 million allocated this year and an additional \$300 million next year for the singular purpose of hiring roughly 3,000 more front-line educators, mental health workers, ECEs, EAs and custodians.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ensuring children remain in class for their mental and their physical health. We're going to continue to invest to ensure kids remain in our schools.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is about the previous Liberal government's contempt for the hard-working people of Ontario and the business community. My question is to the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade.

Speaker, under the previous Liberal government, businesses ran scared and they fled the province in droves. Business owners in my riding have talked to me at great lengths about the cost of doing business in Ontario, under their leadership, the previous Liberal government's, being out of control. The legacy of the Liberal government left energy costs skyrocketing. Taxes were scheduled to increase and businesses just couldn't keep up with the previous government's constant cost escalations.

Ontarians looked to our government to turn the tide on 15 years of mismanagement. Speaker, through you to the minister: What steps has our government taken to make Ontario the lowest-cost jurisdiction in which to do business?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: When our government took office, we listened to the business community and took action to cut red tape, reduce taxes and make Ontario more competitive. As a result, we lowered the cost of business by \$7 billion annually and saw the manufacturing sector take off.

But it's not just our manufacturing sector. All across Ontario people are waking up to go to jobs that did not exist before our government was elected. As of this morning, Speaker, Ontario businesses have created 500,000 jobs since we took office. No previous Liberal government was ever able to create as many jobs in four years as our government has. This is the last time unemployment rates were this low in over 30 years. We will continue to make the right investments to create more jobs for more people in Ontario so we can unleash Ontario.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: I'm so proud to be part of a government that has turned the corner on 15 years of mismanagement. We saw 300,000 jobs disappear from the province of Ontario, but under the leadership of this minister and, of course, the Premier, things have changed and our economy is on fire.

The cost of doing business was so high under the previous government, investments in manufacturing were being offshored to other jurisdictions. Ontario was losing its entire manufacturing base, but, thankfully, Speaker, our government stepped in and reversed the damage the Liberals did to our manufacturing sector. The fact is, Ontario businesses simply cannot afford to go back to 15 years of scandal and waste.

Through you, Speaker: Can the minister outline how our government is securing our manufacturing sector for generations to come?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: We all know the story about how the Liberals, only supported by the NDP, abandoned our manufacturing sector. Their last report on the economy stated, "The structure of the Ontario economy will continue to shift from goods-producing to service-producing ... in particular manufacturing, to service sector industries."

They gave up on manufacturing. They threw in the towel. Well, we did not give up on our manufacturers. As a result, we have seen \$12 billion in investments in just the last year and a half.

Speaker, we will continue supporting our great women and men working in the manufacturing sector. We will never give up on the people of Ontario like the previous governments did.

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier. Ontarians expect a complete separation between police boards and politics. That's why the latest revelation in Peterborough is so concerning. The chair of the Peterborough Police Services Board, Les Kariunas, got his appointment from this government in 2020 after being called the "wingman" of the Peterborough-Kawartha MPP. After being caught on video campaigning for the member earlier this week, Kariunas suddenly resigned from the police board for "health reasons."

The Police Services Act includes a code of conduct for members of police boards that stipulates, "Board members shall not use their office to advance their interests or the interests of any person or organization with whom or with which they are associated." It also says that board members should "refrain from engaging in conduct that would discredit or compromise the integrity of the board or the police...."

Why does this government, Speaker, through you, have such a hard time, such a challenging time separating their partisan political interests from public safety and the police?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Solicitor General.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As the member opposite accurately depicted, the police services board member in question did do something inappropriate and tendered his resignation, which, of course, we have accepted.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: The issue is the pattern of behaviour here. Ontarians have no time for this. That's why they were outraged when the Premier tried to get his buddy Ron Taverner the OPP commissioner job in 2018. It's why the residents of Ottawa were furious when the Premier's hand-picked appointee to the Ottawa Police Services Board showed up to support the convoy that occupied the city of Ottawa.

Mr. Kariunas only resigned from the MPP's campaign after he was caught on video, but neither he nor the MPP thought there was anything wrong with the perception that

the head of the police board would be openly campaigning for the re-election of a Conservative MPP.

Does the Premier, does the minister think that this is acceptable for the member for Peterborough–Kawartha, or will you try to sweep this under the rug and just pretend that this never happened?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I'm not sure the member opposite understood my previous answer, so I will try again. The Peterborough representative of the police services board did something inappropriate. He tendered his resignation. We accepted it, as we should.

CONSIDERATION OF BILL 67

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: For the Minister of Education: On March 3, a private member's bill—Bill 67—that proposes to fine anyone, including a student, who interrupts a proceeding in the education system for something that might be deemed as contributing to subconscious racism passed second reading.

The member for Kitchener Centre stated that the bill is necessary to combat systemic racism in our education system, because if we continue with the current education system, we are replicating colonial systems that perpetuate violence. The government member for Niagara West and parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education stated this is a worthy bill and he looks forward to seeing it pass.

Does the government believe, as presented, that students should be fined in the education system, that the education system is systemically racist, and that if we do things the same way, we are replicating a colonial system that perpetuates violence? Yes or no, please?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think the member knows the bill that she talks about is a private member's bill that was brought forward by a member of the NDP and is in committee right now.

The government, of course, takes absolutely no position on that. It is an issue that members rightfully make their own decision on this side of the House. Of course, private members' bills are not whipped; members make their own decision. But as I said, this is something that is in committee and it will be up to committee to decide whether it comes forward or not and for members to make a decision whether they support it or not.

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

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: All government members, and even the member for Chatham-Kent–Leamington, voted in favour of Bill 67 that seeks to fine students for subconscious racism, and while some professors thought that the government and the member for Chatham-Kent–Leamington were “fooled” by this bill, a review of the debate shows they wholeheartedly supported it.

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The government member for Niagara West concluded in his speech in favour of Bill 67 by saying that he looks forward to ensuring that we're able to pass the legislation

in this chamber. The government member from Carleton said she was proud to support the legislation, and the government member from Markham–Unionville said he hopes to support the bill.

Does the government plan on passing Bill 67 and making it law prior to the June 2 election campaign? Yes or no?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Of course, the government has no intention of passing that bill and making it law. It is a private member's bill. It would be up to members individually to make that decision. The member opposite knows full well that all members give the courtesy of moving bills to committee; I think she herself has utilized that advantage. So, as opposed to attacking the member for Chatham-Kent–Leamington, I would suggest that she continue to focus on what's important to the people of the province of Ontario. But again, Mr. Speaker, the government has absolutely no intention of passing that bill. It will be up to private members themselves to make a decision.

ELECTRONIC SERVICE DELIVERY

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Just yesterday, the Associate Minister of Digital Government and the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction announced Ontario's new online business website that will help small business owners and entrepreneurs access the information and services that they need to get up and running, and build back our economy. The business community has long said that it can be difficult to find information on how to start a business in Ontario, and entrepreneurs are looking to our government to get it done. Small business owners are the backbone of Ontario's economy. With more and more businesses going online, now is the time to help entrepreneurs to better interact with our government.

Speaker, can the Associate Minister of Digital Government tell us how we are making it easier for entrepreneurs to start a business right here in Ontario?

Hon. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to the member of Oakville North–Burlington for the question. The member is correct. I was also joined by the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore and Karen Greve Young, CEO of Futurpreneur Canada, to announce the launch of the new ontario.ca/business website.

I want to take a moment and thank Maria Castillo, the owner of Planted Souls, for being a gracious host for our announcement. Planted Souls is a new business founded right here in Ontario and a recipient of the 2021 RBC Rock My Business Startup Award. I highly recommend visiting her shop in Port Credit, Mississauga.

Mr. Speaker, we heard from the business community that it can be overwhelming to find information on how to start a business in Ontario, and we listened by removing the barriers of trying to locate all the necessary information. My team at the Ontario Digital Service worked tirelessly to consolidate thousands of pages of content into one place. By providing a central location for all information, this will give clarity to businesses on what they need to know and when.

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

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you to the Associate Minister of Digital Government for that great answer. It is great to hear how we, as a government, are helping entrepreneurs take the guesswork out of how to start their businesses.

Ontarians want to know that their government is listening and creating the ontario.ca/business website with consolidated information to make it easier for entrepreneurs to navigate the process of starting a business. I know entrepreneurs in my community of Oakville North–Burlington want our government to take the confusion out of completing necessary paperwork and permits.

Speaker, through you to the associate minister: Exactly what information and resources are provided through the website?

Hon. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to the member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, we are saying yes and getting things done. The platform contains information on how to register a business and apply for tax credits and permits. As well, there's a tool that walks you through a step-by-step guide on the process of starting a business.

I would also like to mention that this website is not just for people looking to start a business. It is also for current business owners, on where they can find possible funding opportunities and sign up for email notifications on relevant updates. This website is a great reflection of Premier Ford's brand of government providing good customer service. We are here for the entrepreneurs and businesses of Ontario, and we are making our economy stronger by making it easier to start a business right here in the great province of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, we are moving the economy forward and making Ontario stronger with this new website.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. My constituent Shantal Roy-Johnson's daughter was diagnosed with autism at just one and a half years old. Knowing that early intervention was vital to her daughter reaching her full potential, she immediately applied to the Ontario Autism Program to ensure the best for her daughter's future. Now three years old, her daughter still languishes on a waiting list while critical time is lost.

In March, the FAO reported that the government only spent 56% of the allocated funds for the autism program, forcing thousands of other families to not get the critical care and therapy that they need. Why has this government continued to find the funds for frivolous lawsuits, for bumper stickers, for defective vanity licence plates, for partisan campaign ads instead of making the lives of children and families with autism better and providing them with hope for the treatment and therapy that they so desperately need?

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

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. The member opposite will be interested to know that we are making good progress on bringing additional children into the program. We already have 40,000 children receiving supports who have a diagnosis of autism. We also have five times as many children receiving supports as in the previous government's program, supported by the NDP.

We also have the Independent Intake Organization, now known as AccessOAP, which is going to be bringing in more children starting this month. That will provide a care coordinator to look at the many domains of need to create this needs-based program—a service-oriented, family-oriented, child-oriented program.

This is something that we will continue to do, understanding that the FAO report reflected the difficulties in accessing in-person services during that time. We are fully committed to spending the full \$600 million, the doubling in funding that we created for this program.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Shantal's daughter, like every other child in Ontario, deserves the opportunity to live up to their full potential without having to wait years in line for help.

While this government fumbled on the file from one minister to the next minister to the next minister, families have been forced to incur debt and struggle to make ends meet. We remember all too well the first minister that held carriage of this file, the self-described "minister of tears," who, instead of fighting for autism children, fought against them and went to war against those families and those parents, threatening them.

Families, therapists and advocates have been clear for years that the Ontario Autism Program must be needs-based and without a wait-list. Why has this government broken their promise to 50,000 families, like Shantal's, who continue to wait for the critical support that their children need?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: To the member opposite: In fact, we have listened to the families through consultations and town halls, creating a comprehensive, needs-based program. Parents told us they wanted more than ABA. They wanted to make sure that their children could have mental health services, that they could have language and speech pathology services, that they could have occupational therapy. We listened and we created a program. That did take time—we acknowledge that—but this is a needs-based program that is clinically informed, research-based. This is a world-leading program created by the autism community, for the autism community.

Through the autism advisory panel and the implementation working group and now the Independent Intake Organization, now called AccessOAP, we'll be rolling out more programs and more access to bring even more children into the program. We have 40,000 children that are receiving supports currently, and I can list some of them for you: for childhood budget funding, 8,682 payments; families who access foundational family services, 12,914; in caregiver-mediated—

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

PLANIFICATION MUNICIPALE

MUNICIPAL PLANNING

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Depuis plusieurs années maintenant, je travaille avec les citoyens de Champlain opposés à la cimenterie planifiée dans notre communauté, pour remettre les pendules à l'heure dans ce dossier.

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To recap for the government, in case they need a refresher, the Ministry of the Environment issued an environmental compliance approval that was based on erroneous data provided by the proponent of the project.

En raison de ces erreurs importantes, j'ai demandé au gouvernement, par écrit, de révoquer l'autorisation environnementale et de réviser la soumission avec les bonnes données. Le gouvernement a refusé. Incroyable, monsieur le Président—un dangereux précédent.

La question est simple : le gouvernement va-t-il faire la bonne chose et reconsidérer sa décision, oui ou non?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

Hon. David Piccini: It's an honour to rise. Thank you to the member for that question. I'd be happy to sit down and have a meeting with that member about this specific issue.

In the Ministry of the Environment, we lean on the expert advice of directors within the ministry. In fact, we have more scientists in this ministry than any other ministry in government, and they work closely, I know, on this specific issue.

I find it ironic, Mr. Speaker, that on one hand, the members from the Liberals call on the importance of environmental assessments, the importance of environmental compliance approvals, and then on the other hand, when it doesn't suit their own specific interests, want politicians to intervene. That was the problem that for too often plagued the Liberal government when they were in this office.

Well, on this side of the House, Speaker, we're going to listen to the experts in our ministry. I'm happy to take a meeting with her to understand her issue in more depth.

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

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Respectfully to the minister: He actually wrote me back and refused, so he is well aware of this case. I just wanted to point that out.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the data issue mentioned in my previous question, I want to stress that the community is fiercely opposed to this project and has been for years, spending time, money and energy fighting this project every step of the way. The warden of the counties, now the local PC candidate, who had the power to stop this project before it even got here, did absolutely nothing. In fact, he refused to do anything about it when asked. That's the Conservative approach.

But, Mr. Speaker, when the Premier was in Campbellville talking about a quarry project he was cancelling, he

said, "When the people don't want something, you don't do it. It's very simple." Well, if it's that simple, as the Premier makes it out to be, how come this project is moving forward? The people don't want it. Don't do it.

Will the government do the right thing and stop this project? Yes or no?

Hon. David Piccini: I wrote back to her refusing to overturn a decision that plagued that previous government, where politicians came in willy-nilly deciding to overturn things whenever they felt. I didn't refuse an opportunity to sit down and meet with her.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that member might be a little nervous about the fantastic candidate who is applying a little pressure and is likely going to beat her in the next election. He's going to win, because the people of her riding know that when it comes to investing in long-term care, we're getting it done. When it comes to building transit, unlike the colleagues she's sitting next to who can't get it done, we're getting it done. When it comes to historic investments in transit, reducing our carbon footprint, this government is getting it done.

We'll take no lessons from the scandal-ridden, plagued, crooked previous government—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. I'm going to ask the minister to withdraw the unparliamentary remark.

Hon. David Piccini: Sorry, I got carried away. I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The appropriate way to withdraw is without qualification.

Start the clock. The next question.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is for the Premier. A family in my riding is struggling to support their child's learning due to this government's cutbacks. Their child is no longer able to receive the support of an educational assistant in the classroom, and the child's mother was told that this was because of education cutbacks. This support was critical in helping their child learn, and now their child will not be able to go to school as a result.

This family is looking for answers. Speaker, why did the Premier make cuts to education, so children in my riding and across the province cannot get the staffing support that they need?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, what utter nonsense from the member opposite, who has access to the estimates and who could see for herself that this government has increased investment in special education by \$3.2 billion, the highest investment ever reported, to help those very families. To suggest otherwise to that parent is so unfair at a time when they face the struggle of raising that child.

I want that family and all families in this province to know that for children with exceptionalities we have in-

creased investment, increased staffing and increased resources in every school board in this province, literally spending more than any government in the history of Ontario. We have doubled the allocation, specifically, for children with autism. We have increased by 400% the investment in mental health. We have added another \$90 million in net investment in special education. We're hiring 3,000 more staff, including EAs, ECEs and special education teachers because we care about their future, and we'll continue to invest to ensure they succeed in the classroom.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: Speaker, it's not my nonsense; it's what families tell us from across this province.

The minister can call on any numbers he wants, but families know the truth. Families know where it hurts and families see the difference. A family has to make a difficult decision to pull their child from the classroom because this Premier is denying them the support that they need. Educational assistants are invaluable members to our schools. The work they do ensures that children can learn and thrive with the supports that they need.

This family in my riding deserves to know why there is no funding available for proper staffing—staffing that is required to support their child's learning. Can the Premier explain why his government, once again, leaves children with special needs behind and treats educational workers as if they're expendable?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm very grateful for the opportunity to speak a bit about the work we are doing to improve public education. In the member opposite's own school boards, when it comes to funding, they have \$14.8 million more for COVID resources. We've added—

Miss Monique Taylor: COVID resources, not educational resources.

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Which includes funding to hire more staff, which includes funding to bring in more resources specific to children with special education needs.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Heritage, come to order.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: This should not be an issue where we should be capitalizing on the insecurity that families face every day. We should be committed to working together to improve the quality of life of these children, and our government has demonstrated, enterprise-wide—with the Ministry of Health, the ministry of community services and so many others—that increasing investments, increasing hiring and, ultimately, hiring more workers is going to improve the life of these children. We'll continue to do that, Speaker.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you very much, Speaker. My question, through you, is to the Minister of Health.

Minister, we've gone from "two mRNA jabs will ensure you won't carry the virus or get sick or die from COVID-19," to "Well, you need a booster every four months and you can still contract, transmit, get sick or even die from COVID." The fully jabbed and boosted are still getting sick with COVID.

The creation of a vaccine—I've mentioned this earlier, in the past—requires 10 to 15 years of research before the vaccine is actually made, which includes several years of identifying an antigen that can prevent a disease. Therefore, one can conclude that the mRNA-based COVID shot is not a real vaccine, as evidenced by the sheer number of boosters required to keep COVID at bay.

Big pharma is earning tens of billions of dollars. The COVID jabs are the most financially successful pharma product in the history of the world. So who's really calling the shots? Clearly, vaccines are not working as expected. Dr. Moore and you said that we must learn to live with COVID, and I agree, just as we must also learn to live with other viruses like the common cold and different strains of flu.

So, Minister, what is your plan, moving forward, as the threat of a sixth wave looms after the upcoming provincial election?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, the member asked the question the other day and I'm not going to change my answer, because the facts are there, laid bare for everybody to see. Vaccines have made an incredible difference in how we have handled the pandemic. Just look at the results before the vaccines and after the vaccines. So we're not going to change that direction.

At the same time, it is very clear: We have to learn to live with COVID. Ultimately, we had to get ourselves in a spot where we could give ourselves the opportunity to live with COVID. That meant massive investments in health care. That meant ensuring that PPE was developed right here in the province of Ontario so that we didn't have to rely on other jurisdictions. You will know, Mr. Speaker, that when we went into that warehouse, the Liberals had left it bare. They left us with outdated PPE. We had to transition education, post-secondary education. We did all of that.

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But, ultimately, vaccines have made a big difference. I still encourage everybody, if you haven't been vaccinated—although over 90% have—to go get vaccinated and get a booster, because it—

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Back to the minister: Over the past two years, big pharma was given a free get-out-of-jail card if people were injured from injections by issuing the emergency usage authorization, and we were led to believe that these safe and effective shots would keep everyone from getting COVID. If that were the case, why was big pharma let off the hook? In the beginning, they said enough clinical trials had been performed, and yet,

recently, Pfizer was court-ordered to produce their clinical trial documentation. Well, surprise, surprise, data produced by Pfizer revealed thousands of adverse side effects that were kept from the public. So here we are: two years, four lockdowns, five waves and thousands of small businesses forced to close because of the pandemic.

A few months ago, I had asked the minister and her team to meet with other medical experts to gain insights and have a sharing of ideas. Sadly, you declined.

Minister, after studying all the data and trends over the last two years, do you anticipate more lockdowns and infringements of personal freedoms, or are you willing to ride out future waves as we learn to live with COVID and other variants?

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

Government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, I've said it on a number of occasions: Ontario was forced into longer lockdowns than almost any other jurisdiction in North America. We acknowledge that. One of the reasons why we were left with having to take such drastic measures is because the previous Liberal government, supported by the NDP, failed to make investments in health care. We had a capacity of 800 people—think about this: One of the richest jurisdictions in North America, with 800 people in ICU, had to lock down the province of Ontario. Well, that changed. Not only have we increased ICU capacity, we've added over 3,000 critical care beds; we've brought back PPE production to the province of Ontario; we were able to transition education; we were able to transition post-secondary education.

We have made all of the investments possible. We've got 90% of our population vaccinated. So we are in the spot now where we're ready to learn to live with COVID. It has led us to this point, and now is certainly not the time to be telling people to stop getting vaccinated, to look back. It's time to look forward, to do what the Minister of Economic Development says, unleash the economy—

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

EATING DISORDERS

Ms. Jill Andrew: My question is to the Premier. According to NEDIC, in Ontario, there are 689,000 people struggling with eating disorders. Only 10% of them actually have access to getting the help they need. We only have 20 publicly funded in-patient beds across the entire province. Many are sitting empty, because there is simply no staff. Private options for ED supports are tens of thousands of dollars and out of reach for most folks.

Sherri lives in our community of St. Paul's. She has been battling an ED for 30 years. She's currently waiting for one of those beds. Waiting equates to dying for many people who have eating disorders. They need the care in order to survive, in order to thrive. Eating disorders have literally the highest mortality rate of any mental illness.

My question is to the Premier. Will this government adequately and publicly fund eating disorder care, get us

more beds, more staff both in institutions and community, to make sure every single person struggling with EDs can get the support they need, and will they commit to universal mental health care?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the member for Eglinton–Lawrence and parliamentary assistant.

Mrs. Robin Martin: As the member opposite knows, our government ran on a promise to put \$3.8 billion over 10 years into mental health and addictions, and we are well on our way to achieving that, with \$525 million of annualized funding increased over those years, every year. It's very important to us that we meet the mental health and addictions needs of all Ontarians, and we are doing that.

Eating disorders, as the member mentioned, are a very important area, and we have been making investments into the eating disorders programs to make sure that they can meet the needs of the people who are using them. Our government is investing \$8.07 million in funding to provide pediatric specialized eating disorder services for those up to the age of 18 years to hospitals which are experiencing significant pressures brought on by the pandemic. This one-time investment will support the addition of 14 life-saving, specialized in-patient eating disorder beds for children and youth.

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

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: When I made my farewell speech last week, I made a comment that a Premier, prior to Premier Ford, had never visited Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. What I meant to say, from a constituent who was sharing with me, was “had never made a visit to do a very significant announcement like the Markdale Hospital.”

I just wanted to correct my record. I wasn't trying to dissuade any of the other Premiers. I believe Premier Wynne and Premier Peterson were there, and I'm almost certain that Premier Davis was there previously, but it was for a very significant announcement like the Markdale Hospital.

VISITOR

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Point of order.

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

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I just wanted to let everybody know that my constituency assistant is here: Julia Kole. She is the reason why my office has been so successful and productive in assisting the constituents of Brampton North.

MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: A number of colleagues have wanted me to say this, and I think it's appropriate: Today is the Minister of Health and Deputy Premier's birthday. On behalf of our caucus, I'm sure all members would like to wish her a very, very happy birthday.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: I'm remiss; I didn't acknowledge at the very beginning of question period that a long-time friend and colleague from the city of Ottawa who works right now for the member from Ottawa West-Nepean is here. So I want to welcome David Gibbons from the city of Ottawa to this chamber today. Welcome, David.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order?

Hon. David Piccini: Point of order. Thank you, Speaker. I, too—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

Hon. David Piccini: —to acknowledge the Stephanie squared sitting up in the visitors' gallery and a long-time friend, Stephanie Delorme, who has been a dear friend of mine since the very first days that I got involved in politics. I'm very thankful for your friendship, and welcome to Queen's Park.

TABLING OF SESSIONAL PAPERS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that the following documents have been tabled: two reports concerning Randy Hillier, member for Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston, from the Office of the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario.

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

The House recessed from 1137 to 1500.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Ms. Laurie Scott: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly and move its adoption.

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

Bill 109, An Act to amend the various statutes with respect to housing, development and various other matters / *Projet de loi 109, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne le logement, l'aménagement et diverses autres questions.*

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

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE POLICY

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Justice Policy and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Meghan Stenson): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 78, An Act to amend the Police Services Act / *Projet de loi 78, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services policiers.*

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

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Dave Smith: 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 bill without amendment:

Bill Pr68, An Act to revive Lunova Machinery Import and Export Ltd.

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

Report adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

AUDITOR GENERAL AMENDMENT ACT, 2022

LOI DE 2022 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE VÉRIFICATEUR GÉNÉRAL

Madame Gélinas moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 116, An Act to amend the Auditor General Act / *Projet de loi 116, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le vérificateur général.*

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

First reading agreed to.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: The bill is quite simple. It amends the Auditor General Act. Subsection 10(1) of the act is re-enacted to provide that the duty to furnish information applies to documents and information that are

otherwise confidential or subject to certain privileged rights, and that subsection 10(2) of the act is also re-enacted to provide that the Auditor General's right to access information applies despite other rights of privacy, confidentiality and privilege.

BRISDALE PLAZA INC. ACT, 2022

Mr. Gurratan Singh moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr69, An Act to revive Brisdale Plaza Inc.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

MYASTHENIA GRAVIS MONTH ACT, 2022

LOI DE 2022 SUR LE MOIS DE LA MYASTHÉNIE GRAVE

Mr. Walker moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 117, An Act to proclaim the month of June as Myasthenia Gravis Month / Projet de loi 117, Loi proclamant le mois de juin Mois de la myasthénie grave.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound care to briefly explain his bill.

Mr. Bill Walker: The bill proclaims the month of June in each year as Myasthenia Gravis Month.

2127023 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2022

Mr. Gurratan Singh moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr70, An Act to revive 2127023 Ontario Inc.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT (CIVIC EDUCATION), 2022

LOI DE 2022 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉDUCATION (ÉDUCATION CIVIQUE)

Mademoiselle Simard moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 118, An Act to amend the Education Act with respect to civic education / Projet de loi 118, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation concernant l'éducation civique.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'd like to invite the member to briefly explain her bill, if she wishes.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: This bill amends the Education Act and aims to ensure that a course of study in civic education is taught in grade 9, 10, 11 or 12 that would specifically include the following topics: identification of disinformation and misinformation and an overview of Canada's Constitution, including separation of powers and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

P.K.B. INTERNATIONAL BAZAAR LTD. ACT, 2022

Mr. Ke moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr74, An Act to revive P.K.B. International Bazaar Ltd.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

1833025 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2022

Mr. Pettapiece moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr72, An Act to revive 1833025 Ontario Inc.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

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2300943 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2022

Mr. Ke moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr75, An Act to revive 2300943 Ontario Inc.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think if you seek it you will find unanimous consent to move that the member for

Timiskaming–Cochrane may act in the place of the member for Timmins for all purposes related to consideration of ballot item number 41 during private members' public business this afternoon.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking the unanimous consent of the House so that the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane may act in place of the member for Timmins for all purposes related to consideration of ballot item number 41 during private members' public business this afternoon. Agreed? Agreed.

PETITIONS

INJURED WORKERS

Mr. Jamie West: This petition is titled "Petition for an Official Statement of Apology on Behalf of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to the McIntyre Powder Project Miners." It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide an official statement of apology to the McIntyre Powder Project miners."

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

SEXUAL ASSAULT

M^{me} Lucille Collard: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas 39% of Ontario hospitals and health centres reached by She Matters throughout the course of the sexual assault kit accessibility study stated they did not have sexual assault kits available to survivors;

"Whereas many hospitals do not have nurses or physicians trained in conducting a" sexual assault evidence kit "examination and specialized training is required to gather evidence without further re-traumatizing the survivor;

"Whereas it is not mandatory in nursing and medical schools to learn sexual assault evidence collection and many colleges charge a fee beyond traditional tuition for nursing students who want to take a SANE course on weekends;

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

"To adopt Bill 108, Access to Sexual Assault Evidence Kits and Provision of Sexual Assault Education Act, 2022, which would amend the Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000, to require persons who grant degrees in nursing under that act to provide Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner training, free of charge, to nursing students and amend the Public Hospitals Act to require hospitals to have at least 10 sexual assault evidence kits available for patients at all times and to provide them to patients who are in need of them, free of charge."

I agree with this petition, will affix my name to it and will give it to page Ria to bring to the table.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Miss Monique Taylor: A petition to raise social assistance rates: I would like to thank the Hamilton Social Work Action Committee and the Campaign for Adequate Welfare and Disability Benefits.

"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 ... 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 support this petition, I'm going to affix my name to it and give it to page Stanley to bring to the Clerk.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: I'd like to present a petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I fully support this petition and I sign my name to it.

ORGAN DONATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Mrs. Janet Fortin, from Lively in my riding, for these petitions.

“Saving Organs to Save Lives.

“Whereas Ontario has one of the best organ transplant programs in the world;

“Whereas there are currently 1,600 people waiting for a life-saving organ transplant in Ontario;

“Whereas every three days someone in Ontario dies because they can’t get the transplant in time;

“Whereas” donation of “organs and tissue can save up to eight lives and improve the lives of up to 75 people;

“Whereas 90% of Ontarians support organ donation, but only 36% of us are registered;

“Whereas Nova Scotia has seen” an increase “in organs and tissue for transplant after implementing a presumed consent legislation in January 2020;”

They “petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“Change the legislation to allow a donor system based on presumed consent as set out in MPP Gélinas’s Bill 107, Peter Kormos Memorial Act (Saving Organs to Save Lives).”

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

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

M^{me} Lucille Collard: “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;

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“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 agree with this petition, Mr. Speaker, I will affix my name to it and give it to page Molly to bring to the table.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I have a petition here sent to me by Dr. Sally Palmer from McMaster University. I want to thank her for her organizing work. It’s a 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;

“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 agree with this petition, I will sign and give it to page Brianna to take to the Clerk.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Denise Godin from Foleyet for this petition to save the ambulance service in Foleyet:

“Whereas the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board is considering removing the paramedics and ambulance services (EMS) from the community of Foleyet. This service is vital, paramedics are front-line heroes in emergencies and often the reason people in life-threatening situations survive, because of the quick and responsive actions they are trained to take under pressure. If this social service is removed, the community of Foleyet and the surrounding area will be at risk in the case of an emergency due to the extended travel and wait time to access medical services through Chapleau or Timmins;”

They “petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“We, the undersigned, are in opposition of the removal and relocation of the ambulance and paramedic services (EMS) in Foleyet, Ontario. We want the emergency medical services in Foleyet to remain in full operation to service Foleyet and the surrounding area.”

I truly support this petition, Speaker, will affix my name to it and ask Pallas to bring it to the Clerk.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Jamie West: This petition is entitled “Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario.”

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I am hopeful the negotiations are going well, Speaker. I support this petition and provide it to page Molly again.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Jessica Bell: This is a “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;...

“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.”

This is an ongoing issue. I support this petition, and I give this petition to page Vivian.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Mrs. Melanie Hood from Lively in my riding for these petitions: 911 everywhere in Ontario.

“Whereas when we face an emergency we all know to dial 911 for help; and

“Whereas access to emergency services through 911 is not available in all regions of Ontario but most Ontarians believe that it is; and

“Whereas many Ontarians have discovered that 911 was not available while they” were facing “an emergency; and

“Whereas all Ontarians expect and deserve access to 911 service throughout our province;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To provide 911 emergency response everywhere in Ontario by land line or cellphone.”

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

INJURED WORKERS

Mr. Jamie West: This is entitled “Petition for an Official Statement of Apology on Behalf of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to the McIntyre Powder Project Miners.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

I support this petition, Speaker, as you know, and I’ll provide it to page Molly.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PANDEMIC AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS ACT, 2022

LOI DE 2022 SUR LA PRÉPARATION AUX PANDÉMIES ET AUX SITUATIONS D’URGENCE

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 13, 2022, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 106, An Act to enact two Acts and amend various other Acts / Projet de loi 106, Loi visant à édicter deux lois et à modifier diverses autres lois.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): When the time expired earlier today, it was with the member for Hamilton Mountain, so we give the floor back to the member for Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: As I was saying earlier, it's always a pleasure and honour to be able to stand in my place on behalf of the people of Hamilton Mountain, and this time to speak to Bill 106, the Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness Act. I did start this morning, so I will try to remember where I was, as the House moved quickly right after that. I'll bounce around a bit more to make sure that I get the points on the record of what is important to my riding.

I believe I was speaking about PPE, and the minister previous to me was speaking about procurement of masks and PPE. I believe I was at the point where we were talking about the lack of access to be able to be part of that process. We've heard from many members from this side of the House who have had a hard time being able to access that market for the PPE that is necessary when we come into a pandemic time.

Some of the issues that people in my riding faced and things that I was hearing during the pandemic were about expired PPE. We've seen health care workers in Hamilton being forced to use expired PPE. At least 1,000 expired N95 masks were used by front-line health care workers in Hamilton.

1530

I want to back that up, just so people in the House can hear. In 2017, the Auditor General had done a report of all of the emergency preparedness and knew that those masks and that PPE was going to be expired. This government took over in 2018 and did nothing about that. As you have seen, we hit the pandemic shortly after that and the supplies were not replaced.

In March 2020, at St. Joe's in Hamilton, 95% of N95 masks had already expired. They had to find reusable gowns due to shortages. At the beginning of the pandemic, our office heard from nurses and PSWs, especially at Grace Villa, about the lack of PPE and definitely the burnout they were already starting to feel when they were so afraid to be working in that environment. As we all know, we didn't know what was happening within our communities, what this virus was going to look like, how long it was going to last or how many people were going to die, and our front-line workers were definitely the ones who were bearing the brunt of that. And then to be expected to use expired N95s and reusable gowns was horrifying for them. I remember hearing very clearly from folks at Grace Villa who were not able to access N95 masks. There was a time when the minister was saying that they didn't need them, that they didn't need to have masks or they didn't need to have N95s. The fear that they were contacting me with was quite great.

You'll recall, Speaker, that I read into the record the letters I received from the workers and PSWs at Grace

Villa, and the trauma and horror that they felt as they were trying to manage the day-to-day life of taking care of our most vulnerable citizens on their worst day. They described it as a war zone and are still living with many of those experiences, particularly PTSD. We've definitely seen the Hamilton Spectator highlight several of the issues that these workers faced, and I raised many of them on the floor of this Legislature, due to them not having the proper equipment necessary.

So if anything comes from this and schedule 1 will actually do what it says it's going to do and ensure that we will always be ready for a pandemic again, I hope that both the Liberals and the Conservatives have learned from this to ensure that the stock of PPE is not something that we can just let expire and let the dust settle on, that it is something that needs to be turned over on a regular basis to ensure that it's available to us, so that the people in this province won't have to face what they faced through those horrifying days.

We definitely heard great concerns within our long-term-care facilities—mainly, I have to say, from for-profit long-term-care homes. I know the government likes to talk about the number of beds in homes that they're creating, but over half of those are for-profit. And we have definitely seen, throughout the pandemic, that the for-profit model was the worst experience for high cases of COVID, high death rates and high burnout of our PSWs and health care workers.

And while they faced all of that, we still see this bill that's in front of us today that will continue to not provide the necessary wages and treatments for those same workers. I know the government was crowing from the rooftops and had it in every media outlet available that this bill was coming forward to provide PSWs with the wage increase that they need, yet within the bill we do not see that increase highlighted here.

We do see, however, a gutting to the Pay Equity Act that has been long-standing in this province as outstanding—not ensuring that women were paid the equal amount as a man—which we actually highlighted, yesterday being Equal Pay Day.

If folks in the House aren't sure what Equal Pay Day is, it is ensuring that—I just want to make sure I have the right numbers—women are paid to the same amount as their counterparts, and we're definitely not seeing that. I'm not finding the exact numbers; I don't want to put the wrong numbers in Hansard. But there are lots of concerns.

We've heard the government say that they were going to give nurses \$5,000. They didn't say that that was in two parts. I actually wouldn't even have known that if I didn't hear it from the member for London West yesterday. How many people actually in this Legislature knew that that was going to happen? I'm sure members on the government side were just as surprised to hear the member for London West say the same thing yesterday.

That's the problem. We see lots of bills. There's usually something in them that create a spark, that highlight the issues of why we can't support bills, why they're not good for the people of the province. There are many things in

this bill that we support, that we've put forward before the Conservatives brought this bill forward, things that we have highlighted.

But we know that the government has a majority. They'll be able to pass it, but we'll make sure that our mark and our stand on workers' rights issues is strong and heard by the people of this province.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the member from Hamilton Mountain for her speech. It was split in two—part this morning and part this afternoon—because of the question period interruption.

I'm listening to that part of that speech and I'm thinking, "Did she not hear the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade talk this morning about how we inherited a province, when the pandemic hit, one that was absolutely, totally unprepared for what happened? And the lack of PPE—the PPE that we had was sitting in closets and backrooms, that it was expired?" Today, Ontario is essentially self-sufficient because we would never let it happen again.

I would ask the member from Hamilton Mountain for a straight answer. Now we are manufacturing 74% of our PPE right here in the province of Ontario. Can you not at least say that tremendous progress has been made by this government?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member opposite. I know he always tries to find something in there that he can stick a pin in. But, yes, and I congratulated the minister this morning for being able to do that and for ensuring that we do have that preparedness here. There is no doubt about it that that is a good thing. But we've also heard from members on this side about other manufacturers actually being able to get in there and it not be a monopoly—that's a problem.

Also, I would like to know if the member read the 2017 Auditor General report. While he was in opposition, he would have been pounding about that Auditor General's report. Yes, he would have been doing one of these. I know he finds it hard to believe. But when his government came into place, what did they do to ensure that it was there? They had a long time. They had almost two years to ensure that it was there. They failed to do it. So I think they have to hold themselves responsible at the same time.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank my colleague the member for Hamilton Mountain for her remarks today and also for her advocacy on behalf of the health care workers that she represents in her riding and, in particular, the Grace Villa long-term-care home.

I wanted to ask the member if she is as concerned as I am by the fact that multiple legal experts came to the Legislature and told the committee looking at this bill that it is unconstitutional because of section 7—that section 7 violates the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It overrides collective bargaining rights. It undermines women's equality and pay equity rights. Does the member believe

that an unconstitutional schedule has any place in a pandemic preparedness plan?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member from London West. She has truly been a true champion on this bill already, as well as workers' rights and sick pay. If there is an issue that's come before this House, our labour critic has been on the file and making sure that she's been working hard with stakeholders, because we did listen to those stakeholders.

Interjection.

Miss Monique Taylor: I know the member opposite has a lot to say, but did they listen to the stakeholders? He says, "Take them to court." They're already taking midwives to court. They've already been challenged on paid sick days. There's lots of issues that they're already in court for. Do they really think they need any further reason to take workers back to court? We, on this side, will ensure that that doesn't happen and make sure that workers have proper rights in this province.

1540

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: The member from Hamilton Mountain is discussing the shortage of PPE and the PPE that was expired, when this global crisis blindsided everybody. As has been mentioned, measures are being taken, put in place. I was certainly involved with a group of people. We were getting PPE onto hospital loading docks in Hamilton. Nurses would unload the trucks. We're going to make sure that that ad hoc approach never happens again, and that will be done through the proposed Personal Protective Equipment Supply and Production Act.

Quite simply, this is not going to happen again, and quite sincerely, I ask you, will you support this initiative through this legislation?

Miss Monique Taylor: Honestly, I am so grateful to the manufacturers who took up the torch and found various ways to turn their businesses—and to create new businesses—to ensure we have proper PPE, to ensure we had sanitizer. We've seen our province come together in a remarkable fashion. But now the dust has settled and there are many manufacturers still sitting there, waiting to be able to be part of this unity of Ontario, and they're being left out in the cold. They're not getting calls returned. They're not getting their proposals even responded to. That's concerning.

We don't need any more monopolies. We need to ensure that we really do spread around the joy and that lots of people who want to be involved and who have already put themselves in positions—of millions of dollars—to start these manufacturing proposals have the ability to be part of the market also.

I hope the members also realize that—don't leave it to just a couple of manufacturers and really ensure that we have a fulsome spectrum of that PPE available to us.

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

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member for Hamilton Mountain for her debate and all the great work she does.

I know Hamilton is a labour town. Our labour critic was talking about schedule 7 and how schedule 7 is likely unconstitutional, and there have been warnings from the OFL and different labour groups like that, about it being unconstitutional. While she was asking that question, our labour critic, a member from the Conservative side said, “What’s the big deal? Take us to court.”

Could the member from Hamilton Mountain just remind the government why it’s important to protect the Constitution and why free and collective bargaining rights are important to the people of Ontario and Canada?

Miss Monique Taylor: Absolutely, and thank you to the member from Sudbury for his question. He’s absolutely right. We have definitely seen an erosion of labour and workers’ rights under this government from the first day they came into power. They were taking out the proposed minimum wage. They were slapping Bill 124 on our public sector workers, workers who haven’t had a proper raise in collective bargaining since 2019. Three years later and those folks have been through the worst pandemic we have ever seen and they’re still being disrespected when it comes to their wages. Now this will once again gut their wages and move into the Pay Equity Act and take away the proper wages and enforcements that should be in place. I thank the member for the question.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member for Sarnia–Lambton.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the member opposite there for her rendition a little earlier.

Bill 106 will allow foreign-credentialed health workers to begin practising sooner in Ontario by reducing barriers to registration and being recognized by regulatory colleges. The bill would require these colleges to certify potential applicants in a timely manner so that internationally trained health care workers can actually start work here in Ontario. Removing these undue barriers will help address the health care shortages. I just wonder if the member opposite would have foreign-credentialed health workers in her constituency at this time, and would she value these supports?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member opposite for that question. I did touch on that this morning and thanked the member from Scarborough Southwest for the bill that she put forward. She put forward Bill 98, working to ensure that we are able to have foreign workers get their credentials quicker here in this province, but the government didn’t touch it. Instead, they stuck it in an omnibus bill once again. But it’s something that we have been fighting for for a long time.

I want to remember that Bill 88, the gig workers bill, actually hurts those same workers because many of those foreign workers that aren’t able to get their credentials are out in the gig economy. Now this government is forcing a \$15 minimum wage on them that will actually make them make less at the end of the day, Speaker.

The government has got it mixed up again. Unfortunately, they can’t get two bills to work together to help the same group of folks. Maybe the government member can put forward a private member’s bill to actually fix gig

workers’ pay in this province, now that his government has messed it up.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): There’s not enough time for a further question and answer.

Further debate?

Hon. Ross Romano: Thank you to all the fellow members in the House here today. I am very pleased to rise to speak to the bill that my ministry, the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services, or, as the great member the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade—MEDJCT—likes to refer to it, MGCS. Obviously I’m happy to be called a number of different things by my great friend and colleague from the riding of Nipissing.

Alongside some of my colleagues today I’ll be sharing some of the details on our ministry’s contributions and responsibilities that relate specifically to our government’s proposed plan to stay open. If passed, the legislation we’re speaking of will expand on the policies and measures that are already in place to ensure that our province can remain open by building a stronger and a more resilient health care system that is better able to respond to crisis.

I want to thank my cabinet colleague, the Honourable Prabmeet Sarkaria, the President of the Treasury Board, for introducing this very important bill into the House. By leveraging other ministry partnerships, this omnibus piece of legislation has very far-reaching benefits for Ontarians in every single corner of the province.

The health and safety of our province, even in the most ordinary times, has always been paramount to our government, but when we saw what we saw over the last several years of the COVID-19 pandemic we knew that we needed to strengthen our resolve. We knew we had to ensure that we had the equipment and the supplies that were required to protect people where and when they needed it the most.

To honour that commitment, we’ve been working tirelessly behind the scenes with all of our partners throughout every corner of this province to ensure that we had the equipment and the supplies that we needed to combat the impacts of this pandemic, but also to ensure that we were ready for future emergencies, which is something that was sorely lacking by the former government. Look no further than what occurred over the course of SARS. As everybody has seen, the Premier walked into a warehouse at the start of this pandemic to find our PPE, our masks—it’s hard to imagine this, Speaker, but think about that: Not only were they expired, they were quite literally rotting, falling apart.

We have continued to work around the clock to centralize and strengthen our procurement and our purchasing practices so that we can address a lot of the challenges that we saw and a lot of the recommendations that were made even after the last pandemic. We’re laying the groundwork to be able to get it done through pieces of legislation like the Supply Chain Management Act, which came in March 2019, which established a legislative framework that supports our supply chain centralization. This is what jump-started our journey and ensured that we were in a position to transform and centralize our supply chain across the whole of government.

Supply chain centralization is enabling a whole-of-government approach to how we purchase all goods and services, transforming our public sector practices and ensuring that we are achieving results for businesses and for people all across this province.

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This streamlined supply chain system is delivering better results for taxpayers, it's reducing red tape for businesses, fostering innovation, making it easier for companies of all sizes to do business with government. Paired with our recently passed BOBI initiative, the Building Ontario Business Initiative, this is an absolute game-changer for our manufacturing and our tech sectors and is in complete stark contrast to the way things operated under the former Liberal-NDP coalition government, which was really a coalition of no.

In March 2020, the World Health Organization had declared COVID-19 a global pandemic: something, obviously, as we all know, nobody had ever witnessed before. This required us, as a province, to pivot very quickly to address the challenges that we had because of the lack of supply of PPE. Because what we had was rotting, Mr. Speaker—rotting. If you look around the world, at that time less than 40% of all of our PPE and CSE—that's our personal protective equipment and our critical supplies and equipment—came from Ontario and Canada. We were relying on jurisdictions overseas to supply us with those goods, but the rest of the world was relying on that as well. So when the pandemic hit and our Premier walked into that warehouse and found all those rotting masks, when he saw all that, he said, "Never again" to the people of this province: never again would we be beholden to any other jurisdiction. That's because it's tough to get supplies from around the world. Everyone was clamouring for them. We didn't make them locally.

Our Premier said "Never again," and there was a call to action. And we worked around the clock, Mr. Speaker, proudly. Proudly, we worked around the clock to ensure that we could deliver to the people of this province the critical supplies and equipment and the critical personal protective equipment that they needed to stay safe. My ministry, along with the Ministry of Health, was actually designated as supply chain management entities in March 2020 through a regulation under the SCMA. And then we worked together to start building that reliable and robust centralized supply chain for Ontarians that is meeting the ongoing needs of our public sector and ensuring that front-line workers have the products that they need to be safe, irrespective of whatever is happening in the world, because we're making it here at home now, Mr. Speaker—right here at home.

You heard the great Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade speak earlier about how we hit 78%, and we're on our way to 93% of all of our PPE being made in Ontario. We're not purchasing from overseas anymore. We're purchasing from Brockville. We're purchasing from places all over Ontario, Speaker. That is what we were able to build, and that is what we are continuing to build.

But it doesn't stop there. We have to make sure that we're protected against the future emergencies that may arise as well. And that is what this legislation, that the great President of the Treasury Board introduced and that I'm so proud to be a part of, is all about. It's about making sure that stockpile remains Ontario-made, and it's about making sure that stockpile remains in good form. We're going to come back yearly to report on what's in our stockpile so that never again, as the Premier said, will we ever be caught flat-footed like we were two years ago—over two years ago.

We just can't afford to do that again, Mr. Speaker. We can't afford another disaster like what was left to us by the former Liberal government and their friends in the NDP. We can't go back to that. We can say a lot of things in this House, and I know when we get in here sometimes we can get a little animated, but that's the reality. The reality is, we were in need, and in our darkest hour of need we were left with rotting PPE. It's never going to happen again, Mr. Speaker, because we're prepared now. We're prepared. We have a robust supply now of PPE and CSE, and we're ensuring that is going to be produced, wherever possible, in Ontario.

Really, a large part of this has to do with this great piece of legislation and how much it impacts countless vital industries in our province: hospitals, long-term-care homes, retirement homes, residential homes, school boards, universities, colleges, ministries, provincial agencies, two hydroelectricity organizations. It is a very, very large list, Speaker, but our will to deliver is much larger, because we know that the people of this province are looking to us as their government to get it done, and we're all about getting it done. We'll continue to get it done, because the people of this province deserve a government that's going to get it done.

We've leveraged our extensive manufacturing capabilities to create these made-in-Ontario solutions, to address many of the challenges that we faced at the outset of the pandemic and throughout. We're making it a priority to ensure that never again are our critical front-line workers and everyday Ontarians going to be left without those critical protective pieces of equipment that they need, not only for themselves, but to ensure that their loved ones are safe.

In the early days of COVID-19, as I said, we were sourcing almost exclusively all of our PPE and CSE from abroad. Imagine that: We were competing with every single jurisdiction in the world to secure the most important things we needed in the time of an emergency, and yet all of this had full capability of being produced right here in Ontario—virtually all of it, maybe even more, as my friend the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade may have alluded to.

This created such significant pressures on the availability of these supplies in Ontario and around the world, as we know. To suggest that it was anything less than—quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, it's in some ways miraculous to me when I look back and I think of what we were able to pull off in such a short period of time. In such a short

period of time, we were already purchasing masks from Ontario-made producers: within the first six months after the Premier said, “Never again.” That’s pretty impressive. Because our government took that immediate action, because our Premier, Premier Ford, said, “I need help. We need help,” the call to arms was real, and our manufacturers responded in a great way. We now have a very robust and centralized supply chain. We’re now ready for current pandemics, future pandemics, forever—we’re ready.

This legislation is also protecting our consumers from bad actors. Just stop and think here: Not only did we ensure that we stocked the shelves, because that was priority one, then we said, “No, that’s not enough. We need to make sure we stock the shelves with Ontario-made products.” And we did that, but we didn’t stop there. We said, “You know what? We need to make sure that people are not turning around and taking advantage of hard-working, honest Ontarians out there by taking our PPE that we were giving them and then selling it.” We made sure that we stopped those actions. I think we can all agree, Speaker, that in light of all of the events over the last two years, the government of Ontario, under the leadership of our Premier, got it done.

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When you look at some of these enforcement measures, these are not small in nature. An individual can be fined up to \$20,000, a corporation up to \$250,000, ensuring that bad actors that are looking to make a quick buck by hoarding critical supplies—we’re making sure that they’re not going to get away with it. This is part of our broader plan to make sure that we have that healthy and robust stockpile, to ensure that we have everything we need in the province to address the challenges of today and the challenges of tomorrow. Again, I want to stress this—I don’t know if I’ve said it strongly enough yet, but it’s permanent. It’s permanent. Because when the Premier said, “Never again,” it meant never again—never means never, never, ever again.

I’m so proud of our record of protecting the people of Ontario. Within the last two years, 33,000 consumer reports of price gouging have been filed, with 900 of the most egregious examples referred to police and 1,700 warning letters issued to businesses. This past December, I even issued a warning to unscrupulous individuals who were out reselling rapid antigen tests that they had received free of cost. I wrote a letter to Amazon, Kijiji, eBay, craigslist, Facebook and TikTok—and do you know what they did, Mr. Speaker? They came back and helped us. They made sure to delist, de-platform these individuals who were selling important goods, hoarding them and selling them to people at ridiculous numbers I won’t get into, and in breach of our emergency order. They helped us track them down as well.

I’m proud, again, to say that we’ve had now over 500 complaints as a result of the resale of our rapid tests alone—500. That’s impressive. I think that’s very impressive, and I think it’s just another one of the steps that we’re making in the right direction as we fight to protect

Ontarians and to protect consumers and our most vulnerable people in this province.

When we look at these types of actions that we’ve been taking as a government, I believe, and I feel confident, that the people of Ontario can rest easily at night knowing that if the worst were to come to pass, the government would have their backs again, and I believe that they know that their government will have their backs no matter what and at all costs.

This new act is building on positive outcomes through direct and indirect benefits:

- fewer disruption to services because of the supply we now have of PPE and CSE;

- more economic benefits realized through a stronger supply chain and inventory, including coordinated distribution across the province;

- economic benefits to industries that are involved in the design, production and distribution of PPE and CSE;

- equal access to PPE and CSE for Indigenous communities and service delivery organizations that are particularly vulnerable and have faced ongoing challenges to accessing these critical supplies and equipment; and

- greater confidence in the province knowing that we now have a very robust and resilient supply chain and inventory of the essential supplies that we need—but it doesn’t stop there—and making sure that they’re properly managed and proper air controls are in place within these facilities.

I was just with the President of the Treasury Board, we were touring one of our warehouses last week—all quality controlled to make sure they’re not going to rot on shelves again.

I think that when you look at the work that we’ve done providing our essential public services—our nurses, our PSWs, people on the front lines—I think it’s about making sure that they have confidence, as well, Mr. Speaker. I believe we have given them that level of confidence that they will have the critical supplies they will need to make sure that they can stay safe, to make sure that they can do their job safely and to make sure that the people they’re serving are also going to be safe.

Another positive outcome of this proposed legislation, Speaker, is that it’s specifically designed to address the recommendations that were made by our Auditor General, who, in her value-for-money audit of PPE, made several recommendations, including for the Ontario government health sector and the non-health care sector to have sufficient supply available during and, of course, as we’ve said, after COVID-19, to make sure that we are not as a province ever going to be vulnerable to sudden market movements and the price and supply concerns that arose over the course of this previous pandemic.

While this is something that the Liberals of old completely failed to do, we won’t make the same mistakes, nor will we carry the same level of negligence. Instead, public front-line workers, organizations, communities and businesses can all rest assured that their government is continuing to take important steps to protect our supply

chain, to buy essential goods and services so that we are prepared for any scenario, no matter what it is.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a question for the Minister of Government and Consumer Services. Numerous legal and constitutional experts came to the committee that was considering this bill, and they pointed out two things about schedule 7: (1) that it is not necessary, whatsoever, in order to provide the compensation enhancements that PSWs and nurses and all front-line health care workers deserve; and (2) that schedule 7 is very clearly an unconstitutional violation of the collective bargaining rights of workers, and the pay equity and equality rights of women workers, in particular.

So, given that testimony that was provided to the committee, why does this government decide to proceed with legislation that is clearly unconstitutional and that attacks the charter rights of women workers in Ontario?

Hon. Ross Romano: As a former lawyer myself who actually taught constitutional law, I would love to hear more from the opposition member as to what the constitutionality concern that she has is. The government, obviously, has had legal counsel review the matters.

I would just say to the member opposite: Would you prefer to have our PPE sitting on shelves, rotting? Would you prefer not to have PPE for the people of this province? Would you prefer that we not be prepared to deal with future pandemics or future crises that may arise? Would you like to be flat-footed, yet again?

I know that the member opposite really values the coalition with the Liberals, and I know that they value doing nothing and saying no all the time, but we, on this side of the House, like to get things done for the people of this province.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you to the minister for his comments.

Minister, I just want to know why you're making it illegal for people to resell PPE and CSE provided by their government. How will the legislation address issues of reselling these two things?

Hon. Ross Romano: Thank you to the outstanding member for such a great question. Thank you. It is critical, because we saw during this pandemic that, unfortunately, there are some bad actors out there. There are some bad actors that try to make a buck off the backs of honest, hard-working people in this province. We're not going to have it. We're just not going to tolerate it, Speaker. It's not right, it's not fair, and we're not going to tolerate it. When we put PPE out there and we provide that free of charge—because it's important that people are safe—and people are hoarding that and selling it for a profit, that is a completely unethical practice. I'm just not going to tolerate that. So we said no, and we made sure that individuals will be fined up to \$20,000, and corporations, up to \$250,000, for those types of actions. Never again.

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

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Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'd like to ask the minister why they decided to proceed with a schedule that is supposed to be supporting retention in public services, and yet they heard from the Ontario Nurses' Association, SEIU Healthcare, CUPE Ontario, the Ontario Federation of Labour and others that this schedule will do absolutely nothing to support retention in public services and in health care. What it actually does is it attacks the collective bargaining rights of workers, it attacks the equality and pay equity rights of women workers. Why is this government proceeding with a schedule in this bill that is clearly unconstitutional and that attacks women health care workers in Ontario?

Hon. Ross Romano: Once again, I'm happy to continue to explain why it's so important that the province of Ontario is never again going to be caught flat-footed, like we were before, like we were when it was their watch that we were suffering under, when the Liberal-NDP coalition government was letting our PPE rot on shelves and ensuring that the people of Ontario were not going to be in a position to address an emergency the way we saw over the course of the pandemic. No, in fact, Mr. Speaker, we are definitely not going to be following the lessons of the former Liberal-NDP coalition.

We're going to make sure that we continue to get it done. This legislation is guaranteeing that the people of this province are never again going to be in a situation like we were over the course of the last two years—because, Mr. Speaker, we got it done. It's that simple.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: I listened very intently to the minister, as much out of job security as anything, but interest as well, because he did a great job there. Maybe the minister could further give a little iteration of what problem the government was trying to solve with the introduction of the personal protective equipment schedule?

Hon. Ross Romano: I just want to start off by saying, I really want to thank the parliamentary assistant here to the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services. He's doing an absolutely fabulous job. And he's an incredible advocate for the people of his community in Sarnia. I'm very excited to have the privilege to be able to work with the honourable member and—

Interjection: Hear, hear.

Hon. Ross Romano: Absolutely. He's just done absolutely fundamental work, even in this legislation here.

It is pretty impressive when you think about for a moment that pre-pandemic, when the Premier walked into that warehouse, less than 40%—it was about 37%, 38%—of our PPE was made in this country. Now we're over 78%, Mr. Speaker, and we're going to 93%. That's where we're heading. We are focusing on Ontario. We are focusing on protecting our people.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'm glad I was here this afternoon to listen to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services and the direction this government is taking in making sure that the next supply of PPE is produced here in Ontario. I'm actually pleased to hear that, although we're going to dispute in regard to making that available and making sure that all industry and companies here in Ontario can participate.

I'm wondering if the minister would entertain me and actually consider adopting a policy such as this: That the administration of the Legislative Assembly and the provincial government take steps to ensure that the masks, respirators, hand sanitizers and other PPE distributed at Queen's Park and in various provincial departments and agencies, including constituency offices, come from Canadian-controlled, private corporations that produce this type of personal protective equipment, or PPE, here in our jurisdictions. Would you be interested in adopting that type of policy?

Hon. Ross Romano: Mr. Speaker, we're so interested in it, we already did it. We already did it, and the member opposite voted no. The member opposite voted no to BOBI, the Building Ontario Business Initiative. The great member and Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade and the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction and I made this announcement at a Myant factory, again a Canadian business right here in the Mississauga area, where we talked about how we are now going to be divesting Ontario purchases to the tune of \$3 billion that was being spent overseas—below trade thresholds—all within Ontario. Now we're moving towards 93% of all of our PPE coming from Ontario and Canadian manufacturers.

So I really would encourage the member opposite to go back and take a look at how he voted last time. I'm not sure if he can undo that vote, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure how that works anymore.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Brantford-Brant for half a question.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you, Speaker, and I'll give half a question, but I'll ask for more than half an answer. The Ministry of Government and Consumer Services is one of the most important ministries in the government of Ontario. It is the forward-facing ministry—and I think you know that extremely well—of the government of Ontario. The minister spoke eloquently this afternoon about the importance of having locally sourced PPE, and I was wondering if he could just talk about that a little bit more.

Hon. Ross Romano: I really want to thank the member from Brantford-Brant for his exceptional advocacy on behalf of the people of his community and for all the kind comments. But it is very critical; it is very important, Mr. Speaker.

The Ministry of Government and Consumer Services does absolutely outstanding work. I want to thank all of our staff across the entire ministry. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, there were a lot of sleepless nights trying to ensure that we were getting it done for the people of this province, because you know what? Making sure that we

have our critical supplies right here, being built and developed right in the province, is important to protect the safety of the public.

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

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Before I begin, I want to take a moment just to acknowledge the month of April and how amazing this month of April is turning out to be for the religious communities across our province. I want to start with a quick shout-out to the fact that we have Good Friday a couple of days from now, and we have Easter Monday. I want to wish everyone a very happy Good Friday and Easter Monday.

It's the holy month of Ramadan, so Ramadan Mubarak to all Muslims across Ontario and Canada for this spiritual month, this time of fasting and reflection.

It's Sikh Heritage Month, so happy Sikh Heritage Month, everyone—a round of applause, for sure, for Sikh Heritage Month. Great, why not? I'll take it.

I want to wish everyone a very happy Vaisakhi and Khalsa Sajna Divas. This is a really important time for Sikhs across the world as Sikhs celebrate revolution, a revolution where those who were downtrodden, those who were oppressed, those who were told they were less than human beings were empowered. They were empowered and uplifted and told that they were royal, sovereign and free. We celebrate the creation of the Khalsa during this time, and the creation of the Khalsa is the celebration of a revolution that is founded in this belief that we are all one, and because we are all one, an injustice to any of us is an injustice to all of us. With that in our hearts, this month and during Vaisakhi and Khalsa Sajna Divas, we recommit ourselves towards fighting for a better world, to standing up against tyranny, to fighting injustice in all its forms. So I want to wish everyone a very happy Vaisakhi and Khalsa Sajna Divas. Today, and every day, let's fight injustice.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention some other communities. Passover is coming up, so I want to wish everyone a very happy Passover. As well, we already celebrated Navratri, to the members of the Hindu community. So happy Navratri as well. It's a time of the year where religions across the world really come together to celebrate, which is beautiful.

Now to the matter before us: to look at the question around pandemic emergency preparedness. Any time I think about being prepared for a pandemic, I think of Brampton, and the reason I think of Brampton is because when we look at the pandemic, Brampton was one of the worst-hit communities in Canada, frankly, by the pandemic and looking at how badly Brampton was devastated by COVID-19 really gives us a lens into examining how we can ensure that that kind of damage never happens again. How can we be prepared for a pandemic? I just want to give a bit of an outline of why understanding Brampton and the struggles that we faced during the pandemic really provide a very important background and case study into understanding how we can be better prepared.

1620

Brampton is a city that has been left behind for years. It's a city of over 700,000 people. We have one hospital, and we're the ninth-largest city in Canada. We're one of the fastest-growing. And when the pandemic hit Brampton, keep in mind that we had a health care emergency declared before the pandemic. These issues and cracks in our health care system have been something that we've been talking about for years, the fact that Brampton is ground zero for hallway medicine. Thousands of people every year are treated in the hallway because there's no space in rooms. Brampton has some of these very, very long wait times.

When you feel sick, people in Brampton have this deep sense of fear and concern. It's like a hurt within the community in the sense of how badly people feel when we talk about our health care system. They feel left behind. They feel something like they've been disregarded. There's just so little preparedness for the fact that Brampton, a city that's growing and continues to grow, is not getting the investment in health care that we need and deserve.

When you look at how the pandemic devastated this community—keep in mind, this is a community of essential workers who work day and night, who don't have the privilege and the ability to work from home. The fact is that others can work from home because Bramptonians go to work everyday. And it's a community that's struggling with affordability. We know that affordability is hitting us across the province right now, but in Brampton, as I've said before, the issue of auto insurance is something that is devastating Bramptonians, who are often working in areas that require them to drive to get to their job or drive to get to the school. Auto insurance is something that's really devastating Brampton in terms of the fact that it's so expensive.

We talk about the fact that Bramptonians don't feel like that they have the infrastructure necessary. We're a city of over 700,000 people. We don't have a university in our city. We don't have a university in Brampton. There was a university that was slated and that was cancelled by the Conservative government right after the municipal election in 2018. This is a problem. This all demonstrates how Brampton is being left behind. And then, when the pandemic came and hit Brampton, it then demonstrates all the ways in which we were being left behind, because this is a community that already feels—and not just feels; it is legitimately being left behind.

A city of 700,000 people, of more than 700,000 people in Brampton—the community deserves better. A city of 700,000, like Brampton, deserves to have a university. It deserves to have three fully funded hospitals with emergency rooms. It deserves to have affordable car insurance so people are not struggling to make ends meet. It deserves to have an affordable life. It deserves to have amazing public education. It deserves to have all these factors that are necessary to build a robust community.

But what we saw instead is that when the pandemic hit Brampton, it really demonstrates the cracks in our communities, and some of the issues that we saw are issues

that are not being addressed by the legislation before us. We know one of the most important things that Bramptonians need are supports like permanent paid sick days—and I'll explain to you why that's so important—something that's lacking in this legislation.

Despite the government's nice words about the need to make sure workers are protected, when we look at this piece of legislation, if we look at schedule 7 particularly, we know that folks, essential workers across our province, are not given the dignity of permanent paid sick days. And when we look at COVID-19 and the heights of the pandemic prior to the support of the vaccines, prior to all the vaccinations and the clinics that came forward, we saw that workplaces were some of the worst places of outbreak in Brampton for COVID-19. And the fact that workers had this terrible decision: Every single day, they had to choose between going to work sick or paying the bills, a decision that no one should, frankly, ever have to make.

If you looked at the stats—I used to pull them up very regularly—they demonstrate that workplaces were just increasing—the spread was happening across the board, and health experts were saying, they were coming out in droves and saying, “If you want to protect communities from pandemics, then you cannot put people in this terrible position where they have to choose between going to work sick or paying their bills.”

Permanent paid sick days is how you get prepared for a pandemic. Permanent paid sick days is how you ensure that people don't have to choose between going to work sick and spreading a sickness, and staying home and getting well but not having to worry about paying the bills. That is the support that permanent paid sick days provides. And if the government wants to be prepared for a pandemic or future pandemics, then we need to make sure that those kinds of supports are there and necessary.

As I mentioned before, it's so important to understand and that people really get—looking at Brampton and understanding—the systemic ways in which we've been left behind for years: the fact that for 15 years the Liberal government left Brampton behind; the fact that for 15 years the Liberal government decided to not invest in our health care, decided to not build a university, decided to not lower car insurance rates—they did the exact opposite. The Liberal government, time and again, allowed billion-dollar corporations to overcharge Bramptonians on car insurance. They made active decisions to not invest in our health care. They made a decision to not build a university in our city. For 15 years, the Liberals had a mandate, and they left Brampton behind.

But instead of things getting better under the Conservatives, they went from bad to worse. We saw auto insurance rates continue to go up every single year under the Conservative government. We saw the fact that our hospital and our health care are still in crisis.

A city of 700,000 people should not have to rely on only one hospital to get the support they need. Name me another city in Canada that has over 700,000 people and one hospital. Brampton is the only city that's being left behind in such a terrible way. Let's look across Ontario. We can look at Windsor. Over 200,000 people live in

Windsor; they have two hospitals. Over 600,000 people live in Hamilton: three hospitals. Over 800,000 people live in Mississauga: three hospitals. Brampton: 700,000 people and more, and growing, the ninth-largest city in Canada, one of the fastest-growing—only one hospital. This is an injustice. This is terrible. And when pandemics hit communities like Brampton, the cracks in our health care system come out. The cracks had already existed.

One of the ways we know that we need to address our health care crisis is by making sure that we retain nurses and health care workers, people who are risking their lives day after day, putting their lives at risk, serving us, taking care of us, making sure we're healthy. Those are the folks we need to retain in order to maintain a strong and robust health care system. But when we have these regressive pieces of legislation, unconstitutional pieces of legislation like Bill 124 that truly don't give health care workers the support they need to work in these terribly stressful situations, the result is that that puts a further burden on our health care system, and the result is that we see communities like Brampton that are already struggling being left further behind.

These are issues that are not being addressed in this piece of legislation. If we want to be prepared for a pandemic, then we need to look at where our failures were, and this legislation doesn't do that. It does not look at the fact that to be prepared for a pandemic means to make sure that communities don't have to struggle to see a doctor.

If we look at Brampton and our health care situation, we needed a second hospital 10 years ago. We need a third hospital today, with full ERs. We're talking about how we need 24-hour hospitals, just like other cities across Ontario. And Brampton is just going to keep on growing. Brampton is one of the fastest-growing, so if you don't drastically make a change in how we're dealing with Brampton, if we don't make drastic investments in Brampton today, then the struggles that Bramptonians are facing in and out [*inaudible*] we build and ensure that Brampton has three fully funded, functioning hospitals with emergency rooms. That's the kind of health care that Bramptonians deserve. It is such a grave injustice that there are folks in Brampton who are scared to go to the hospital in their own community.

That is, to me, such a clear example of how, if we want to be prepared for a pandemic, you need to look at what the health care system is outside a pandemic. If we know that Brampton had a health care emergency prior to the pandemic, then obviously, when we saw the COVID-19 pandemic ravage Brampton, folks in Brampton rightfully said, "What did you expect?" You underfund our city for 15 years under the Liberals. You underfund our city for four years under the Conservatives. For basically 20 years, Brampton has been left behind by Liberals and Conservatives, and the result is when something drastic like a pandemic hits, Brampton gets thrown further into crisis, with one of the highest positivity rates, with so many folks who were sick and lost their lives.

1630

It was truly a tragic and terrible time in our city, and it continues to be so, because these issues are not being

addressed. This piece of legislation doesn't address them. By not ensuring that nurses are being properly compensated, that health care workers are not getting the support they need, the result is that Peel Memorial health care centre—not a hospital, a health care centre—was shut for the first three months of this year. So you have a city that's already struggling with a health care crisis, has a hospital that's already operating at over 100% capacity, had a health care centre that was operating at over 500% capacity, and then you get slammed by a pandemic, and because of all these regressive pieces of legislation by the Conservative government, our only health care centre, our urgent care centre, was shut down for three months: January, February and most of March.

The lack of action in this legislation demonstrates that if we continue to get hit with further health care emergencies, Brampton is going to once again be put in the same situation. It begs the question, what's going to be the response as year after year—just keep on saying, "You know, we've left Brampton behind"? That's all it is. "Brampton doesn't deserve better." It's wrong. It's unjust. It's so terrible. And Brampton does deserve better. Some of the hardest-working, most dynamic, amazing communities across the world call Brampton home, and to put them in this desperate, terrible situation is just something that further pushes people to the margins, and we've seen that time and again.

If we want to make sure we are prepared for a pandemic, then we need to look at all the factors that left Brampton behind and address them one by one: Bring in permanent paid sick days. Make sure that communities don't have to choose between going to work sick and paying the bills. Make sure that health care workers are properly compensated so we don't run into those circumstances like we did for the past three months, where Peel Memorial urgent care centre was shut January, February and March 2022, because the Conservative government refused to provide Brampton with the funding we needed.

Ultimately, the buck stops with the Conservative government. If there's a crisis in our city, the Conservative government has an obligation to act, to invest. What better time than a crisis to make some drastic decisions? But time and again, the Ford government decided to leave Brampton behind, and the result is that people were struggling, and folks in Brampton continue to struggle, living in a city of over 700,000 people with only one hospital, which is chronically overcrowded, chronically underfunded, where people are treated in the thousands in hallways because our hospital is not getting the funding that we deserve.

Peel Memorial was operating at over 500% capacity, I believe, before the pandemic. Brampton Civic was operating at over 100% capacity before the pandemic, and what did the pandemic do? It threw our city further into crisis. And instead of acting, the Conservative government came to Brampton with empty promises. An empty election promise the Conservative government did, coming to Brampton during the pandemic: They said, "We're going to build another hospital." We looked at the budget: not a dollar in the budget for another hospital. The Conservative

government continued to make these announcements about hospitals coming to Brampton. What's the reality? Peel Memorial, the institution that needs to be converted into a hospital, was shut for the first three months of this year.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's the third time you've said that.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: That demonstrates how badly this Conservative government has left Brampton behind. And I heard members saying that's the third time I said it. Let me make it the fourth time I say it. Let me make it the fifth time I say it. I will continue to say it time and again until the Conservative government acts, because that's what Bramptonians elected us to do: to come here and fight day and night. And that's what we're going to do. We're going to continue to make the Conservative government feel uncomfortable, and I think that's what happens when they start to heckle. They have questions and comments afterwards. They could say their comments then, but I think they're afraid to say their comments then, because the proof is before you. You chose to not act and not invest in our city. You chose to not invest in our city.. You chose to leave the ninth largest city in Canada behind. You chose to come to our city in the middle of a pandemic and make an empty election promise and, instead of building a hospital, say, "Yes, we'll build it in a couple of years," when you could have said, "You know what? We're going to fully fund Brampton Civic today. We're going to end the health care emergency today. We're going to end hallway medicine today."

So yes, you will hear from me—a broken record—because until you act, I'm going to keep on pushing. I'm going to keep on advocating for Bramptonians, because that's what they sent me here to do, and with the hope and honour of the people of Ontario, we're given the privilege to finally be in a position where we can bring the investment that Brampton needs. We can be in a position to finally invest in our health care and make sure that Bramptonians don't have to live in fear, that they don't have to live in a city where people are genuinely afraid of going to the hospital, because they'll know they have more than one hospital to attend when they're unwell. That is my dearest and greatest hope right now: that we are given the privilege and opportunity to be in a position where we can make sure that Brampton gets that kind of support, because that's what Bramptonians deserve.

Brampton is a city that's been left behind for far too long. Looking at our city demonstrates how we can be prepared for a pandemic, and it begins with investing to end our health care crisis. It begins with ensuring that we have permanent paid sick days. It begins by making sure that nurses are not suffering from an unconstitutional piece of legislation like Bill 124. It begins by making sure that our city has the tools necessary to fight this pandemic and any future pandemic to come.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Just before we proceed with further debate, I'll just remind both sides of the House to please direct your remarks through the Chair, as opposed to back and forth across the aisle.

I recognize the member for Whitby.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker. You'll know, from being out in the region of Durham, and in my riding, in particular, I've got three academic institutions: two universities and one community college. Part of what we're discussing today is that the government invested \$81 million to support the expansion of the Community Commitment Program for Nurses—you'll recall that—targeting newly graduated registered nurses, registered practical nurses and nurse practitioners, as well as newly licensed, internationally educated nurses and nurses returning to practice. This particular initiative has been well received by the members that I've just discussed in all the academic sessions, and they've advocated for the expansion of the program.

Will the member from Brampton East once again vote against this investment for front-line workers?

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Well, I'll talk about the investments that Brampton does need. That's what we're fighting for in Brampton, and that's what we're fighting for in the NDP. The fact that Brampton is a city of 700,000 people with only one hospital—we need to fight, and we in the NDP have been fighting to make sure that we get the investment to build additional health care facilities in Brampton, more than one hospital. Brampton deserves three hospitals with three ERs, and that's what we in the NDP are committed to fighting for. We're going to ensure that the people, the voice of Brampton, are heard every single day.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I want to thank my friend the member from Brampton. He is an incredible advocate for his community—always has been, always will be. As we can tell from the fire in his speech, he's there for his constituents and knows their needs.

I just want to ask him what the effects of schedule 7 of this bill might be on his community, specifically, and those impacted. How does he read the mechanics of that portion of the bill?

Mr. Gurratan Singh: I want to take a very brief moment just to say what an honour it has been to serve alongside the member from Essex. He is truly someone who is so dedicated to his community. I know, in whatever endeavour he moves forward, he's going to bring the same dedication and commitment that he has brought to this House to that endeavour. I look forward to whatever the future brings to him.

Schedule 7 is something which, as we've mentioned before, is unconstitutional. It's going to devastate our community. We saw Peel Memorial shut down because of a lack of access and a lack of support from this government, and also the great burden that was placed on our front-line health care workers. Schedule 7 of this piece of legislation is going to exacerbate that and further put our city into crisis.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: I had the opportunity, with the current Associate Minister of Transportation, to chair the

Agency Review Task Force. We did a lot of work and we looked at the Fairness Commissioner as an example, who is tasked with a lot of work in order to get foreign-trained nationals credentialed here in Ontario. And as with many things that the previous government did, they actually gave the Fairness Commissioner no teeth.

What I've noticed in this bill is that we're actually working, the Ministry of Labour, with the Fairness Commissioner in order to get foreign-credentialed workers trained here quicker. I realize that the member from Brampton East has issues with the legislation, but I was wondering if he would be able to support what we're trying to do by reducing barriers to registering with and being recognized by health regulatory colleges so that we can get more people certified here more quickly to take care of the labour gaps in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: I find it so interesting, Speaker, that you have the hecklers who want to heckle during speeches, but then when they have the opportunity for question and answer, they're silent. So I'd really encourage that also the hecklers take the opportunity to ask their questions now, because, hey, this is the whole point of question and answer. It seems like they're zip-O right now.

I'll say this as well: I find it shocking any time the Conservative government talks about health care, anything about educational institutions, the fact that in Brampton we had a university slotted to come to our city. I think it's such a grave injustice that a city like Brampton doesn't have a university. At the nth hour, at the eleventh hour, the Conservative government cancelled our university. A city of 700,000 people doesn't have a university. That is a grave injustice, and that lays at the feet of this Conservative government, because they decided to leave our city behind.

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

Mr. Jamie West: The bulk of this has to do with PPE, and PPE helps reduce that risk of illness or injury, which is really important. But when it's not able to reduce the risk, when illness gets through, that's when paid sick days are important, and we saw this. The member from Brampton East talked about how badly it very often affected Brampton, working-class families that were there, and the need for paid sick days.

Yesterday, during the Equal Pay Day debate, I was reminded that the measly two paid sick days the Conservative government has provided are going to expire in—I can't remember—two or three short months. Very shortly, they're going to expire. Maybe the member from Brampton East could remind the Conservative government how important paid sick days are to working-class families so not only can they make ends meet, but protect their coworkers and protect the workplaces where they work.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: As I mentioned beforehand, throughout this pandemic, we saw time and again the fact that workplaces were some of the greatest areas of spread of COVID-19. Every day, Bramptonians woke up and essential workers had to make this grave decision between going to work sick and paying the bills.

Permanent paid sick days was something that we saw that was proven by science, by so many health care experts that would have helped prevent the spread of COVID-19 and, frankly, save lives. But instead of doing the right thing, the Conservative government, time and again, voted against bringing in permanent paid sick days, and the impact is that Brampton continues to be devastated. And so it's something that is necessary, it's something that's so important and it's something that we in the NDP are going to keep on fighting for until workers have that dignity and support.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: I know that the member opposite has tried to avoid all the questions that we've asked and twisted it to something else, so I expect that he'll try and twist this question to something else as well.

One of the main features of this bill is to ensure food security for us in Ontario in the event of a pandemic, in the event of a protest that would make it impossible for the Ontario Food Terminal to actually function. Two billion pounds of food go through that a year. It feeds so many people not only in Brampton but in Ontario. Can the member opposite support something that is actually going to provide food security for the members of Brampton, or is he going to twist this to some other answer that has nothing to do with what I'm asking?

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Well, what I'm still waiting for, Speaker, is for the hecklers to ask their question, because they're still silent—

Interjection.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: See, he's allowed to heckle because he asked a question, but the rest of you folks want to heckle, but it's question and answer. It's fair game. You can ask your questions at an appropriate time, but just zip-O, I see, time and again.

I'll talk about security. How about giving workers the security to be able to work with the dignity of knowing that when they're sick, they can stay at home and not spread COVID-19? How about giving people the security so that front-line health care workers know that they can pay their bills because they don't have to deal with regressive, unconstitutional bills like Bill 124? That's the kind of security that workers deserve, and that's what we in the NDP are fighting for.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: We're having such a good time here this afternoon. Sometimes I sit back in my seat—I'm not one to heckle, so I listen to the back-and-forth. It's quite interesting, some of the comments that you hear. It's always fun walking across the aisle and actually having some communication. For the people back home, what you hear is not always what actually goes on here. We actually get some work done.

I do want to ask a question. Schedule 7 really supercedes the collective agreement rights of individuals who are working as front-line workers. I want to ask the member—I know what benefits it would bring to my area

if we were to repeal Bill 124. This was a great opportunity for this government to actually take those steps in repealing that so we can show the respect that front-line workers are rightfully entitled to. What would it mean for people in your area?

Mr. Gurratan Singh: I know that, earlier, members of the Conservative government provided their comments about them being lawyers, and because they're lawyers all of a sudden, that makes them experts in every single, specific area of law and their words cannot be contradicted. I'm a lawyer as well, and I will tell you, yes, schedule 7 of Bill 124 is unconstitutional. A variety of legal experts have demonstrated it and stated it is unconstitutional. It is a problem, and it's something that we should be fighting against. It will be challenged and cause immense costs to this Conservative government, just like all of the other times they were challenged and the costs that they faced in those previous challenges as well.

Schedule 7 of Bill 124 is going to hurt front-line health care workers. It's a problem, and it's something that we in the NDP are going to continue fighting against.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): There being not enough time for a question, we'll move on for further debate. Further debate? Further debate? I recognize the member for Sudbury.

Mr. Jamie West: I was giving the government an opportunity to debate their bill.

But I am proud to stand to talk about Bill 106, the Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness Act. The heart and soul of this bill, I think all of us agree on. There was an issue, Speaker—we're two years into COVID-19 and, for the majority of those two years, that sucked the air out of the room for any other conversation or debate. A lot of the reason that it did that was because we were not prepared. Part of it could be because we were not familiar with what COVID-19 was. We weren't sure how it was transmitted.

I was having a conversation recently with a friend of mine, and we were talking about getting packages, and you'd leave the package on your front porch for 24 hours, and wiping everything down with hand sanitizer and spraying everything with Lysol, and all those things. More and more, we began to understand the need for good-quality respirators. Over time, it now seems normal.

I remember, for example, I had a problem with my credit card and I had to go into the bank to sign off on something. They needed to see me in person to check my ID in order to do this. I walked into a bank with a mask on, and the security guard thanked me, because it was a relatively new concept of wearing masks when you went in anywhere. I'm sure we all remember that time where you got out of the car to go to the grocery store or to go wherever, and got to the door, and then went back to your car, because it wasn't a regular routine like how it is today.

When you think back to that time, Speaker, you recognize there were real problems with procurement. There were real problems with our stockpile. It was broken. And members, I think, on both sides—I missed the morning debate—talked about PPE just not being there.

We had SARS, and many of the recommendations came from SARS in order to ensure we were prepared for a pandemic, ensure we were prepared for viruses. They weren't followed, for a very long time, and we didn't have the stockpile of good-quality PPE.

PPE, by the way, is something that I'm really interested in. I love health and safety. I was fortunate, while I was working at Vale, previously Inco, as a steelworker, that I got into a health and safety committee. I volunteered, and when they asked me why I'd like to join, I literally said I didn't know anyone else wanted to; I just was interested. The training experience through that led me into a greater appreciation of PPE, a greater appreciation of risk management and how that works and the importance of having access to PPE, the importance of recognizing that PPE does expire, because a lot of people wouldn't think that it does. The reality is that a lot of it was expired; a lot of it wasn't any good. And when you head into a pandemic and you're handing out PPE that's expired or crumbling or not effective, it's not very helpful, and not enough is not very helpful.

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A lot of this, Conservative members have rightly pointed out, falls at the feet of the Liberals. SARS came through during the Liberals. They commissioned reports, and one of the frustrating things, I think, for average citizens is that when governments commission reports, they think that's the end of it. They finish a report, they have it, they do a press conference, and they smile, put it on a shelf and walk away. That's what I think happened with the SARS report, and that what happened in 2017, I believe, from my notes. The Auditor General came out and was very critical. I'm going to read the quote here: "One of the critical objectives for the timely implementation of our recommendations from 2017 was for the province to be better prepared for the possibility of a major emergency, which occurred with the COVID-19 pandemic." In 2017, the Auditor General said, "We haven't done this." And in fact, you've only matched 11% of the 207 recommendations. That's not very good.

So you think about that, in 2017, and you put the blame at the feet of the Liberals—and I'm happy to do that, because I think they did a very poor job when they were in government. But let's not forget that the Conservative government came into power in 2018. I know there was lots to fix; there was a big mess. But you were in power in 2018. The first case of COVID in Ontario was in January 2020, but COVID was going around. I remember watching the news. I think all of us were watching this as it was coming out of the east, across Europe. They are having the shutdowns, the lockdowns. I think in Europe were the first places they were doing the "health care heroes" and banging pots—and cases, and people dying from this. And we were watching and hoping it wouldn't come to us, wouldn't get across the shore, wouldn't affect us in Ontario. I think there were enough warning signals prior to January 2020 for the Conservative government to think, "We should be better prepared, starting today."

Now we're two years into the pandemic. I know the government has declared that they're done with COVID,

Speaker, but I want to remind the government that COVID is not skinny jeans; you don't get to decide when you're done. It's a virus. You can't decide, "I'm not going to get it." You're going to get it if you happen to contract it, just like how we can't decide to be done with cancer—and I wish that we could, but the reality is, we can't. So I think we've put the bulk at the Liberals' feet, but I think that the Conservative government needs to have some ownership of it. And everyone can be a Monday morning quarterback; I'm not trying to be offensive about this, but let's be realistic.

I want to move ahead, just because when I'm talking, I don't want to miss certain things. Sometimes I go schedule by schedule, and then I run out of time. So I want to skip down to schedule 6, the Regulated Health Professions Act. Frankly, what this allows is that it forces the councils of the colleges to comply with the regulations around English- and French-language requirements. It also prohibits requiring Canadian experience as a qualification for a registration requirement. What that does: It allows more internationally trained and experienced health care workers who come to Canada a quicker path to accessing that field, to get into that field, and I think that's a great step forward. I think it's an important step forward. I think it's a good acknowledgement, and I want to congratulate Conservatives for doing that.

I also want to congratulate the member from Scarborough Southwest, who proposed that as a private member's bill and tried pushing it through. I think it's great. There's an expression when we talk about health and safety. We'd often say, "Steal good ideas." I want to acknowledge the member from Scarborough Southwest, Doly, for having a wonderful idea and bringing it forward. It would be great if she had the credit for it, but I want to acknowledge as well the Conservative government for moving in the right direction on this as well.

Speaking of stealing great ideas, I had a private member's bill, Bill 266, and this was about creating wage supports for PSWs. We recognized for a very long time that PSWs—a lot of them—don't make very good money. We say very often that PSWs don't get into that field to become fabulously wealthy; you get into that because you have a huge heart and you care about other people. But we can all agree, especially in this situation that we are in, where there is so much more information, knowledge and awareness of the work that PSWs do, especially those who travel for home care, that that is quality, important work and they deserve to make a decent wage where they don't have to worry about making ends meet.

I'll give you an example, Speaker. Last week, we were talking about our opposition day motion that would put \$200 into the pockets of northerners because of rising costs. Erika Lougheed, our candidate in Nipissing, talked about a PSW who was skipping meals because she couldn't afford gas for her car and knew how important her clients were. We have to make sure that PSWs are able to do the work and also not be out of pocket to the point where they can't afford food. I think we're aligned on this across the board.

Bill 266 would have created a wage floor for PSWs, so no PSW would get less than a certain amount. The government and their resources could figure out what that was. It would also ensure that those PSWs who are travelling for home care would be properly compensated for that travel. I know that—because when I'm in Toronto, I know how densely populated we are here. For example, in the past I worked for Bell Canada, Speaker, and they would have a quota of how many jobs they'd want you to finish. It was frustrating in Sudbury because I would go from Noëlville to Capreol, from job to job, and then some of the guys in Toronto would do six or 10 jobs in one hour because they were all just plugging in the wire in the basement of an apartment building.

It's very similar for PSWs. If you're helping people as a PSW, and they all live in a neighbourhood in downtown Toronto, travel isn't as big a factor as if you're in northern Ontario. The member from Sault Ste. Marie is here. He would recognize this, because his riding is sparse, and the need for travel as well.

We wanted to create that wage floor. That would also include proper compensation so that you weren't out of pocket—you weren't paying for extra expenses, like gas and wear and tear on your car—so they can do the important work that PSWs do. Very often, when I talked about this, I've said we need to care about PSWs as much as they care about our family members.

That bill was voted down, Speaker, completely voted down. I say that because I want to get back to: Steal good ideas with pride. There was some hint before this bill was tabled that this bill was going to permanently give money to PSWs. It's hinted at in here: may allow "for temporary or permanent compensation ... may include different eligibility rules." But it's kind of mushy. God bless these PSWs and DSWs, these front-line workers whom the government keeps saying health care heroes and stuff. We had a lot to do—

Interjection.

Mr. Jamie West: They absolutely are; they are, but let's reflect that in the pay and the way we treat them. Let's reflect that in repealing Bill 124, for example. A member opposite—I don't know who said it, but thank you for saying, "Yes, they were."

I'll tell you a story. The other day, I was at the good roads association downtown, and that's right near where there is a monument to Jack Layton. It's Jack Layton on a tandem bicycle. People go there and take photos. Jack Layton is one of the reasons I got into politics. I thought my civic duty was to vote in the past, but Jack Layton—I was on strike for a year and Jack came out to see us, and Jack came out again and again. Quite frankly, Speaker, no other party did. I'm sure that you would have if you were nearby, but no other party came by to see us. Not even our MPP in our riding came to see us—10 picket lines, 24 hours a day.

I know the NDP supports and stands with workers because they supported and stood with me when I was on a picket line, supported and stood with me when my family was in probably the most terrifying situation we've ever

been. Jack was there very often. So I went down to get a photo because I never had a photo of Jack there. Back when the strike was on is when we had flip phones, so you didn't have a decent camera in your pocket. I only have one photo of Jack Layton from 2009, even though I saw him many, many times.

So I got that photo, and while I was there, a man and his daughter were there, an older man and an adult woman. He said, "Do you know who Jack Layton is?" I won't bore you with the details, but I'm a New Democrat, I'm an MPP; of course I do. When his daughter heard that, she said, "I'm a nurse. Let me tell you how difficult my job is. I work with COVID patients, and I work with COVID patients who are going to die. I know in my profession that some people may not live. One of the most painful and difficult things I deal with is the fact that people are going to die from COVID, and I have to tell their families they can't visit."

1700

That's the reality for a lot of these nurses, for a long time, and quite frankly, Speaker, for much too long for Bill 124 to still stand. I know Bill 124 has nothing to do with this, and I appreciate my colleagues for not interrupting and telling me to steer back to it, but really, I want to take the opportunity to say that we have to recognize the stress, the hard work, the amazing work, like the member opposite said, of our health care heroes, and we've got to repeal Bill 124. If you guys aren't going to do it, we're going to do it when we win the election. So do it now and take credit, or we'll take credit for it afterwards.

Yesterday, Speaker, was Equal Pay Day. The Equal Pay Coalition had a leaders' debate. One of the leaders didn't show up, perhaps because of a scheduling conflict. I would say as a male politician that if I was invited to an equal pay debate, I think I would move heaven and earth to be there. I'm not going to say which leader; I don't know all the commitments that they have, and I know schedules are really busy and all that. But I'll move on and just say that this debate was fantastic, and it really brings forward the difference in pay between genders: women and people who identify as women and how much less they make, and how difficult it can be.

I think back to my mom, for example. As a single mom—my parents were separated when I was two; my dad didn't provide any sort of support to us, and my mom worked full-time. We lived in Sudbury housing, which is geared-to-income housing, because of that pay gap, because of the perception back in the 1970s and continuing to now that men deserve more money and need more money. They're the breadwinners, typically, in the mind, and equal pay was brought into that.

The reason I bring up the Equal Pay Coalition is because they're opposed to section 6. They're opposed to it because it allows a way for the government to sort of slide around Bill 124. It allows a way for the government to pick and choose who gets different pay.

My background—and I'm proud of this—is that I'm a trade unionist. I come out of the steelworkers, and I'm proud of the work that unions have done, that steelworkers

have done, to ensure equal pay for all workers. In fact, when I started working, I thought that it was amazing that everyone made the same amount of money. Really, what I learned over a short amount of time was that all work is equal work. You're not paid based on how strong you are or how tall you are; it's based on the work that you do together, and the reality is that we all have commitments and payments to make.

And so I think it's important to recognize that the Equal Pay Coalition was opposed to this. I think, as well, of unions such as ONA, the nursing association. The Ontario Federation of Labour President Patty Coates asked a question yesterday in the Equal Pay Day debate—and I want to recognize, as well, that she's the first female president of the Ontario Federation of Labour. As someone who was a labour council president, I'm very proud that the labour council president who followed behind me was a woman, and I think that true leadership is making space for leaders who don't traditionally have that past. One of my commitments when I left as president of my labour council was that I was going to be the last old, bald white man to be the president, and I managed to keep that commitment.

ONA and OFL have identified schedule 7 as being unconstitutional, and earlier there was some heckling about this, about it being unconstitutional in the same way that Bill 124 is very likely unconstitutional. People said, "Are you a lawyer?" and different things like that, and "Maybe they'll take us to court." I don't think you should be excited to be taken to court as the government. I think you should try to prevent that from happening. Bill 124 is already in the process.

But let's move back to the Liberals, under Bill 115, because Bill 115 was unconstitutional. What the Liberals did under Bill 115 was they told education unions, "This is what you're going to get and this is what your contract is going to be," and so they didn't allow free and unfettered collective bargaining to happen with education workers. They passed Bill 115 and—very similar to Bill 124—they forced it onto these workers. And they said, "What are you going to do? Take us to court?" And these education workers did take them to court, and they lost.

Very often the Conservative government will talk about the financial mess the Liberals made—and they did. What a mess. But part of that mess is because they had to pay over \$100 million in penalties because of Bill 115, because of the attack on these education workers. When you present bills and legislation and schedules that are clearly flagged as unconstitutional and you want to be fiscally responsible—first of all, pick up the phone, talk to these unions or get some advice on it. But as well, think to yourself, "I don't want to be like the Liberal government. I don't want my legacy to be that not only did I take advantage and abuse workers, not only did I lose their trust, not only did I poke them in the eye and force what I wanted from them, but I also cost the province more than \$100 million." I don't know what the total will be for yours.

I've got about a minute. I'm going to go to the SEIU, just to share—they had an open letter, and I just want to

get on the record their five provisions on this list. A lot of unions represent PSWs; SEIU is really well known for them—Purple Power. They anticipated wage enhancements for their PSW and DSW workers. They advocated for a list of five provisions. I'll try to read them all:

(1) The legislation must include all PSWs, not just some. This one doesn't really specify any. I mean, it possibly could get some.

(2) Those PSW wages will be increased to \$25 an hour—nothing in there about that.

(3) The legislation should address the health sector staffing crisis by providing wider wage enhancements—specifying RPNs, for example; they also need a bump in pay.

(4) Establish sectorial bargaining, which this doesn't have; and

(5) Repeal Bill 124. I think I talked really effectively about Bill 124. That's all missing out of here.

So we go back to health care heroes; we go back to PSWs. We know how important they are. We know that they lead with their hearts and they care so much. We really have to understand the importance of these five things and how it will really help all of us in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Questions and response? I recognize the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the member from Sudbury for his statement today.

The NDP default position is, "It's unconstitutional." They have their friends come in—and anybody can come before committee and voice their opinion. So they play this card: "Well, that's unconstitutional."

The government has untied lawyers. They're not advocates; they're lawyers that vet every single piece of legislation for that purpose. So they're going to keep saying it. They have nothing to base it on and they get no traction on it, other than that their friends are happy that they keep saying it in this House.

But let's talk about the advancements in long-term care under our government: 30,000 new beds, 28,000 redeveloped beds. I've got five homes in my riding that are either getting redeveloped beds or new beds—five homes in my riding.

Will the member for Sudbury support the government on its revolutionary transformation of long-term care in this province, for the good of the people?

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member opposite. He talked about unconstitutionality and the resources the government has. I just literally spoke for 10 minutes about the mess the Liberal government of the day had made with Bill 152, with the same government-side lawyers who provided that advice and made a mess out of it. You have to understand how important this is, that you don't make this sort of mistake. You have to understand that free and collective bargaining is enshrined in human rights. It's not worth throwing this out.

Also, Speaker, I think it's important that—the Conservative member opposite said, "You have your friends." I'm proud to have friends from the labour movement. I'm

proud to have friends who represent workers. I'm proud of that. I'm not going to shy away from that. Because I think workers are the heart and soul of this province. I think workers are what drive the economy. I think that—

Mr. John Yakabuski: What about our long-term care?

Mr. Jamie West: About long-term care, I think that we need to pay PSWs effectively. I think we need to treat them with fairness. I think we need to get rid of Bill 124. I think we have to stop warehousing seniors. I think that you guys dropped the ball when you said, "We're going to put an iron ring around long-term care," because you didn't. Building more beds isn't long-term care. What you did is you shielded those large developers from liability—

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Cut him off, Speaker.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm ready. I'm up. Thank you very much, Speaker.

I'm so happy to join the debate and add some comments to my friend from Sudbury. He's such a wonderful representative of the north. He'll do anything for you, give you the shirt off his back. That's pretty much what we know of our northern friends.

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Anyhow, the question to him is in reference to schedule 7 and its unconstitutionality. Look, I'm not a constitutional scholar. I'm barely a scholar at all, really, if you ask any of my former teachers. But I do know that these guys time after time have failed on a constitutional level. They play roughshod with the charter day in and day out. They've been handed some terrible judgments already when it comes to the constitutionality of their bills. Doesn't it go without saying that they possibly could have missed this one as well?

Mr. Jamie West: I think part of the question is my colleague would like my shirt.

Yes, it's one of the things I'm wondering about. When we're debating these things, you say stuff that can come across as insulting because you're being critical of someone who did some really hard work to prepare a bill. It doesn't matter what bill. We all do a lot of work on it, and so when you get criticism—I always tell people when they criticize me, I'm going to sulk for a while, and then I'll think about it and then I'll probably agree with you afterwards. But when you have a track record where things were unconstitutional, when you have a track record where the Liberals did things that were unconstitutional and you've lost those challenges—the Liberals and Conservatives lost these challenges—then yes, I think it's a good idea maybe to look at that and have a sober second thought. Maybe this doesn't make sense. It may be better just to repeal Bill 124; you don't have to worry about those constitutional challenges.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: It's been an interesting debate this afternoon. I wish that the members opposite would answer the question that's asked by our side.

But anyway, the members on the opposite side voted against making the northern school of medicine a stand-alone institution. They voted against a \$175-million investment to mental health and addictions. 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, creating more than 3,100 additional hospital beds. Will the member opposite please explain why they voted against expanding our health care system and critical mental health supports for Ontarians?

Mr. Jamie West: This is a common question that comes again and again from the Conservative government. What they do is they table these omnibus bills and there's a poison pill in there. It's a political tool. You put in a poison pill so you can point your finger. The government has been doing this forever—not just your government, but previous governments as well. An omnibus bill with multiple schedules, and then they pick and choose the little schedules. They go, “How come you didn't vote for this? How come you didn't vote for this?” and ignore the parts that were bad.

My colleague from Humber River–Black Creek once answered it this way, and I think it's the best answer of all. He said what the government does is they take a Snickers bar and they open it up, take it out of the wrapper, and then they bring it over to a bin with all this garbage from restaurants and all the juices at the bottom. They throw it in to the bottom and they swirl it around and they take it out and they go, “How come you guys don't like chocolate?” I think that's the example.

When you pick and choose these little sections and you go, “How come you voted against this?” pull that out and we'll vote for it, but tie it to bad legislation and you force it to a place where we have to vote against it.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I very much appreciate the comments of my colleague the member for Sudbury. I wanted to ask for his thoughts on what he thinks the government might have heard if they had actually consulted with any health care worker or union representing health care workers, such as ONA, the Ontario Nurses' Association, SEIU Healthcare, CUPE Ontario, the Ontario Federation of Labour, Unifor, OPSEU, the list goes on. Would the government have heard from those unions that schedule 7, the proposed compensation enhancement scheme that the government has set out, is the way to actually retain and attract health care workers in Ontario?

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you as well to our labour critic for the excellent work she does. This is kind of a disturbing trend I would say—the lack of willingness to reach out to labour unions. I know they will have a couple of examples that they point to, but very often I'll phone people in the labour movement and they have no idea this is happening or they haven't been consulted. They requested meetings, and meetings haven't been designed.

When you talk about the pandemic, I'm brought back to the health and safety act, which is part of the Ministry

of Labour. The health and safety act, the cornerstone of that, coming out of Elliot Lake, is that it's a balance between workers, employers and the government. And that's a template you bring everywhere to have good results. You listen to everybody; you make good decisions from that.

When you talk about consulting, working with the unions and reaching out to them, especially in a pandemic, why would you miss that opportunity to have the best voices, the best representation? Nobody knows workers better than workers do. Nobody knows employers better than employers do. And then, in the middle, you have the government to help and guide and make great decisions.

I don't know why they don't do it. It's a missed opportunity. They should consider it in the next month and a half, if they're still here.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: It's great to rise and join in debate with my friend the member from Sudbury—

Interruption.

Mr. Will Bouma: We have a lot in common in the communities that we represent. I find that we both suffer from the opioid crisis, and we are dedicated to serving our communities. I appreciate our relationship here in the House.

I was wondering if he could answer for me—and I know the opposition has issues with this bill. Again, in my work with the Agency Review Task Force and the Fairness Commissioner, actually giving the Fairness Commissioner some teeth, which was never done before by the previous government, so that they could work to have foreign-trained workers certified more quickly in Ontario, especially in the health care field—regardless of the rest of the bill, regardless of what he calls, perhaps, poison pills in this legislation, whether he can say in the House here this afternoon that that's a good thing, that we are making it easier for foreign-trained workers to be certified in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to my colleague as well. We had a good conversation yesterday about how his riding has the plant for Ferrero Rocher. We're probably going to make a reason to visit my colleague, just so we can do the tour and get the gift bag afterward and get that “dad of the year.”

Absolutely, that section is important. My riding of Sudbury was founded by people who came to Sudbury to work in the mines, who came with their old cultures, identities and languages and were able to find work and build the strong city that we have. The same thing is happening all across the world, all across Canada and in the province today. Having those people come with those trades, those skills, those abilities, is really important. So I'm moving this forward. Thank you again to Doly for suggesting it. I think it's a great idea.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Thank you. Just before we resume debate, I'd like to just remind everyone in the House again: Please, when you're going

to speak, take your phone off your desk for the safety of the people in the broadcasting booth.

Further debate? I recognize the Solicitor General.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As the minister responsible for emergency management, I am pleased to participate in third reading of Bill 106, the proposed Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness Act.

If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it is that Ontario is not immune to an emergency. From floods to record wildland fire seasons to COVID-19, these last two years have tested the resiliency of our emergency preparedness. And it will be tested again in a few weeks' time as ice jams form causing seasonal local flooding and possible evacuations in northern First Nations.

Emergency Management Ontario monitors and assists with the development and implementation of emergency management programs across Ontario. They work with municipalities and other ministries to ensure program requirements are met, and they provide expert advice and assistance. In situations where local capacity is overwhelmed by the circumstances of an emergency, municipalities may request provincial support and resources.

If provincial emergency management is required, it is Emergency Management Ontario that coordinates that. This coordination is done through the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre, or PEOC. The PEOC is a 24/7 operation that coordinates evacuations and connects people to resources, among many other duties. For example, PEOC works with First Nations communities during flooding season to coordinate with on-the-ground organizations, local medical staff and municipal services to support the care and well-being of evacuees. This ensures provincial decision-makers and resources are ready to respond to evolving situations as they come up.

Since 2018, our government has invested in building up Ontario's front-line emergency response. We have expanded and strengthened teams that are specially trained in urban search and rescue, hazardous materials and chemical, biological, radiological and explosive materials across Ontario as part of our emergency management action plan. These teams are the backbone of specialized disaster response in Ontario and a lifeline for those in imminent danger, but these teams cannot be based everywhere. As a result, the government has provided the funding and flexibility to ensure that they can be deployed as quickly as possible, where and when they are needed.

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Teams responsible for front-line emergency management must be supported by the best policy, which in Ontario's case is the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act. This act has been used many times over the past two years to coordinate an effective emergency response. It was used to declare emergencies that protected people's health and safety.

Most recently, on February 11, Premier Ford declared a province-wide emergency pursuant to section 7.0.1 of the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act. The emergency was declared as a result of interference with transportation routes, including essential trade corridors

and border crossings in locations across Ontario. These declarations of emergency and their emergency orders have been necessary and effective, intended to safeguard the people and the economy of Ontario. Yet the global severity, frequency and nature of disasters is climbing, and we know that we must plan for another virus, another threat at some point in our future.

When COVID-19 arrived in Ontario, there were significant challenges. Ontario had expired and depleted personal protective equipment stockpiles and there was limited infrastructure for sourcing made-in-Ontario PPE. Emergency protocols were not developed to clearly outline roles and responsibilities within and outside of government. Hospitals lacked the capacity and health human resources to manage additional pressures. There were significant personal support worker retention challenges, stemming in part from chronic underpay and challenging working conditions. Many Ontario-based life sciences companies had vacated the province, leading to little-to-no capacity to create and produce PPE, vaccines, therapeutics or ventilators.

Our government has been working tirelessly to combat the threat of COVID-19 and protect the health, safety and well-being of Ontarians since the very beginning of this pandemic, a pandemic that has exposed critical gaps that, unfortunately, historically had not been addressed. Our government has made significant progress in tackling these challenges, and today we are saying that Ontario must never be left in such a precarious position again.

It is important to Premier Ford and to our government that we modernize Ontario's emergency response framework and write the handbook on a whole-of-government approach to future emergencies. Ontario's Plan to Stay Open is a comprehensive strategy to ensure our province has the preparedness and stability needed in the face of an emergency. It is the next step in the government's ongoing efforts to build a stronger, more resilient health system that is better prepared to respond to crises. By filling long-standing gaps in three main areas—including expanding the province's health workforce, shoring up domestic production of critical supplies and building more hospital beds—the plan provides people and businesses with more certainty by helping to keep the province open.

A Plan to Stay Open promises to attract and retain more doctors, nurses and personal support workers, shore up the domestic production of critical supplies and continue building vital health care infrastructure. Bill 106, the government's proposed Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness Act, 2022, is an integral part of the plan and is a multi-ministerial legislative bundle. As legislators, we have a tremendous opportunity with this bill to enable the province to enhance the leadership, support and guidance it provides to communities; to improve emergency readiness; and to protect and safeguard Ontarians in the event of major emergencies. If passed, the Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness Act, 2022, will secure Ontario's progress, as well as use the knowledge we have gained to protect the lives and livelihoods of future generations of Ontarians.

To support a coordinated whole-of-government approach, this legislation would require that the government establish a governance and accountability framework that sets out the roles and responsibilities of ministries' partners during an emergency.

The changes will require provincial ministries to identify and monitor risks and hazards and provide information to Emergency Management Ontario. Ministries will also be required to identify the resources, goods and services they need to respond to these hazards and the readiness of those resources.

This and all future governments will be required by legislation to have a Provincial Emergency Management Plan that will be renewed and updated at least every five years. This plan will describe how Ontario will coordinate the response to any emergency that requires engagement at the provincial level. The changes will ensure that the government understands and monitors existing, new and emerging provincial hazards and risks and provincial resource readiness to respond to an emergency that requires coordination at the provincial level.

Keeping in mind that the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act was last updated in 2006, as I mentioned during second reading of the proposed legislation, despite the experience of SARS in 2003 and H1N1 in 2009, the previous government let emergency planning go stale. We all remember calls at the time to plan for future emergencies, yet though they were armed with recommendations of the independent SARS commission, the previous government failed to act. This has cost Ontario so much. Now is the time to demonstrate to Ontarians that whatever the future brings, this province will be prepared with a plan, with health care capacity, with PPE, with everything we need to get through it together.

To accomplish all that the Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness Act sets out to do, and to ensure our government can deliver necessary services during an emergency, the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act must be updated to reflect current best practices. The Ministry of the Solicitor General has initiated a review of the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act in order to identify the legislative opportunities to better prepare the province's response to emergencies in the future. This review is being informed by lessons learned from COVID-19, past emergencies and reports, including the Auditor General's recent COVID-19 Preparedness and Management report.

While this comprehensive review is under way, the ministry has already identified some legislative improvements that can be made now to clarify and strengthen governance and accountability, which is in line with the Auditor General's recommendations. For example, we know there is a lack of clarity about governance and accountability when dealing with provincial emergencies impacting critical infrastructure. We know that there is a need for greater clarity on governance structures, roles and responsibilities between ministries.

Ontario's incident management system is an effective tool, a common language, if you will, for coordinating the

response of many organizations during a disaster. It gives players a clear framework to enable effective communication, collaboration and decision-making. But there is no province-wide risk assessment process that collects, analyzes, assesses and coordinates intelligence on provincial hazards and risks. Such a gap can limit the province's ability to anticipate, prepare and respond to unforeseen hazards and pinpoint identified risks.

That is why the Ministry of the Solicitor General has developed and published a Provincial Emergency Response Plan. The plan describes roles and responsibilities, including within our incident management system, and we are proposing to further clarify those responsibilities through this legislation, the Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness Act, 2022.

Effective emergency management requires open and transparent public communication. To improve transparency, we are also proposing requirements for more proactive information-sharing with stakeholders and with the public in three ways:

First, the bill would require the Solicitor General to work with the commissioner and chief of Emergency Management Ontario to develop and release a Provincial Emergency Management Plan. Second, it would require this emergency management plan be made publicly available and that it be reviewed and updated at least once every five years. And it would require the development and publication of an annual report from the progress made toward achieving the plan's goals and priorities.

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From the start of the pandemic, when changes were minute to minute, to the long months when public health updates meant new protocols month to month, to our cautious and safe reopening, we have learned that proactive information-sharing with stakeholders and the public is critical.

Each stage of COVID-19 has necessitated clear and ongoing public communication about the provincial emergency management structure in Ontario and the approaches we have taken to coordinate the province-wide emergency response. And now is the time to bridge the gaps in our emergency management transparency model, including by legislating that the province's emergency management plan be kept up to date and publicly available. If passed, this bill will put into law the kind of open and transparent public communications that have been essential to public confidence in recent years.

Emergency management is a shared responsibility and always calls on cross-ministry efforts. There are a lot of moving pieces, including multiple levels of government, government departments, first responders, hospitals, community organizations and non-governmental organizations, such as the Red Cross, that all need to come together in a coordinated response to protect Ontarians.

As an example, last summer's forest fire evacuations required the response of seven different provincial ministries; among them, the Ministry of Forestry and Natural Resources, the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, the Ministry of Health, as well as the Ministry of the Solicitor General.

At the onset of an emergency, a lot of decisions have to be made in a very short period of time, and with a multitude of groups and communities. And a lot of vehicles, human resources and sometimes aircraft to support an evacuation have to be pulled together quickly. The government is proposing legislative changes in each of these areas to improve the governance, accountability, transparency and coordination of emergency management in Ontario.

The proposed changes to the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, if passed, would introduce a new legislative requirement for the province to establish an accountability and governance framework that sets out the rules and responsibilities of provincial ministries during an emergency. It would formalize in legislation that both the Commissioner of Emergency Management and the chief of Emergency Management Ontario are appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, and that the commissioner operates under the direction of the Solicitor General, and the chief operates under the direction of the commissioner.

It would require the development and publication of a Provincial Emergency Management Plan that describes how Ontario will coordinate the response to any emergency that requires coordination at a provincial level. The plan will be reviewed and revised at least every five years. It would require that each ministry's emergency plan aligns with the new Provincial Emergency Management Plan. It would require that all provincial ministries identify emerging risks and hazards, monitor and assess those risks and hazards, and provide information to Ontario's chief of Emergency Management Ontario annually and upon request. Additionally, ministries would be required to identify the resources, goods and services they require to respond to those hazards, and the readiness of those resources.

Hazard and risk identification and assessment is already a required component of ministry emergency management programs. However, there is currently no legislative requirement for this information, or information related to the availability and readiness of required resources, goods and services to be shared with the chief of emergency management. Further, the proposed legislation would require the development and publication of an annual report that details the progress that has been made on achieving the objectives of the Provincial Emergency Management Plan that year.

Bill 106, if passed, supports a coordinated, whole-of-government approach that would better enable the government to monitor the risks and hazards that have been identified, identify the resources we and other emergency management partners need to respond to potential hazards and any emergencies that may arise, and provide essential information to the public. Furthermore, this and all future governments would be required to have a Provincial Emergency Management Plan that includes a mandatory review and update at least every five years.

Public safety is a top priority for the Ontario government. That is why we are proposing these changes to the

Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, changes that would improve overall resiliency and the capacity to plan, prepare, respond and recover from emergencies anywhere in the province. If passed, Bill 106 would make Ontario the first jurisdiction in Canada to release a comprehensive post-COVID-19 pandemic preparedness plan.

I began by speaking about Emergency Management Ontario and the many talented public servants that stand ready to protect Ontario during future emergencies: Emergency Management Ontario staff, nurses, personal support workers, first responders and others on the front lines. Ontario's workers deserve for all of us here today, on both sides of the aisle, to ensure Ontario is prepared with a first-rate plan for future emergencies.

Bill 106 is the result of our government's clear vision and commitment to the people of Ontario, like my constituents in Dufferin-Caledon. In the spirit of well-executed emergency management, I want to acknowledge the President of the Treasury Board, who has collaborated and communicated with ministries across this government to create this excellent piece of legislation. I commend the minister, his staff and all those colleagues who have contributed. It has been my pleasure to propose forward-looking updates to the legislation as Ontario's Solicitor General.

And, Speaker, I move that the question now be put.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Ms. Jones has moved that the question be now put. I'm satisfied that there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House—seeing over six hours of debate and eleven speakers. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

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

I believe the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred to the next instance of deferred votes.

Vote deferred.

KEEPING ONTARIO
OPEN FOR BUSINESS ACT, 2022

LOI DE 2022
VISANT À CE QUE L'ONTARIO
RESTE OUVERT AUX AFFAIRES

Ms. Jones moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 100, An Act to enact legislation to protect access to certain transportation infrastructure / Projet de loi 100, Loi édictant une loi pour protéger l'accès à certaines infrastructures de transport.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the Solicitor General.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: First, it is an honour to stand and speak on Bill 100, the bill brought forward by myself earlier this month to deal with, frankly, a very disturbing

part of Ontario's history. But, first, if I may, I would like to acknowledge the work of the members on the justice committee who deliberated and discussed Bill 100 to see if there were potential improvements and amendments that they were interested in bringing forward before third reading debate here today. But I think what I'd like to spend a few minutes on is talking about the why—the why and the need for Bill 100.

As I don't need to remind members in Ottawa and Sarnia, there were some very disturbing activities that were happening in the cities of Ottawa and Windsor earlier this year. Of course, probably most disturbing is how quickly an unauthorized blockade ended up impacting Ontario's economy. It is, frankly, quite disturbing and should be of concern for all members in this chamber to think how quickly the Ambassador Bridge, one pathway, if you may, from our American trading partners to Ontario businesses impacted and had ripple effects.

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We often talk about what happened in the city of Windsor when the Ambassador Bridge was blocked, but what we don't talk about enough is how it impacted other downstream second- and third-tier manufacturers all across Ontario. We saw it at Stelco, in Hamilton. We saw it in Woodstock. We saw it in other communities that you wouldn't automatically think of in terms of why they would care or be impacted by a blockade on the Ambassador Bridge in Windsor. Well, in fact, they clearly were. There were team members, there were employees who had to be sent home because of our just-in-time manufacturing. They didn't have any material to work with.

We as a government understood and appreciated that that cannot be something that we can see in the province of Ontario going forward. As a result, we have a very targeted, very limited ability in Bill 100 to say, if you are blocking international borders, if you are impacting Ontario's economy in a direct way by not allowing those trade pathways to occur in the province of Ontario, then we're going to be able to step in quickly.

There are members who would say, why do you need this? What is the value? Well, we've seen, through the pandemic and through Ottawa, that simply issuing tickets was not sufficient, Speaker. What happened is people would take the ticket and then they would carry on with the protest. That cannot be the case. We need to make sure that when international borders are impacted, they are quickly dealt with, and now, with Bill 100, if we have a successful passage through and ultimately it is passed, you will see that we are now giving law enforcement an additional tool so that they can very quickly clear these illegal blockades.

The other piece we discovered, unfortunately, was that when people were unwilling to move their trucks, their vehicles, other items that were used for blockades, we didn't have the resources to actually move them. We had challenges finding heavy tow truck operators who were willing to move those vehicles, for any number of reasons which I won't get into today, but it spoke to the fact that,

as trained and as coordinated as we can be with our police services—and I will say it again: One of the police chiefs I spoke to after said that one of his proudest moments was seeing police officers from literally a half a dozen different services working together, coordinated, in removing the blockades in what was a very safe manner. And we have to acknowledge that that training that happens at the Ontario Police College, that coordination that was happening between the RCMP, between the OPP and between a myriad of multiple municipal police departments really made a difference to make sure that they could safely clear these blockades.

But the other piece is that there's an opportunity here, and the opportunity is to expand that public order unit within the Ontario Provincial Police. So we will do that, and we as a government have made a commitment and set aside resources to make sure that happens, so that when a municipal police force, when a smaller department is looking for assistance, they can very quickly react and call on their partners, whether it's the RCMP or the OPP. We're going to bolster that public order unit. We're going to make sure that when they call the OPP, they have the opportunity to make sure they have those additional police officers and staff on-site. We've already seen how the coordination between the RCMP, between the OPP—having those in some cases weekly, as-often-as-necessary calls with the large municipal services has made a difference in terms of that blockade that was happening on the ground in Windsor didn't have the ability to move to another bridge; wasn't going to be able to easily move to Sarnia for the Peace Bridge; wasn't going to be easily going to Fort Erie. We had that coordination, and that ability to react and respond quickly was very important.

But, as I said, we have some opportunities here where we can bolster what is already in place. We can expand on some of the resource challenges that the OPP and the Windsor police experienced when they did not have the ability to remove those vehicles.

I think it's important to also remind people that sometimes the action doesn't actually have to occur. The threat of “move that vehicle or we will move it, we will impound it and you will pay for it” was enough of a motivation to ensure a faster pathway through. The tickets have value, absolutely, but they, at the end of the day, were not driving the outcome that we needed, which was to quickly clear the border.

As a result, we have brought forward Bill 100. As the members opposite have reviewed it in committee, thank you for your input. I think you will see that we have struck a very critical balance in terms of making sure that what we have brought forward is going to achieve the outcomes we are looking for to make sure that our critical border pathways are not blocked by a similar blockade and that we also expand and ensure that we have both physical resources, heavy tow trucks, as well as additional public order unit staff being trained at the police college in Aylmer to make sure that when we need to move these resources around in the province of Ontario, wherever there happens to be a challenge, we will do that.

I again want to say, Bill 100 is very much targeted to ensure that our trade pathways are not blocked and do not have to experience what ultimately ended up being almost a seven-day delay at the Ambassador Bridge in Windsor, where literally critical goods were not being able to go through.

We often talk about the auto sector, which is absolutely important in the province of Ontario, but I have to say, another piece that was really important and not, frankly, probably talked about enough was southwestern Ontario—as you know only too well, Speaker, as a parliamentary assistant with OMAFRA, a critical, critical part of Ontario's ag food industry, with greenhouses. The comment made was something like 80% of the produce that grows in southwestern Ontario in those greenhouses actually flows south. It is actually going to our American neighbours. We cannot—cannot—have fresh produce literally rotting in trucks. We have to make sure that these critical trade pathways are there so that all of the infrastructure and all of the investments that we have made under Premier Ford, under Minister Fedeli in economic development and trade are actually coming to fruition and we can give confidence to our trading partners that Ontario is open for business, will be open for business and has prepared for the potential for future blockades.

With that, Speaker, I would like to thank you for your time and appreciate the members' opposite input on Bill 100.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Randy Pettapiece): Questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I thank the Solicitor General very much. As she knows, I'm from the Windsor-Essex area. I met with officials from the Windsor border and Windsor duty free last week, and they expressed so many concerns about the impact of the blockade. We met with small businesses that were also impacted by the blockade. One of the things that they were most disappointed with, frankly, were the actions of some federal members, particularly of the Conservative caucus, who were out encouraging the blockade members. I know even the MP from Essex was seen encouraging these blockades, when in fact his community was impacted to the tune of \$290 million a day.

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The question is, do MPs and MPPs have a responsibility to be forthright in what the impact is on our communities in undemocratic blockades and illegal blockades?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I spoke about this in committee. One of the things that I was doing as Ontario's Solicitor General is I actually suggested and told—I wrote to the OPP commissioner saying, "If you need me to come and speak to the protestors, under the condition that they would leave the blockade, I'm prepared to do that." The reason I was prepared to do that was, we were receiving information that frankly, as a mother, as an Ontario citizen, disturbed me greatly, which was that there were young children participating and part of that blockade. I felt very strongly that if there was any pathway so that we could stop this before it got violent, that's what I wanted to do and that's why I made that offer.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: It's a pleasure to rise and engage with the Solicitor General on this issue. If I could just for a moment, Mr. Speaker. I want to recognize her and her staff's incredible work, not just through the blockades and the resulting legislation that we have before us here today, but indeed through the entire pandemic.

As she well knows how dependent the province of Ontario is on our supply chains—I have a lot of constituents who work in the Toyota facility in Cambridge, and I know a lot of them were laid off for a few days, secondary to the blockades. In fact, I was probably about two to three days out from having 5,000 labourers laid off in Brantford and Brant with the situation at the border. I was just wondering if she could discuss a little bit more how important it is to keep our supply chains open when we're faced with illegal blockades.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I appreciate the question. We often talk about how governments work in silos; well, here's a perfect example. We were seeing, literally by the week, announcements made by Premier Ford, by Minister Fedeli. Whether it was Stellantis in Windsor, whether it was GM in Oshawa, we've worked as a government so aggressively to make sure that Ontario was open for business, that Ontario was here and wanted to be a partner, to make sure that we had a strong manufacturing base in the province of Ontario.

What they're seeing is on the business side going, "But we can't get our products through. We can't have the Ambassador Bridge blocked." So we worked together to make sure that we're sending a clear message with Bill 100 that that would not happen ever again.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to recognize our colleague the member for Ottawa Centre and the amazing advocacy he did for the residents of Ottawa, whose city was occupied for two weeks while this government sat by and did nothing.

One of the concerns that the member for Ottawa Centre raised was the difference in how the occupiers of Ottawa were treated versus racialized dump truck drivers who were immediately threatened with licence suspension back in 2021 when they were protesting this government. In 2022, largely white truck owner-operators were never fined after occupying Ottawa for 25 days. Can the minister explain why those two groups were treated so differently?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: You know, the member opposite can attempt to divide and separate us. I can tell you that Bill 100 is all about making sure Ontario is open for business—people have jobs that are confident that they are going to be there.

Specifically related to Ottawa, you only have to listen to the OPP commissioner at the hearings with the federal government talk about how proactively the RCMP and the OPP, even before there were any protestors in the city of Ottawa, were sharing that intelligence, were sharing that

information with not only Ottawa police but other major municipal police departments across Ontario, because they wanted to make sure that everybody had as much information as possible in order to prepare. Without a doubt, as a result of what happened in Ottawa, Toronto, Windsor, Sarnia and Niagara Falls were far better prepared to deal with any incursions.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to the Solicitor General: I know you talked about the auto industry and the supply challenges with the Windsor bridge. Peterborough used to be a big manufacturing centre at one point, as well. It changed in the 1980s and 1990s. But we do have a couple of manufacturers, and I want to talk about one in particular who reached out to me. They manufacture trusses. We don't have a problem getting wood, because it's in Ontario, but all of the cleats that they use to put those trusses together come from the United States. They were down to, he said, two days' supply, and they were concerned that they were not going to be able to make trusses or floor trusses—not just roof trusses but floor trusses as well.

This would have impacted far more than just the auto industry. It was the entire construction industry. Could you elaborate on why this is needed to make sure that it does not occur again in the future?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: That's a really important question to raise. Why do businesses and job creators make decisions about where their new plant is, where their expansion is going to be? Why? Well, there's a whole suite of reasons, and one of them is: What is the government of the day doing on electricity costs? What is the government of the day doing about taxation? What is the government of the day doing about ensuring that critical trade borders and pathways are clear and available? Consistency is a very important piece of how businesses make decisions on where they move, where they expand, and if they see that there are challenges or there is an unfriendly government that is far more willing to raise taxes than actually work

with them, then you get the exodus that, frankly, we saw under the 15 years of the Liberals.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: Coming from northern Ontario, we were far away from these blockades and the incidents that were happening over in Windsor. However, there are quite a few questions that have been raised from people that live in northern Ontario, particularly from Indigenous communities. Indigenous communities have had a long-established process of engaging with community members and OPP officers. There are community liaison police officers that are very much engaged and have a relationship with Indigenous individuals who exercise their sovereign right in order to inform the public at certain times of their frustrations and their dissatisfaction in regard to decisions that this government is making or not making.

I'd like to hear from the Solicitor General: Will this legislation actually impact those relationships? Because there is a great big concern in regard to how this is being perceived with the public.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. It's an important one. It's why I began my third reading comments by saying that Bill 100 is very targeted. It is about border crossings, it is about ensuring critical trade pathways, to the point, in fact, where if there are easy workarounds in terms of other transportation routes, then Bill 100 would not be used. Bill 100 is very specific and very targeted to ensure and send a message that the province of Ontario is open for business. We want you to come here, we want you to invest in Ontario, and your government, the Ford government, will have your back when you're doing that. Bill 100 is very much about ensuring our trade borders, internationally, are protected.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): The time being close to 6 of the clock, it is now time for private members' public business.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

Report continues in volume B.

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