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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 6 October 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 6 octobre 2021

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

YORK REGION
WASTEWATER ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LES EAUX USÉES
DANS LA RÉGION DE YORK

Ms. MacLeod, on behalf of Mr. Piccini, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 5, An Act respecting York Region Wastewater /
Projet de loi 5, Loi concernant les eaux usées dans la
région de York.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the minister of heritage to lead it off.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: It's a pleasure to be actually speaking in the last bit of this Parliament and, of course, right after the throne speech.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 5, York Region Wastewater Act. I'll be sharing my time with the member from Barrie–Innisfil. In fact, she is such an expert on all such matters, I am going to cede my time right now to the member.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I will recognize the member for Barrie–Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I am pleased to have this opportunity to be able to speak to Bill 5, otherwise known as the York Region Wastewater Act, 2021, introduced by the youngest Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks in Ontario's history, which is very exciting and which leads me to think about our future and all the decisions that we make in this Legislature and, very importantly, the substance of this bill.

Though it's short, it's a very mighty bill because it is reflective of what's going to be happening in the next generation. As much as we're enjoying all our waterways, our growth and affordable housing etc., all of these impacts have an impact on the next generation.

That brings me to what we're talking about today, which is the York Region Wastewater Act, 2021, and what it will do, Speaker. I think that's important to review. It's going to help the regional municipality of York to find the right solutions to meet its waste water servicing needs that are necessary by its rapid growth and its population growth as well, and of course its economic activity. As we know,

growth, our manufacturing might and also water play a huge role in economic activity.

I was introduced earlier this morning by the minister of tourism, culture and sport. You could just look to the work she's doing in the tourism sector, but it's important to note what contributes to the economic growth of the tourism sector. A lot of municipalities and areas of the province—for example, in my riding of Barrie–Innisfil—are very contingent around, for example, Lake Simcoe. So the very nature of being able to fish, swim and enjoy our local waterways is a huge economic driver locally.

In the summer, the minister of tourism, culture and sport actually had an opportunity to go kayaking on Lake Simcoe. We got to take these really great water bikes along it. That was just a small example of the economic activity that revolves around our waterways, but also growing cities.

As we know, York region is growing, all around Simcoe county is growing, and much of Ontario. But we have to do it in the smart, right way and obviously reflect on science.

That brings me, in the more general sense, to Bill 5, which we're discussing today, which reflects on our government's commitment to support Ontario's communities, to meet their infrastructure needs and grow their economies while maintaining public health, providing strong protection for air, water and land. Because we know that any time we have any sort of water advisory, for example, or if there's an E.coli warning etc., that's less people who can go and enjoy the waterway. They can swim; there are people who might be travelling to a community who, after swimming, may be enjoying a restaurant, may be buying souvenirs, may be doing other things—maybe staying at a local hotel, an Airbnb—and that revitalizes our economy. We also have to think about the other side of it, where people live. They also need to be able to find attainable and affordable housing as communities grow. We've often heard the “drive till you qualify” slogan, far too often. And so that is much a need.

That brings me to the York Region Wastewater Act, which aims at creating the kind of Ontario that all honourable members would like to see: a healthy, clean and prosperous Ontario with jobs, opportunity and the quality of life Ontarians deserve. I'd like to go into some detail about the proposed York Region Wastewater Act, 2021, and what it would accomplish if it is passed in this Legislature.

The regional municipality of York is one of Canada's biggest municipalities and is the third-largest in Ontario. It is also the second-largest business centre in this province. It is also one of the fastest-growing large municipalities in Ontario, with its population expected to reach

1.5 million people in the next decade and more than two million by 2051.

To prepare for this forecasted growth, York region began planning in the late 1990s for new water infrastructure to meet the increasing future needs. At the time, the region proposed new infrastructure to connect to the existing York-Durham sewage system. The waste water would be treated at the existing Duffin Creek Water Pollution Control Plant in Pickering. The Duffin Creek plant, which is also co-owned by the regional municipalities of York and Durham, treats 80% of York region's waste water and discharges it into Lake Ontario. In 2004, the Minister of the Environment required York region to undertake a full environmental assessment of the proposal, including an assessment of alternatives to the proposed infrastructure.

I just want to say a few words here about the importance of Ontario's environmental assessment process. The Environmental Assessment Act, as many of us may recall from previous sessions, came into effect in 1976. That is a very long time ago, and so it did need some updating, which we were able to do on a practical level in this Legislature. Going back to 1976 and why it was important, with the provincial, municipal and some designated private sector undertakings, they all need to respect the Environmental Assessment Act, but we also have to make it in touch with the 21st century. So this government embarked on making things a little more practical. For example, all of us who like the outdoors, we may love to use a bike lane to get to work; we may want to use it for recreational purposes with our family. But did you know that it took a very long time for these bike lanes to be built by municipalities because they required an environmental assessment just to paint that beautiful green line on the side that encourages people to share that part of the road?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): The government House leader for a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Just to welcome the Deputy Speaker to the chair on his first day. Congratulations, sir. Sorry for interrupting.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): That is not a point of order, but I greatly appreciate it and will do my best to uphold the traditions of the House, with the help of all of you. Thank you.

Please return to the member from Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you, and congratulations again, Speaker. It's wonderful to have you in the chair, especially on today's bill that I get to speak about.

I was talking about environmental assessments and the history and the importance of it. I talked about the bike lanes and how many of us will want to get to work. But again, under the old rules, it would have taken us many years to have approved it. Now, again, it's shortened. And it's better for many things: It's better for the environment; it's better for the health of individuals. Again, we're taking that whole encompassing approach. There's been a lot of science that has been done in terms of people being active and how it prolongs their life, gives them a healthy

lifestyle, reduces the chances of diabetes etc.—a lot of things based on science. The environmental assessment process and much of what is done at the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks is based on science.

Ontario's environmental assessment program, an important process, ensures impacts on the environment are considered before building infrastructure, or other projects in communities, and how it impacts other projects in communities, and of course, its impact on the environment. The environmental assessment process promotes good environmental planning by determining the benefits and potential effects of projects before they're implemented, and can be an effective decision-making process that ensures public agencies and Indigenous communities are heard and that their concerns are addressed.

0910

The environmental assessment program has served Ontario well through the current process for environmental assessments, and we can really see how the environmental assessment program has—not only has it served well through the current process for environmental assessments, but how we can improve it, and of course, how it improves our environment.

Improving the environmental assessment process is important for infrastructure projects that help Ontario communities, and is especially important as communities rebuild after COVID-19. We have been updating the almost 50-year-old environmental assessment program, and we made a series of amendments—I talked about them a little bit earlier—through the Ontario COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, 2020, to support strong environmental oversight while getting shovels in the ground faster on projects that matter most to communities. Again, this is strengthening the integrity of the process, keeping the integrity of the environmental process intact, but of course taking into account modern-day engineering, modern-day science and how we can improve our processes within government to develop stronger and better communities.

Returning to the Upper York Sewage Solutions environmental assessment, York region, for history purposes, submitted its application to the Minister of the Environment for approval in 2014. The environmental assessment identified a preferred alternative that would involve a new waste water treatment plant, discharging treatment effluent into the East Holland River within the Lake Simcoe watershed.

The East Holland River is a really incredible place to see. We talk about “farmers feed cities,” and as we're celebrating Agriculture Week, how important that element of our lives is. I spoke about economic activity in tourism, but how important economic activity is in our agriculture sector, every part, whether it's the equipment they buy, the people they hire, the food they sell, the communities they touch and many of these farmers' markets we love to go to, the tourism aspect of it. It really shows the greatness that is our province.

But the East Holland River is a really unique element. We receive much of our produce through the entire province of Ontario. Our vegetables, of course—the

vegetable growers' association is based out of the East Holland River. Much of it is coming from that part of the watershed. So as we're celebrating the week to recognize our agricultural workers, I just want to also thank the farmers along the East Holland River for all their work, and of course, our fruit growers as well in that area who do so much.

Interjection.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you. It's not just the food they produce. They always go above and beyond. It's that call of community. I just want to dwell a little bit on the East Holland River aspect, because when I talk about how they go above the call of community, much of what the agricultural community has to do is based on—a lot of them have to base it on science, with climate change and crop seasons either being extended or shortened and long rainfall. They have to take that all into consideration.

Something that happened many years ago with the federal government announcing the Lake Simcoe Clean-up Fund is many agricultural workers, especially along the East Holland River—many of these farming families and communities stepped up to the plate. We talked a lot about that during COVID-19. But they were able to do that because of the Lake Simcoe Clean-up Fund.

Back in 2014, there were farmers who came together and they proposed a lot of projects to reduce the phosphorus runoff as a result of the East Holland River. Again, we knew the science. It was based on science. We knew how much phosphorus was coming off. We knew it was less than 3% at the time, but of course, it was still affecting the watershed and specifically in Lake Simcoe. So they applied to the federal government for the Lake Simcoe Clean-up Fund, and they were awarded \$8.6 million to help clean up the watershed.

They stretched that \$8.6 million, and as a result of these grassroots organizations being able to come together on different lake restoration projects, those communities organized, and they contributed nearly \$60 million themselves to these restoration projects on the watershed. Some of them not only were the Holland Marsh Growers' Association, but also included the Georgina Ladies of the Lake. It really shows you, again, as we're talking about the history of the Holland River, how much those families really came out and stepped up to plate and helped: for example, the Carron Farms president—back in 2014, of course, he was president—Jason Verkaik and his families. There are approximately 115 Holland Marsh families that contributed and helped be part of these cleanup efforts and were really happy to see those funds, and of course, it's their way of contributing to that community.

Again, the economic activity, as cities grow—I talked about how York region is growing. We also need to feed those cities with growth. We have to be mindful of our waterways. All of this is economically driven and based on science.

Of course, with climate change, as water levels are also changing, we have to take our crop growers and our farmers into consideration as they grapple through those challenges. They have to pivot and make their decisions as well.

It was really incredible to see how this group was able to step up and reduce a lot of the phosphorus back in 2014. Today, as we reflect on the science of Lake Simcoe, we've seen that little efforts like that contributed to big results in terms of phosphorous loads and reducing it. So there's a little about the Holland River and I'll certainly come back to other accomplishments through those types of projects later on in my speech.

Again, as I was just talking about the environmental assessment with York region and how the environmental assessment identified a preferred alternative that would involve a new waste water treatment plant—discharge treatment effluent into the East Holland River within the Lake Simcoe watershed.

As they were discussing this environmental assessment, and we had all these projects that were done before to reduce phosphorus, one thing that also came to mind is, when I first got elected, I was able to sit down with our conservation authority. There are two in the area that I so humbly represent. One of them is the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority. At the time, our CEO was Mike Walters; it's now Rob Baldwin. Congratulations, Rob, for taking the torch. But Mike was really great. He used to sit down with me and he would talk about the accomplishments they made through the watershed and the projects they had on the go.

There was one project they've had on the books for decades. I remember looking at him—wouldn't this be a huge game-changer? It was a phosphorous treatment plant along the East Holland River, and the potential it would have. I started asking questions. How come we haven't funded this? What do we have to overcome etc.? It's great to see that governments are stepping up now and there is hope on the horizon in the sense of we may have a phosphorous treatment plant in that area if the federal government follows through with their promise of funding to the tune of about \$60 million for this treatment plant, and, of course, York region also stepping up with the money that is needed for that solution. We know any time the federal government does infrastructure projects, the province is oftentimes involved as well.

That was obviously a big game-changer, which brings me to—if we talk about the proposal they had, which is the proposal for a new waste water treatment facility, the location of this would have been the town of East Gwillimbury. It would have a sewage treatment capacity of approximately 40 million litres a day. If we talk about this capacity of 40 million litres a day, we have to think about, again: What are the consequences to the watershed? Is there any new-based science? What about these projects that have been on the books that we've known could be a huge net positive to the whole region? How do they take into account some of these newer projects that are coming up for consideration? When we talked about 40 million litres a day—that's a lot of sewage treatment capacity. Certainly, it would help with the growth that I talked about earlier. But the facility that we talked about for the town of East Gwillimbury is referred to as a water reclamation centre. That's the official term.

It would be the first waste water treatment plant in Canada using four levels of treatment, including micro-filtration and reverse osmosis water treatment technology for waste water. We don't really have the technology in Canada. Certainly, there are many other countries and other places that have used it, but our waterways are very unique in the sense of the places that use reverse osmosis often use it for sea water, to convert salt water to be drinkable water, for instance. And so, we have to take into consideration our rivers, our lakes in Ontario and how this new technology would apply to them, for instance. But that is the proposal before us.

0920

The effluent that I had talked about, from the water reclamation centre, would be discharged into the Holland River, which ultimately drains into Lake Simcoe. I had talked about some of the history of the Holland River and how that community really rallied together. There's a substantial amount of funding that went in, and certainly I don't think anyone would want to lose the great gains that had been made thanks to the East Holland River farming community, everything they've done to reduce phosphorus, everything they've done to really improve their practices. Ultimately, if it does drain into Lake Simcoe, we have to take into consideration the science that has been done around Lake Simcoe for its restoration. It's a bit of a balancing act, and of course new science and technologies are coming out every day. As we learn more about this reverse-osmosis process, we have to think about how it impacts our local fisheries, our waterways and the entire community.

Certainly, if we look at saltwater species, they are very different from cold-water species in a lake or shallow-water species in a lake. I know a little too much sometimes about our fisheries and Lake Simcoe, but we've been really fortunate to restore many of the fisheries that we've lost in the past because of either high chloride levels, high water levels or high phosphorus levels—really a slew of different contaminants in the water that had resulted in a very low cisco population, our whitefish population. To think this was the place where people used to come from all around to come fish and enjoy the recreation, and now, finally, we're at a point, in 2021, where we have restored much of that population and things are vibrant again and people are coming. It's one of the most fished lakes in Ontario where you can see in the wintertime so many people enjoying that part. So it all plays into this. It is a bit of that balancing act concerning the science. A lot of things that happened have been done for the lake. We have to think about weighing everything that's new that's coming out.

The project that we're discussing, the water reclamation centre, also called phosphorus offsetting programs, which I touched base on a little bit. Why is it called phosphorus offsetting programs? It's important when we talk about phosphorus to think about the implementation of policies around phosphorus and how it's going not only to be taken into consideration in this water treatment plant but also our stormwater management. Of course, retrofitting our

stormwater management ponds is very important, and it's not only important throughout the province but, as I mentioned, very important in the Lake Simcoe watershed. If this water reclamation centre is approved, it would be discharging into the East Holland River, which, again, ultimately drains into Lake Simcoe.

It's important to note the amount of science and money that has been allocated into not only the Lake Simcoe watershed but specifically into stormwater management. This summer, Speaker—I just wanted to highlight—I had an opportunity to join my fellow colleague the Attorney General and MPP for Barrie–Springwater–Oro–Medonte and my federal counterpart, the member of Parliament for Barrie–Innisfil, where we were able to announce some federal funding. It was a stream that was joint money between the province and the federal government, also known as the COVID-19 resilience infrastructure stream of the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program—it's a bit of a mouthful. The importance of this announcement we did this summer built on all the previous work, like I talked about the Holland Marsh growers and all they have done for Lake Simcoe, and so many groups—Ladies of the Lake, which I will go into later—but now, again, two levels of government, with the help of the municipality for nominating some of these projects showing the importance to continue to improve Lake Simcoe's health.

One thing that we did announce to improve stormwater management was the Kidd's Creek stormwater pond upgrades, which will upgrade the Sunnidale stormwater pond. Now, this is significant. For anyone who has gone to Kempenfelt Bay and enjoyed a stroll along Lake Simcoe, you would have encountered Kidd's Creek. It's large; it flows throughout our municipality. But it has some issues in terms of—it is a stormwater pond, and as most of us know, in our own backyards, if we have a stormwater pond, it is a huge place for phosphorus to gather. So it obviously gets treated, and then as it flows into the rest of, whether it's a wetland etc. and gets treated, the quality of that water is better off as a result. That investment was so important, and that was very, very recent, and, of course, builds on other projects that I will get to later.

In the same announcement, we were able to connect the downtown core of our municipality of Barrie to the waterfront—again, talking about the economic activity and the importance of connecting people to nature, to water, but also to our business community. We were able to announce several other projects that do that, including, as I was saying—we talk about the health of individuals. They like to swim. They like the recreational trails. Well, part of the spending that we were able to contribute to as a province, with my colleague, was the rehabilitation of a multi-use trail along the lake so that we can, of course, increase the commuter trail that we have all the way to the Kiwanis Pavilion in downtown Barrie. That's connecting people to the water, it's telling them the importance of it—but, also, it's that economic activity. Like we were saying, York region is growing. All areas around the York region area are growing, as well. We can't forget that. They have

to absorb their own growth. With that comes the need and demand for more recreation, more things for people to do. It's great if you're able to afford a house, but then you're always looking for that next step of, "How do I live in my community? How do I enjoy it?"—that quality of life I talked about earlier. So this really builds on that.

When we look at this project that we're discussing here, again, it's that balance of, how do we manage and implement stormwater management issues when it comes to retrofitting existing stormwater ponds, like we've been able to fund with the Kidd's Creek project, and manage the phosphorus loads?

So here we are, and of course the issue at hand is that many years have passed since the York region environmental assessment began. I imagine there's great frustration there. It's interesting to note the history there. We know it started many years ago. We also know the Wynne-Del Duca Liberals refused to make decisions. So this is something that we inherited. This was on the books for a little while. Certainly, different considerations were made at that time; nevertheless, no decision was made. Instead, it was delayed and it was delayed. To no surprise, their decision-making was based on political maps of this province rather than what I have talked about, which is—we talk about growth, we talk about the science and the importance of the fabric of our communities, not to mention the previous investments that were done in cleaning up certain waterways. Again, those projects like the Kidd's Creek stormwater pond were all based in science—why we picked that stormwater pond over any other. So we are at this juxtaposition now where the Wynne-Del Duca Liberals decided not to do anything about it.

We are a government that came in and said we want to do something about things but we don't want to do it willy-nilly. We don't want to just make decisions based on a political map, like maybe the previous government was going to do and had done many a time, and certainly history will reflect that. Under our government, with our Premier, we're really committed to making informed decisions, and certainly this pandemic has proven that. We talk about informed decisions on this watershed, on the York region area and all the surrounding communities. We need to be informed on the decisions we make, because as I said earlier, the decisions we make today are going to affect tomorrow and the next generation. We have to make sure that everything we have now, every science, every evidence, whether it's engineering technology, whether it's water treatment technology—we need to make sure that we uncover every basis of science, every piece of evidence we possibly can now to make these decisions, because it's not just going to be us who are going to be seeing the building of it; it's going to be the next generation that's going to be enjoying that water or drinking that water. So it's a very weighted decision, very important. We're not in the position, of course, to be making this based on a political map of winners and losers, and the us versus them politics, which is all too well known in some other political parties.

Again, on this side, in this government, we believe in making informed decisions to unify our communities and to think about what's best for many generations. So taking into account the informed decisions we have to make, we have to take into account financial issues, environmental and social factors, and getting this done right instead of delaying and thinking of votes like the Liberals were doing.

0930

Science is the best practice and is really at the core of every decision this government makes. We believe more information from technical and other experts is needed to better understand the significant environmental, social and financial implications of any waste water servicing solution for York region, for the very reason that we want to get moving. We need to understand the long-term environmental effects, especially on shallow lakes like Lake Simcoe.

What do I mean by a shallow lake? Well, I was talking about how with Lake Simcoe we were able to restore the cold-water fishery. The cold-water fishery actually only sits on the deepest level, the deepest part of the lake. That's the only way you can get colder water, because of course—it's grade 3 science—if you have shallow water, it's going to be hotter, right?

But it's interesting if you look at the history of Lake Simcoe. I was looking up a few things from our Indigenous partners and how much they relied, in the history of the lake, for their food supply, of course, living on Snake Island, for example. A group that comes to mind is the Chippewas of Georgina Island. It was interesting that there was a time at one point where the Lake Simcoe levels were so low—talking about a shallow lake—that it actually enabled residents to cross in wagons or walk in ankle-deep water to the mainland.

However, for those who know their history, when the Trent-Severn Waterway was completed, the water table increased several feet in the 1920s to early 1930s, and of course that community on Georgina Island did have to adjust, because it drowned all the wild rice that they were growing. Again, they depended on those low water levels. But just to show you exactly how low those water levels used to be way back in the 1920s and 1930s.

So, this particular community can no longer walk to the mainland unless it's the winter. Once the ice freezes, we're lucky that oftentimes we have long ice-fishing seasons around the lake and they are able to access that mainland. But, interesting to note, when we talk about a shallow lake, it's not just now that it's a shallow lake, but historically it's always been a shallow lake.

A lot of science has come out now as well through the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan that was established back in 2008, which is a guiding document for that particular watershed and to help the restoration of Lake Simcoe. Part of that is two different committees that were established: the Lake Simcoe Science Committee and the Lake Simcoe Coordinating Committee.

This past summer, I was able to attend a town hall, a science town hall, to talk about the science of Lake Simcoe

and what has happened over the past 10 years. What we learned through that, and what I learned through that, is that although great improvements have been made—again, cold-water fisheries coming back, the oxygen levels that we need in waterways being restored, which is very important for fish. That’s all great work, but our lake is still shallow, obviously, in some pockets.

When we have large rainfalls, that changes the composition of the lake. With large rainfalls, that’s going to increase the water level. You would think that that would be a good thing, because then we would have more water in the lake, a shallow lake, and would improve it. Actually, it doesn’t, because what ends up happening with the extra rainfall we experience is that it also adds other sediment to the lake, the worst sediment being chloride, which all of us know in the wintertime as salt.

As much as when you’re in the—not part of the snowbelt, which is Barrie, Ontario. We’re not the buckle, but we’re part of the belt. You need to be able to have safe roads, so oftentimes lots of salt is applied. Where does that salt go? It’s going to get washed away. We get rain and it’s going to get washed away. So now you have a composition of large water levels because of rain, extra chloride because of salt on the roads, and that’s all going into our lakes. Again, that was the science table. They were able to monitor the different seasonality of it and they know that the conditions of the lake—obviously, there’s more water levels as we get into the wintertime, rainfall etc., and that actually makes impacts on the typical chemical compounds in the lake versus the summer, where the water levels are lower.

Again, when we’re talking about the effects, long-term environmental effects, on lakes and shallow lakes like Lake Simcoe, all of this science has to be taken into consideration, especially when we’re dealing with issues like, today, another waste water treatment plant and the science behind the positives of technology—reverse osmosis—but also looking at the history of science improvements that have been made to date around the entire watershed, the whole area, and not making errors in scientific judgment for future generations.

Again, we need to collect all the information because a lack of current information from technical experts is holding up this current process. We don’t have that technical information from experts on exactly the impact of said water treatment plant on the entire watershed. Specifically, at this point in time, the EA that’s being reviewed would be the East Holland River option, which flows into Lake Simcoe. That really does need to be taken into consideration because there is way too much stuff that we have done to make these decisions lately.

We have to consider everything that we currently have. The great thing about the 21st century is there is a lot of science out there. There are different individuals who have published different articles etc. on observations they’ve made. For example, I talked about Peter Dillon, who is the chair of the Lake Simcoe Science Committee. He’s been chair since 2008 and he’s great. I’ve had many conversations with him. I want to take this opportunity to thank him

for all his work and his continued work. He has published in many scientific journals and all of them look at not just Lake Simcoe but the entire impacts of other watersheds and the impact of climate change etc. We’re really lucky to have him on the science committee with all his work and recommendations as to how we continue to improve the lake.

There’s one article, I remember, when I first met him. He’s like, “You need to read this and the impacts.” He does a lot of work with the International Joint Commission. He also does a lot of work with—we reference it here and in the news a lot—the IPCC reports. He brought up a very interesting topic, which is impacts of climate change on a regional scale and how it would influence local hydrological and water quality. He does a lot of modelling—as we’ve learned through COVID, lots of modelling exists. But he did a lot of climate modelling in terms of what is the impact of climate change on different watersheds, and specifically, the article that he wrote is about Lake Simcoe.

For anyone who is interested, it’s the Impacts of Climate Change on Hydrology and Water Quality. The secondary title of his paper is Future Proofing Management Strategies in the Lake Simcoe Watershed. He published this with other scientists looking at that impact. He talks about that very thing I was mentioning which is the different water levels of the lake and how that impacts the health. When you are putting more effluent into a lake, that obviously contributes to water levels and we have to take that into consideration. He talks about that in his paper and he says how we have to consider management strategies that are being applied to Lake Simcoe, especially when we talk about high loads—he talks about TP but he also talks about phosphorus. Of course, if we’re increasing those factors—he gets into a little bit more than science, which I won’t bore you with—but those loads and those tributaries need to be taken into consideration. He does a lot of analysis on the West Holland River and he compares it to the Black River as well, which is really interesting. He does talk about, as a result of, say, we have high levels of different contaminants etc., how that does impact our runoff, but it also impacts the fisheries. He talked about that need for balance, which was really, really interesting. Again, I want to thank him for his work.

You have a compilation of scientists coming together. They did this work and there’s so much emerging work being done. It’s no wonder that more emerging work is being done because, through this government, we’ve also funded much of this work.

Another announcement I wanted to talk about is: I was joined two summers ago by Minister Dunlop, another neighbour, near Simcoe county. We were able to announce funding for several projects. Many of those projects are science- and engineering-based as well. We were able to award a significant amount of funding for projects: for example, the St. Lawrence River Institute nutrient model for Lake Simcoe. This project was receiving \$77,000 and change over two years. Basically, what they’re doing is a web-based tool that uses satellite imagery to predict areas with high amounts of phosphorus in the watershed. This

model will inform target best-management practices to help reduce phosphorus in the lake. This is something that we announced way back, Mr. Speaker, on July 17, 2020. It's not that long ago. Again, it built on the previous science that had already been done, but we're always learning more and we need new data.

0940

The satellite imagery project came to light because we actually didn't know—we don't have a sense of the impacts. Again, the information from the study will also be very important for the science that we need to take into consideration when making these decisions on what we're dealing with today for an environmental assessment to deal with additional effluent in a waterway.

It's not just this project. I was talking about how we funded other ones. In addition to funding the St. Lawrence River Institute, we also gave the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority funding for three different projects. We're really blessed that in the watershed, the Lake Simcoe conservation authority, in addition to its base-level funding, gets additional funds to do many of these restoration science projects and whatnot that have to do with Lake Simcoe Protection Act.

One of the things they're going to be embarking on is a Lake Simcoe conservation authority mapping project. This one is over two years, and it's going to use aerial photos to identify and track changes in land use in the watershed over time, with a specific focus on changes in watershed impervious areas such as paved roads and parking lots. This information will enhance stormwater management planning and help reduce phosphorus and other contaminants from entering the lake. Again, going back to stormwater management—really, really critical.

We are getting this information—this project was funded in 2002. Things are taking a little bit slower because of COVID to complete, but nevertheless, they're committed to these projects. The information coming out of that will also be very important science and evidence to help the evidence-based decision-making for this environmental assessment that we're discussing today.

There's another project the Lake Simcoe conservation authority got funding for the same day, when I was able to still make the announcement, which is that the Lake Simcoe conservation authority is also doing inspection and maintenance. This project is again over two years. It will allow them to train inspectors in inspection and maintenance of stormwater facilities in the watershed. Stormwater facilities that are being regularly inspected and properly maintained will help prevent more phosphorus and other pollutants from entering the lake. That maintenance and that inspection are very, very key.

As we get them to fund inspection and maintenance, we'll also get more evidence-based science out of that over the next two years, which will help us be more informed. And this is just a small piece of the pie. There are certainly more evidence-based decisions and more information that our government will be looking at in order to make this decision, but that's just to name one other.

Lastly, the third project the Lake Simcoe conservation authority received funding for just in 2020 is water quality

and phosphorus monitoring and research—again, very important. They're getting about \$370,000 over three years for that project, and it's to monitor the water quality in Lake Simcoe by measuring the amount of phosphorus entering the lake. This research will investigate the relationship between phosphorus loads and dissolved oxygen. Deep water dissolved oxygen is a key indicator of the lake's quality. I mentioned that earlier.

We know that there is a relationship there. We knew that because in the 10-year report that was done for the Lake Simcoe Protection Act, it did show that as we had increasing oxygenation levels, we had increased fishery, which is great, but now we need to understand more of that relationship, so that's what the study is doing.

Again, it's more science that we'll be able to add to. If there is additional effluent being put into the lake, how does it impact the oxygenation levels? How does it impact the different fisheries, the cold-water fishery? How does it impact the food web that we often talk about and that they talked about at the science round table for the Lake Simcoe consultation we had this summer? How does that all impact, right? We need to understand that. I know myself, being the MPP for Barrie–Innisfil, and my fellow watershed colleagues, the MPP for Barrie–Springwater–Oro-Medonte and the Minister of Transportation and member for Bradford-East Gwillimbury, obviously take all this into consideration.

Again, the minister and I talked about—in Simcoe North, we've got the entire area, so obviously we attended some of these round tables and listened to these scientists, and we know that that stuff is going to be emerging. It's very exciting, but we need to take into account this emerging data, this emerging science that's going to come out in our decision-making. Certainly that's not the only information we'd be looking at and waiting for, but I thought it was very important to note in terms of when it comes to making decisions based on experts. As I said, the lack of current information from technical experts—it's very low, so it is holding up this particular process, because we want to make it based on science and not, of course, based on political boundaries.

That brings me to: What do all Ontarians expect, including Simcoe residents? Well, they need to be confident, especially here in Lake Simcoe, with everything that we've dedicated to the water and the amount of funding that's been put in place—we need to be confident that our water resources are protected, now and into the future, by very good decision-making based on the best and most up-to-date information, understanding what we can't take for granted.

And of course, we can't take our Great Lakes for granted. Much work has also been done in our Great Lakes, but I wanted to focus on the watershed that would be impacted by the effluent that we're discussing today.

We talked about getting the best evidence-based decision-making—very important. But that is also why, earlier this year, our government did introduce the York Region Wastewater Act, 2021. At the time, it was Bill 306, and that was introduced on June 3 of this year by the

previous Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. I want to thank him for introducing that, because it certainly made a difference in the area I represent, that that was introduced.

At the time, Bill 306, if passed, would have put on hold the upper York sewage solution environmental assessment to allow for expert research and assessments needed to make a science- and data-based decision. The pause, as I mentioned, would have provided time for the ministry to appoint an advisory panel to look at the issues and requirements surrounding the provisions of the waste water services in York region. The bill, Bill 306, unfortunately did not receive second reading.

This brings me to why we're here today: reintroducing of the York Region Wastewater Act, 2021, now known as Bill 5, by the new Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks so that we can have this debated, have this passed, hopefully, in this House to truly take into consideration these decisions—decisions that can't be made lightly, that have to take into account everything that has been done.

For me, this issue is very important and near and dear to my heart, because I am obviously a resident of Barrie–Innisfil, the watershed that is being taken into consideration for this act, but also I'm the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. It was really wonderful when I was appointed as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. I thought to myself, "Great!" All this work that we've done in the watershed in terms of the Lake Simcoe Clean-up Fund, which I was able to work for the government—which dedicated millions of dollars at a time for cleaning up Lake Simcoe. As a result, now I'm in a role where I get to review a 10-year report that talks about all these projects that had contributed to the health of Lake Simcoe. I get to be a part of this journey to build on many of those successes.

Along this journey, I learned the great history that is Lake Simcoe for my previous work. I thought it was interesting, because before, when I was able to contribute to things like the Lake Simcoe Clean-up Fund, we talked about the rich history of Lake Simcoe. Not only does it play a vital role in clean water and the economy, but it actually played a really important role in safeguarding Canada. Few may know this, but Lake Simcoe played a huge, vital role in safeguarding Canada during the War of 1812. We have to commend this beautiful lake that I get to surround myself with. It did help stymie the invasion by our now-American neighbours.

The other interesting point—many people would have learned about this in history class, and that was John Franklin. We know the great exploration that he did in the arctic, but this explorer, John Franklin, actually had to pass through Lake Simcoe on his journey to arctic exploration—so again, that really rich history of Lake Simcoe.

We all know it as Lake Simcoe, those who live on the watershed now. But also, it was known by the Indigenous populations. The Huron called it "beautiful lake" and the Ojibwe called it "round lake." Certainly, as the representative for the area, I still would very much love to keep this

as a beautiful lake. I would say I've canoed in the area, I've kayaked, I swam, and it's certainly a round lake still. So that's always good.

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I talked earlier about the economic impacts, but I failed to talk about the percentages and the actual dollar figures. The recreation activity alone from Lake Simcoe generates approximately \$200 million per year in the local economy, and 80% of that is connected to the ice fishery, which I mentioned.

The ice fishery is an interesting thing. Now there's a lot of fishing happening, but at one point—in Innisfil, we have a community called Belle Ewart. Belle Ewart, back in the 1900s—I don't know the exact date—that's where everyone used to get their ice. What they used to do—because, what does a shallow lake do in the wintertime? Well, if it's shallow, it's going to freeze faster. When you freeze things, you get ice. So we had these huge ice blocks that were created from the lake, and they would be shipped all across Ontario. That was a huge industry for Belle Ewart and Innisfil for many years. Of course, as technology evolved and we got away from putting everything on a train, buggies etc., the need for those types of ice—the invention of the refrigerator, the most obvious—that particular industry fizzled out. But new industry came, such as fishing, which I mentioned contributes 80% to the local economy. It's very, very exciting.

For me, growing up in the area, it was really important to continue this history—but also the importance to keep Lake Simcoe beautiful and clean. Every year, there are different challenges.

When I first came to Barrie—I emigrated from Moscow in Russia—in the early 1990s, at the time, there was this whole big issue of zebra mussels in the lake. Now we've gone from zebra mussels, which we've tried to contain a little bit around the lake, and now we're still dealing with phosphorus loads. The most recent issues we are grappling with for the lake is invasive species and of course the chloride levels from the salt.

So, again, historically—and we're talking about things based on science, of having to take into account all the evidence. Well, even history shows us the evolution of the science, where the zebra mussels were an issue in the 1990s, and now we're coming to a point in the 21st century where we've got chloride issues and phosphorus issues. So interesting things and observations—again, I'm not a scientist, but just observations I've made as a resident of that watershed and just living there for many years.

That brought me to, when I did get elected—before I even knew I was going to be the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, it was very, very important for me to continue that commitment to keep Lake Simcoe clean. Like I said, I was involved in some of the policy-making for the Lake Simcoe Clean-Up Fund, and I got to work for a local member of Parliament who was involved with that. I saw that whole potential that could be made—and not losing that momentum. It would really be a shame if we did all this effort, all these investments, took into account all the

science and invested all this time to keep this beautiful lake clean, only for new science or extra effluent or things that we don't know, not knowing other evidence from experts, to quash all of that development.

So it's really exciting. I think we could do a lot of work together with experts who would be able to build on the accomplishments of the 10-year report for Lake Simcoe, to build on the production in phosphorus levels we've been able to do, and to build on a lot of the projects that have been done and the community advocacy that has been done.

I talked about the Lake Simcoe conservation authority, which has done a lot to improve the lake's health, but we also can't forget our other partners, like Ducks Unlimited. They have been a great partner throughout the years, not only just on this watershed but throughout the province. They do incredible work around wetlands. They're really, really great.

Interjection.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Yes, we should applaud our Ducks Unlimited friends. That's true.

Thanks to this government, we were also able to fund a Ducks Unlimited project—to the tune of \$581,000. This was awarded through an Ontario Trillium Foundation grant—so coming back full circle to the beginning of my speech, when I talked about tourism, culture and sport. I was fortunate to be introduced today by the minister of tourism, culture and sport. Through the Ontario Trillium Foundation, which is under that ministry, we were also able—and this gets missed sometimes—we funded a great environmental project, as well, which contributes to the economy, which, again, contributes to tourism, because we want clean waterways, and that helps the economic investment that is a result. Through this Trillium Foundation grant that Ducks Unlimited received, they are now able to do things like create green infrastructure like wetlands and really take into account good community planning practices.

That takes me to the Planning Act and planning practices. It's a bit of a dense policy area. Of course, as our municipalities tend to grow, we also have to take the Planning Act into consideration. The Planning Act has to, of course, interact with so many other things. In our watershed, for example, it has to interact with the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan. Again, much of that plan is still upheld today, and we're constantly making improvements on it. But all those things have to be taken into consideration, with science, when we make these types of decisions when it comes to approving new projects, increasing projects etc.

We have to take into account a lot of the community members who spent so much time and effort, whether it's fundraising, whether it's contributing to the science or whether it's helping with local stewardship programs to help clean up the lake.

For instance, a group that comes to mind is the Youth for Lake Simcoe. They've done cleanups throughout the year. It's incredible. I've joined Zoe and that group for many years. But not just them: I spoke about Ladies of the Lake earlier. They've done a lot of work, but so have many

groups around the lake, really, who have rallied together to improve its health. Their work cannot be forgotten, can't be taken lightly. I think we need to build on that work that they've done, the work of our 10-year Lake Simcoe report, which is based in science, and of course, think about the more than 450,000 people who live in the Lake Simcoe watershed as of 2017. Of course, that population as well is expected to grow—significant growth in that area by 2041, similar to York region.

Lake Simcoe in itself, like other watersheds, endures a tremendous amount of—there are a lot of environmental pressures, most notably the high levels of phosphorus that I talked about earlier and the chloride populations I had also spoken about. We've got to think about the collective actions around this lake. For the past 30 years, we've seen significant signs of improvements, which I've talked about in terms of the cold-water fishery, but also the amount of algae. This is a huge topic, not only around Lake Simcoe but our Great Lakes as well. That's measured by chlorophyll A, for the scientists who are watching this speech. We're lucky that the amount of algae has actually decreased in the lake, leading to improved water quality. The one thing you don't want to do is reverse those efforts when we have been able to decrease the amount of algae. We don't want something coming in to reverse those great strides. And they weren't taken lightly: There are a lot of, again, science experts who were behind the projects that led to the reduction of the algae, but also a lot of taxpayer dollars. I think, as we got elected as a government to bring back respect to taxpayer dollars, we don't want to just throw out these huge amounts of investments that have been done over the past many, many years.

The other thing we've seen is also—we talked about shoreline erosion, and that's constantly an issue. Shoreline erosion has been slightly improved. Of course, more things need to be done with the Lake Simcoe Protection Act and working with our Lake Simcoe conservation authority partners, but we've been able to really do well with the planting of shrubs and trees etc., which help with shoreline restoration, but also some of the other infrastructure projects that have also helped with shoreline restoration which have been really, really critical. Why is that important to the health of the lake? Well, it's everything that seeps into the lake, right? Your shoreline is kind of your last wall of buffers when things are going into the lake, so it's certainly very important.

So I commend all the work that has been done. I was very lucky to be part of it. Like I said, many of these actions were done through that protection plan, but we need to continue this collaboration. We need to continue this work. A lot of the work is with our partners, our Indigenous partners and their communities, our municipalities, agriculture, commercial sectors, residents and local conservation authorities. Over these past few years, I have been able to do large consultations about the Lake Simcoe watershed with our business communities and how the business community is impacted by the water levels and how the water has to be good, because if your job or if your small business or what you're proposing—

we have a splash park right on Kempenfelt Bay. Well, if the water quality is not good in that splash park, no one can go in and play there, and that affects them on a monetary scale, but also you're seeing the erosion of the health of Lake Simcoe.

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Again, all these things need to be taken into consideration. There's a lot of science that we have been able to build on when it comes to the Lake Simcoe watershed, but certainly when it comes to new technologies—for example, waste treatment technologies—we also need to consider the impacts of those new technologies, the science of those new technologies and their impacts on everything that we have accomplished to date with Lake Simcoe protection.

It's important that we consider the region of York's solution and how it's going to contribute to phosphorus monitoring and how it's going to impact the research already done for Lake Simcoe and some of the projects that have been successful. I've named some of them, but one I did forget to mention was the funding of a testing prize called the George Barley Water Prize. That was really interesting. It is so people can test their own water. It's getting more people involved in the science of Lake Simcoe so that they understand it, but we're also improving the water quality, which is very, very key to all watersheds—and again, not taking these decisions lightly.

I want to conclude by encouraging my honourable colleagues to support the York Region Wastewater Act and to think about all the great science and history that we have learned, from my particular speech, the impacts it's going to make on decision-making and how we want to rely on and enable experts. For example, this act, for those who have read it, will enable the province to enlist experts from a number of disciplines to help refine the work already done by the regional municipality of York and determine the best possible solutions for the waste water solution in that region. This process has been going on for many years and we want to ensure that it is completed with the benefit of the latest science and the best information.

Our goal is one that I believe is shared by everyone in this Ontario Legislature, because we need to have better waste water services as part of a healthier and more prosperous Ontario. We need to think about the families in York region; we need to think about the families that I represent in Simcoe county. As we continue to grow with a healthy mind, with science in mind—that we don't make these decisions lightly, because the next generation is counting on it.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm pleased to have the opportunity, in the wake of the member's lead, to ask the PA for the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks—she called the proposed stormwater treatment and phosphorus reclamation plant a game-changer and said that hopefully we will have one. I'm inclined to agree, recognizing that the feds and the region are putting up the funding.

Just for your own benefit, Speaker, the feds in November committed half the cost of the phosphorus reclamation plant, which would cover \$16 million. The other half of the cost, borne by York region that they said they would pay for, is based on the Upper York Sewage Solutions project going forward—which, with this bill, is in effect illegal. Will this government and this member commit to picking up the tab that can't be paid now by York region? I understand that interested communities have passed resolutions asking, so I will too: Will this government pay half the cost of the proposed game-changing phosphorus reclamation plant on the Holland River?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you for the question. I did mention that in my speech. As a local MPP, as the representative for the area of Barrie–Innisfil, I know the impact that this phosphorus treatment plant is going to have on our local watershed. As a local MPP, it's my job to advocate for improvements to my area and anything that's going to not only improve the economy but the health of our region. As a local MPP, I can commit to continuing to advocate for that, as I have done, but I am not the Minister of Finance and I do not hold the purse strings of the treasury, so I'll have to leave that to other colleagues.

What I will say is that this government has made tremendous improvements when it comes to water quality. We've made tremendous improvements to Lake Simcoe and there are funds and money that have been attached to those improvements. I'm very thankful to my colleagues who have been able to help me with funding on that, but certainly there's more work to do.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you to the member from Barrie–Innisfil. I'm glad she touched on all of the aquatic species. Any time I get to stand up in this Legislature and talk about fish, it's a good day.

I wanted to just quickly look back. I'm going to have a chance to take part in debate a little later this afternoon on this bill, and I'll touch a little bit more on it in my remarks, but I wanted to talk a little bit about what has happened in Waterloo region and what the member might think this could—pausing this and taking a more fulsome look at things.

We built a new water treatment plant along the Grand River not too long ago. There was a lot of study, a lot of due diligence that went into it, and we've now seen a resurgence in many fish species in the river that were, quite frankly, almost not there anymore. Pausing this, being able to take a look, taking a more fulsome approach, not using data from 10 or 15 years ago: What will that mean for aquatic species going forward in Duffins Creek and into Lake Simcoe?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you for that question. Certainly you've seen the outcomes in your own region, in Waterloo, and the improvements that have been made there to the fishery. But that's why it's so important, why we need to take this bill into consideration and improve it, so we have that time to ask experts to analyze the impacts of the fishery on the waterways that are going to be

impacted by this environmental assessment that would approve a new water treatment plant, and how that's going to have long-term effects on different fisheries.

We know we have the evidence-based science on how the populations of different fisheries—I was talking about the white cisco, for example, and the goby fish, and how they've improved with time, but now if there's a new factor in play, certainly we have to analyze that science, and that's why this bill is so important today.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: There was some talk about 1812. Do you know what helped protect Canada in the War of 1812? First Nations people. There would be no Canada if we didn't help them out, and one of the things that comes to mind is Indigenous rights. I'm talking about free, prior, informed consent, which allows Indigenous people like myself to give or withhold a project that may affect them or is within territories.

My question to the member across the way is: What work has been done with the Mississaugas of Scugog Island and the Chippewas of Georgina Island? Meegwetich.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you for mentioning that. I did go over some of the history of the lake, and I would be remiss not to repeat myself, to talk about the importance of the Indigenous people on the lake.

You talked about the War of 1812. According to a paper that was done with the history of the Chippewas of Georgina Island, they were also very important in that fight, of course. Certainly one could read much history on that. That's why it's so important, not only when we talk about working with all community members—in my speech I also talked about the importance of working with our Indigenous communities. I know I've spoken to leaders like Donna Big Canoe, who has done such great work on Lake Simcoe, and the great fishery projects that they also contribute to, and so I look forward to continuing that work with her.

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

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member from Barrie-Innisfil for her really exciting speech. I was very excited. Honestly, I'm a daughter of an engineer, and so all of this talk about waste water infrastructure and stuff like that—I just get really excited about that. It's a big project.

I was also really excited, and this is probably because I come from Saskatchewan originally, by all the discussion about the Holland Marsh and the East Holland River. I've of course gone there many times. Every time I see it, I get excited because of the dark, beautiful soil—I think because that's not the soil that I was used to seeing when I was little. It's such beautiful soil, and it's so important for fruits and vegetables and everything in our region.

Can you just give us a little more information about the possible impacts of this on the East Holland River and why that's important?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: We're very blessed with the great, dark muck soil that is at the Holland Marsh and

Holland River. Again, it's a significant economic contributor through the amount of food they produce for all of us to eat. But also, there are the other investments that they've made through the Holland Marsh. They've constantly made improvements to the amount of phosphorus entering the Holland River. We don't want to remove any of that progress that has been done.

1010

This act is so important, because when it comes to these new engineering technologies, we need to take into consideration the impacts they have on things like the Holland River and specifically that phosphorus level. Because the farmers there certainly will not be very happy if you have taken away the great efforts that they have done to keep that river in better shape.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I've had many decades of experience with landfills and discharges in Hamilton. We have Randle Reef. We just had sewer gate. We've had a lot of discharges going into Lake Ontario over the years that have had to be dealt with and are still being dealt with.

My question to you is: I don't see anything in your documentation about future industrial discharges that will accompany urban sprawl as York region grows. These industrial discharges will go into Lake Simcoe and Lake Ontario. They don't even know today—there are hundreds of chemicals that go into these lakes that they don't even know what effect they have on human life.

I don't see any of that study in there. Maybe that would be an important thing to share with the people of York region and the rest of Ontario, because I think you're headed for things that are—you're talking very rosy about these things, but there are a lot of other things that go on with discharge that people might not be aware of. So hopefully you can answer that.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: That's very important, actually. The part of the information that I mentioned in my speech—it's very key to build on the fact that, yes, we've used new technologies and we've used science to be able to make improvements on stormwater ponds or discharge, but we can't forget that there are new things coming out every day, which is why this bill is here before us. We can't make the decision lightly. We need to take into consideration the science, the impacts of discharge.

It's this very government that actually took action to improve our Spills Action Centre resources. There is now a special advisory committee that was formed to look over sewage and water spills. The previous government—I can't even name the countless amount of sewage spills that had been underreported under their reign, and we've had sewer water going into our waterways, not only the one I represent but all across Ontario. Now this government's action—we actually have more monitoring on those types of things, and of course funding assigned to a special advisory panel that monitors all these spills that happen.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Can the member from Barrie–Innisfil tell us a little bit about the role of the—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Sorry, we're at the end of time. I apologize.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): We will now transition to members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WOMEN'S SHELTERS

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

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you, Speaker. I have the pleasure of rising today to speak about a great organization in my riding of Eglinton–Lawrence that has been—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Excuse me. We made a rookie error. I recognize the member for Niagara Centre—and I apologize.

Mr. Jeff Burch: No problem. We could have kept going, Speaker. But congratulations on your appointment.

I rise today to talk about a crisis facing abused women in my riding. Women's Place of South Niagara is being forced to close Serenity Place, which, since 1996, has been a safe haven for women and children fleeing domestic violence in the city of Welland.

Chronic underfunding by the provincial government has forced Women's Place to fundraise to be able to stay open over the years. Each year, the agency must raise approximately \$550,000 to maintain programs and keep the lights on, but the COVID-19 lockdowns made that nearly impossible. So at a time when this service is needed the most, the agency has to make the difficult decision to consolidate operations at Nova House in Niagara Falls and close the 10-bed shelter at Serenity Place in Welland.

Jennifer Gauthier, executive director of Women's Place of South Niagara, tells me that the decision to close the Welland shelter was not taken lightly. Not only have domestic violence rates increased during the pandemic, but the severity of the injuries suffered by victims has also escalated.

Mr. Speaker, it's time this government pulled its head out of the sand and addressed the crisis faced by women's shelters across the province. They need a multi-year commitment to increased funding so they can continue their important work, supporting women in crisis, in these especially desperate times.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Thank you. Now I look to the member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

JVS TORONTO

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you, Speaker. I apologize for that earlier.

I have the pleasure of rising today to speak about a great organization in my riding of Eglinton–Lawrence that's

been helping people of Toronto and York find employment for decades. Last night, I had the honour of attending the JVS Toronto's 74th annual AGM as they prepare themselves for the future. It's been a very difficult year, and their new mantra is, "The world has changed. Our vision has not."

JVS was founded in 1947 with the goal of helping victims of the Holocaust and veterans of the Second World War find employment as they moved beyond the horrors of war to rebuild their lives here in Ontario. As JVS experienced success in helping the Jewish community, it expanded its outreach to serve the broader community in finding work. JVS holds its four values in particular as important: excellence, collaboration, integrity and respect. These values are, of course, worth celebrating, and they lead to great things for people—values not only important in finding work but in helping people reach their full potential.

I want to congratulate all the award winners recognized last night and the board members, staff, volunteers and clients of JVS, and particularly the retiring president and CEO Kim Coulter for her 31 years of service to JVS.

Civic-minded institutions like JVS are the cornerstones of communities here in Ontario, like my own of Eglinton–Lawrence. I am very, very proud of all the work they're doing and happy to congratulate them on all of their efforts. Keep up the great work.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Jennifer K. French: After this long summer recess, this PC government restarted the Legislature with a lacklustre speech from the throne that, among other things, failed to mention "back to school." It failed to mention education entirely. Yesterday was World Teachers' Day, and we were all again reminded that this government has yet to prioritize public education during this pandemic.

Since the beginning, we should have seen what has been begged for by education workers, parents, families, students and the opposition: smaller class sizes, air quality standards and reporting, fewer kids on buses, staffing supports and testing kits. However, since the beginning, what we have seen is this government turning its back on students.

I fervently believe in public education. Full disclosure: I was an elementary school teacher for a long time, so I fundamentally believe in investing in the futures of kids. I believe in strong public services. I don't believe in disassembling a world-class education system while folks are distracted by a pandemic, to stealthily scrap it and sell it for parts, which appears to be the goal of this Premier and government, frankly.

I am hearing from the education world that children as young as kindergarten are fighting, running out of school, self-harming and struggling desperately. Times are brutal. Our classrooms and our students need care and investment. More and more teachers and education workers are frantically trying to leave the profession. We don't have

enough EAs or custodians. Teachers are trying to take early retirement. Perhaps if this government didn't attack and neglect them, they might feel that they could continue.

This government's aggressive agenda of cuts and privatization makes me sick. So my message to this Premier is, end the attacks and support public education.

PATHWAYS HEALTH CENTRE FOR CHILDREN

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'm pleased to rise today to announce another critical investment in Sarnia–Lambton by the government of Ontario. As part of the 2021 provincial budget, our government announced the historic investment of \$240 million over four years in Ontario's children treatment centres and preschool speech and language programs. As a result, I'm pleased to announce that Pathways Health Centre for Children, our local children's treatment centre, will receive an increase in annualized funding of over \$1.1 million, or a 24% increase, to help them deliver important services and support children and youth in our community.

Already, Pathways provides a range of essential rehabilitation services to over 3,400 children and youth annually. This \$1.1-million investment will help them to build service capacity and increase access to preschool speech and language services and community and school-based rehabilitation services.

Mr. Speaker, we know that early intervention leads to better long-term outcomes for children and youth. By improving access to assessments and early intervention services, children will begin receiving services and working towards goals sooner. This investment in Pathways Health Centre for Children is an investment in children and young people of Sarnia–Lambton.

Together with our partners at Pathways, this provincial government is working so every young person has the best opportunity to achieve their life's goals and be set up for success.

1020

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Mr. Chris Glover: At this time of year, millions of birds are migrating across the Great Lakes to winter in Ontario and millions more are migrating south. But many do not make it. Windows that reflect the sky and clouds can appear invisible to a moving bird, so they continue to fly at high speeds until they smack into the glass and fall to the ground.

The bird photographer Priya Ramsingh writes that if you “walk around one of the city's large towers” during the migratory season, “you'll find the bodies of dead birds” with “their feet curled up in the air.” These are brilliantly coloured birds, including electric blue indigo buntings, “warblers with yellow, green and blue wing markings, and scarlet tanagers with regal, red feather plumage.”

FLAP Canada states that over 25 million birds die through collisions with windows in Canada each year. Thankfully, we have a way to dramatically reduce bird collisions with windows. Nearly 19,000 people have signed a petition asking to prevent further damage to bird populations, including petitions by BirdSafe and FLAP Canada.

This week, I am introducing a motion to adopt the Canadian Standards Association's 2019 bird-friendly design standard into the Ontario building code for all new construction in the province of Ontario. This is a proactive and inexpensive measure that will protect Ontario's biodiversity for years to come.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES SERVICES D'OPTOMÉTRIE

Mr. Stephen Blais: For months, optometrists in Ontario have been trying to have discussions with the government about the challenges in the OHIP funding model. Despite months of warnings that they would withdraw their service, the government chose not to engage with optometrists to resolve their concerns. OHIP-covered eye exams ended over a month ago, and the Ontario government continues to be absent from meaningful discussions with the Ontario Association of Optometrists.

Eyesight is not a luxury, Mr. Speaker. Imagine you're the mom of two school-aged children who wrote to me. Both children need eye tests to perform their best at school and to participate in the extracurricular activities that they've been missing for so long. Their eye tests were cancelled.

Les examens de la vue couverts par l'assurance-santé ont pris fin il y a plus d'un mois, et le gouvernement de l'Ontario continue d'être absent de toute négociation significative avec l'Association ontarienne des optométristes.

Imaginez que vous êtes gestionnaire d'une résidence pour les personnes âgées, comme David, dans ma circonscription, qui ne peut pas voir bien d'un de ses yeux—une condition facilement corrigée par des lunettes correctives; mais il ne peut pas obtenir un rendez-vous avec un optométriste.

On a besoin d'une solution maintenant, monsieur le Président.

It's time that the government sit down with optometrists and work out a deal so that they can once again provide world-class eye care to Ontarians.

EVENTS IN HALDIMAND–NORFOLK

Mr. Toby Barrett: As you know, Haldimand–Norfolk boasts an abundance of fairs and festivals unique to our varied and rich farm heritage. These fairs, festivals and parades cap off the planting season, the harvest seasons and signify a celebration of sorts after months and months of hard work.

Dunnville hosts the Mudcat Festival and its summer fair as well. Port Rowan has Bayfest. There's the Langton Fair,

Houghton County Fair, the Simcoe Heritage Friendship Festival, Donnybrook in Charlotteville, Fall Fest in Delhi, and then the quaint town of Waterford is well known for its Pumpkinfest.

While some of these festivals have been sidelined during the pandemic, I was pleased last week that the show was on once again in Caledonia for their fall fair. A great time was had by all, I can attest. Next year will be their 150th fair.

And just yesterday, the famous Norfolk County Fair and Horse Show kicked off their 181st year. The fair has in place many safety precautions. We're still able to take in the traditional events, the livestock shows. Entertainment coming up includes Tim Hicks and the James Barker Band.

As the area MPP, I'm so heartened; a tremendous amount of work goes forward from our volunteers, and kudos to all for soldiering through these time-tested traditions.

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaker, it's too bad we are not allowed to have visitors in the gallery these days. I'm sure that Mike Wood, the founder and main advocate for Hamilton Tenants in Unity, would be sitting in our gallery, listening intently as the problems he and our office are witnessing—with residential tenants who are being harassed, shamed, scared and bullied throughout Hamilton. Local media headlines such as “Exterior Door Removed by Landlord” or “On-site Laundry Machines Increased to \$20 for a Wash and Dry” may seem strange and unlike anything people from more affluent communities are accustomed to hearing, but my office hears these strange complaints from tenants every day.

What do you tell a person in her early seventies who is in tears and has been informed that she has to leave her \$700-a-month apartment for renovations and she will be evicted and removed by a sheriff if she doesn't? How do you explain to her that Landlord and Tenant Board hearings are only being conducted virtually and that she'll have to buy, pay for and learn to use a smart phone in the next few weeks or miss out on her chance to defend her home from outside investors who see no value in her living peacefully on Melvin Avenue and do not concern themselves that without this apartment she's bound for a life on the streets?

Currently, the Landlord and Tenant Board system is broken and the people of Hamilton know it. They see the bullying and harassment from investment-class landlords and nameless numbered companies every day. They see the ever-increasing misery of the overheated housing market. What they don't see is a government that is doing anything about it while they leave the fighting to hometown advocates like Mike and his ilk.

Being forced out of your home at any age is a great mental and emotional burden, especially when there is nowhere to go that is even slightly close to being within your budget.

We need to stop the profiteering and start listening to what our community needs: safe, secure and affordable housing.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr. Lorne Coe: The Ontario government has provided up to \$696 million this year to help cover historic working funds deficits, with a focus on small, medium, as well as specialty and rehabilitation hospitals. I'm pleased that this includes over \$9 million for Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences in Whitby in support of their world-class programs and services. Overall, Ontario Shores has been the recipient of approximately \$16 million over the past three years from the government.

Clearly, the government is determined to build a comprehensive and connected mental health and addictions system that benefits Durham region residents and people in other parts of the province.

Speaker, at the end of the day, our government remains absolutely committed to supporting hospitals like Ontario Shores and others in Durham region so that they can continue to care for hard-working families today and in the future.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: As the representative for Barrie–Innisfil, I also represent a part of the manufacturing might that is Ontario. In Barrie–Innisfil, we have incredible companies that have been not only employing more people, helping the province's economic recovery, but they're ready to take on more.

I wanted to announce that our government has contributed to the Skills Development Fund and the Second Career program so people can take advantage of these opportunities to have high-paid skilled trade jobs. But there are businesses in Barrie that are still looking for individuals, and our government has also invested in these manufacturing companies.

Jomi, for example, have a multi-year relationship with Tesla and Lucid Motors and they plan to expand into the US market. They've created 20 jobs and retained 23 jobs, thanks to this government's investment, but they can take on more people and are ready to do so.

Tempo Plastics also received additional funding from our government. Not only are they employing 144 individuals, but they also have an ability to take on more.

Innovative Automation and Steve Loftus in Barrie received investment from this government to allow for their automation sector to grow globally, and they can take on more individuals as they continue to innovate.

Matsu Manufacturing in Barrie were also able to receive funding from this government to create 24 new jobs, and certainly they can take on more.

SBS-Drivetec in Barrie have been able to double their production capacity and optimize efficiency, thanks to this government.

Lastly, TNR doors is ready to expand. They have many employees now, but if you're looking, check them out.

There is so much manufacturing growth in Barrie, and we're very excited for economic recovery.

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

1030

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I would like to bring to the attention of the House that on Monday, October 18, a limited number of legislative pages will return to their duties in the chamber this fall. As we welcome them back to the legislative building, their health and safety, as well as everyone who has direct contact with them, is our top priority. That's why, during this trial period, we have only accepted applications from grade 8 students who have received both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, as well as ensuring that anyone who works directly with the page program is also fully vaccinated.

We will continue to monitor the COVID-19 pandemic, as we all will, and our response to it, ensuring that all occupants of the precinct are protected.

REPORT, FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that the following document has been tabled: a report entitled Federal and Provincial COVID-19 Response Measures: 2021 Update, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario.

The member for Ottawa South has informed me that he has a point of order he wishes to raise.

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, a point of order: I seek unanimous consent to move a motion without notice calling on the government of Ontario to immediately make COVID-19 vaccinations mandatory for all front-line health care and education workers in the province, including hospital workers, PSWs and home and community care staff.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa South is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion without notice with respect to private members' public business. Agreed? I heard a no.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I will ask for the House's attention. On June 14, 2021, the member for London West, Ms. Sattler, and the member for York Centre, Mr. Baber, rose on questions of privilege respecting the ability of members to rise on points of order to seek the unanimous consent of the House regarding the business of the day. The member for London West subsequently provided a written submission in support of her questions, and gave an additional oral submission to the House yesterday. I am now prepared to rule on the questions raised by the members.

Let us first revisit the events of June 14, which was the last day the House sat before the summer recess. At various times during that day's proceedings, members rose on supposed points of order, each time seeking the unanimous consent of the House to give immediate consideration to a private member's bill or motion, or to move a substantive motion without notice.

Made over and over again, the requests cumulatively made it difficult for the House to conduct its scheduled business. As Speaker, I eventually found these requests to be disorderly and came to the view that they were being used for a dilatory purpose not provided for in the standing orders or in the assembly's practices. As a practical and reasonable response, I made the decision to ask the House if there was unanimous consent to consider any business other than the bill that had been called for debate. When that request was not granted, I chose to move on from any further unanimous consent requests and resumed the business at hand.

Let me remind members that, among other responsibilities, the Speaker has an obligation to ensure the House is able to conduct the business that is before it—more on that later.

In the course of the day's events, the members for London West and York Centre both raised concerns framed as issues of parliamentary privilege. While they raised objections related to the procedures and practices of the House, as well as the role and response of the Speaker to the events of June 14, they did not establish that any parliamentary privilege had been breached.

Let me remind members that there are a number of specific parliamentary privileges which, as standing order 23(a) indicates, may be categorized as either a member's individual privilege or a collective privilege of the House "conferred by the Legislative Assembly Act and other statutes, or by practice, precedent, usage and custom."

The matters brought before the House by the two members would have been more appropriately raised as points of order, and I will respond to them now as such.

It perhaps bears explaining what a point of order actually is. A point of order, according to the third edition of House of Commons Procedure and Practice, on pages 636 to 638, "is an intervention by a member who believes that the rules or customary procedures of the House have been incorrectly applied or overlooked during proceedings...."

"When recognized on a point of order, a member should state only which standing order or practice the member considers to have been breached; if this is not done, the Speaker may request that the member do so."

Standing order 14 provides that when raising points of order, members are to make their points tersely, and without interruption by other members.

The Speaker's responsibilities include the preservation of order and decorum in the House and ruling on points of order. The latter involves interpreting the rules and practices of procedure to address issues as they arise out of the proceedings. The Speaker may rule either immediately after a point of order is raised or after taking the

necessary time to consider the standing orders and precedents.

While the Speaker should hear a valid point of order when one is raised, the Chair retains the discretion not to entertain a member who persists with points of order. This discretion is supported by various procedural authorities. Erskine May, at paragraph 21.49 of the 26th edition, says, “Speakers have exercised discretion over the taking of points of order.”

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, at page 637, says, “Points of order are often used by members in an attempt to gain the floor to participate in debate; in such cases, the Speaker will not allow the member intervening to continue.”

Finally, Australia’s House of Representatives Practice, at page 193 of the seventh edition, says that when “points of order which are inordinately long, frivolous or of dubious validity” are raised, “the Chair would normally intervene.”

What is a valid point of order? The question is sometimes muddled because of the occasional but long-standing practice of using points of order to gain the floor for purposes not actually related to matters of order.

Speakers have not objected to allowing members, from time to time, to use points of order, for example, to apologize, to ask for a moment of silence, to seek unanimous consent to expedite the business of the House or waive notice, to vote on a motion without debate, to wish a member a happy birthday or announce the birth of a child, or on occasion to immediately pass a bill. While this has been a somewhat common practice, it is one that is typically used sparingly, and has mostly been used when there is known agreement among the parties to proceed with the request.

In her written submission, the member for London West noted that the successive requests for unanimous consent that were made on June 14 were similar to requests that had been made on many occasions in this Parliament, requests that at the time had been deemed acceptable. In her submissions made yesterday, the member made the point that conducting business by unanimous consent is very often helpful to the House and, indeed, it occurs frequently enough in this House that it could be said to have entered the realm of established practice. And I agree.

The member also said that historically there have been few limitations on the subject matter or nature of unanimous consent asked for. I also agree with this assertion, but this is the point where the distinction can be made between what has become an accepted practice in the House and where what happened on June 14 deviated from that practice. The sheer extent and volume of those requests on June 14 was a striking and obvious change from the typical use of unanimous consent. In other words, it is not the case that when members simply utter the phrase “point of order,” the Speaker is then somehow obligated each and every time, without limit, to give members the floor and interrupt whatever other business is properly before the House. Indeed, previous Speakers

have intervened to deal with the kind of dilatory measures that occurred on June 14.

For instance, on April 2, 1997, at pages 7,523-24 of the debates, the House found itself in a very similar circumstance to the one that we’re contemplating today. After members raised several lengthy points of order and requests for unanimous consent in succession, Speaker Stockwell decided to disallow further interventions so that the House could move on to the next proceeding, providing the following explanation: “I don’t ever want to cut a member off from a point of order because I think it’s very, very important that they have the right to stand on those points of order, but it’s also very important that we are allowed to continue the business of the day.”

A few days later, on April 6, 1997, at page 8,386 of the debates, Speaker Stockwell elaborated on the role of the Speaker: “I believe that a modern definition of Speaker requires that decisions are taken which are also in the best interests of the institution of Parliament. On occasion, in particular when faced with extraordinary circumstances, Speakers may have to intervene in a way which seeks to enable the parliamentary process to accomplish the business at hand.”

Our precedents are supported by similar decisions made in the House of Commons. In a ruling from May 27, 2019, at page 28,059 of the debates, Speaker Regan explained that the use of unanimous consent to expedite the business of the House “confers on the Chair a certain discretion to determine to what extent a motion needs to be read, particularly when they are unusually lengthy”—like this ruling—“or when multiple motions are presented one after the other. On February 6, 2004, Speaker Milliken had stated at page 245 of the debates:

‘I want to say right off that if every member had the right to stand up and ask for consent to move motions and then stood here and read motions all day, no business would be conducted in the House. In my view members do not have such a right. They are asking for consent and if consent is not going to be given, then we cannot have interminable requests for unanimous consent.’”

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Speaker Regan continued that “requests for unanimous consent are not to be used as a method to thwart the rules of the House or as a dilatory tactic. Therefore, to uphold the integrity of the process, the Chair will continue to invoke its authority, particularly when it becomes clear that the motions are deliberately too lengthy, when they are continuously attempted in a repetitive way or when they stray into the realm of debate.”

Applying these authorities to what happened on June 14, the requests may have been individually acceptable, but the volume and disruptive effect of these requests made it a matter of order requiring intervention by the Chair pursuant to standing order 14(a). Parenthetically, it’s worth being mindful of the fact that the business before the House could just as easily be an opposition day or private members’ public business, and to consider the impact of repeated and dilatory points of order in that context.

The member for London West and the member for York Centre questioned the Speaker’s decision to test the

House by asking if there was unanimous consent to consider matters other than the business currently before it. Again, this was a prerogative of the Speaker, and is.

Erskine May explains at paragraph 21.49 of the 26th edition that “cases may arise upon which the rules of the House are indistinct or obsolete or do not apply directly to the point at issue. The Speaker will then usually give a ruling to cover the new circumstances, on occasion referring the matter to the judgment of the House.”

Beauchesne’s Parliamentary Rules and Forms of the House of Commons of Canada, sixth edition, at page 98 states: “Sometimes, instead of expressing an opinion on one side or the other, the Speaker may ask instructions from the House...”

One example from our own practice occurred on March 2, 2006, at pages 2,364-65 of the debates. A member raised a point of order regarding the division procedure provided by a time allocation motion, arguing that it was out of order, and proposed an alternative way of proceeding. While the member himself did not test unanimous consent, the Speaker took it upon himself to test the House to see if there was unanimous consent to address the issue raised by the point of order, and in that case there was.

Finally, I will address the question raised by the member for York Centre, in which he asserted that “there’s nothing in the rules that precludes a member from rising on a motion without notice, whether it’s brought under a point of order or not.”

In response, I will direct the member’s attention to the definition of substantive motions contained in standing order 3, which states: “Such motions require notice and must be submitted to the Speaker in writing when moved, before being put to the House for debate.”

As well, standing order 101 establishes the requirements for filing notice of and moving a private member’s motion.

So in short, points of order will normally be heard and legitimate points of order will be acknowledged and recognized. But if they are repeated over and over and they are intended to obstruct the business of the House, we may have to move on.

I will conclude by stating that the House has exclusive control of its own proceedings, and it has a long history of adapting in the face of changing circumstances and challenges so that it can continue to carry out its functions.

I will continue to endeavour to maintain an appropriate balance between individual members’ ability to gain the floor and the orderly progress of the business before the House.

I thank the members for their submissions.

It is now time for oral questions.

QUESTION PERIOD

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question this morning is for the Premier.

Speaker, our health care heroes, our small businesses that are trying to stay afloat, and parents who are trying to drop their kids off at school continue to have to walk a gauntlet of hateful anti-vaxxer harassment.

My question to the Premier is simple: Will he stop saying no and pass safety zone legislation today to protect them?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you for the member opposite’s question. I think we all appreciate and understand that we are disappointed when people choose to protest in front of our health care facilities. But, to be clear, that is not happening a lot in the province of Ontario. And currently in the province of Ontario, police have the ability to intervene when appropriate. Those instances include, of course, harassment and intimidation.

I’m watching this very closely to make sure that we don’t have situations where health care workers and individuals who are accessing our health care system are being put at risk because of protesters. But right now in the province of Ontario, currently there are opportunities and abilities for the police to intervene when appropriate.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Premier has been dragged kicking and screaming to, for example, call in the military to help in long-term care. He was dragged kicking and screaming to implement vaccine certificates. He is now not doing what he should be doing when it comes to safety zone legislation, and we watched as he was dragged kicking and screaming to agree to rapid testing in hot spots and schools several weeks after schools were already back.

My question, again, is to the Premier. Will he finally take decisive action, stop saying no, do the right thing and pass safety zone legislation today?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I think it’s important for the member opposite and others in the assembly to appreciate and understand what tools we have already in the province of Ontario and the police have. Under the Criminal Code, police officers have an extensive number of tools in their authority. Some examples include mischief, interruption of lawful use of enjoyment of property, trespass, breach of the peace, assault, criminal negligence and causing a disturbance.

I know that when we see individuals protesting, we want them to come here to Queen’s Park, here to the Legislature. But it’s also important to understand that health care workers are protected under existing legislation and existing tools that the police across Ontario have. I know that our health care leadership wants to keep their staff and the visitors to their hospitals safe and will continue to do that using the existing tools we have.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontarians are fed up with the Premier’s hesitation to take on the anti-vaxxers, and they’re tired of hearing him apologize to them while he does nothing to protect our health care heroes and cancer

patients trying to get into our hospitals; our parents, who are simply trying to drop off their kids at school and they're being screamed at by these folks; small businesses and their customers—small businesses who are trying to stay afloat and customers who are trying to support those small businesses who are being targeted and harassed by these unruly mobs of people.

The Premier needs to do the right thing here, Speaker. He needs to do the right thing and pass the safety zone legislation we tabled the other day so that Ontarians can go about all of the activities—Ontarians who have done the right thing, who have been vaccinated, who are trying to ensure that we fight successfully against COVID-19. They're the ones that need this Premier's attention. They're the ones that he shouldn't be saying no to. Will he say yes and pass safety zone legislation?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Listen, I appreciate that the member opposite is attempting to make this a larger issue than it is. I will reinforce and remind people that currently in the province of Ontario, intimidation is not allowed. We have the tools. The police in our jurisdictions have the—

Interjection.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: —to enforce, to ensure that our health care workers are safe.

I get it. I'm no happier than anyone else when I see protests happening in front of our schools or our hospitals, but we also have to appreciate that people have the right to share their opinion. I would prefer that they do it in the centre of government, here at Queen's Park. Having said that, when there is intimidation and harassment in front of our hospitals, then the police have the ability to act, and I know that our hospital leadership will ensure that their staff remain safe.

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OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is for the Premier—but I think it's clear this government can do something about the problem that we see happening to too many people going about their business in Ontario.

My question is about the 35 days that it has been now since seniors and kids in our province have been able to access eye care. There are children who are literally now in school having trouble seeing the blackboard. There are seniors who are unable to renew their driver's licence—which then, of course, makes them less mobile, less independent—because they can't get their glasses prescription renewed, because the service isn't being funded by the government. I spoke to a mom named Beverly Murray last week whose teenage daughter is literally suffering from eye pain and migraines, and she cannot get her daughter an appointment to have her vision and her eyes looked after by their optometrist.

My question to the Premier is: Why is he saying no? Why is he saying no and refusing to get us a fair deal and fund the optometry services that our kids and our seniors so desperately need and deserve?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Through you, Speaker, I would like to advise the leader of the official opposition that OHIP-funded services continue to be funded by the province of Ontario; however, many optometrists in the province, at the urging of the association, have chosen not to provide those services. We're very disappointed with that.

We have been engaging in discussions with them and we're ready to continue those discussions. The problem is due to the fact that the Ontario Association of Optometrists refuses to go back to the independent mediator and adhere to their conditions in order for the mediation to resume. We are ready, willing and able to go back to the table to discuss. But this is not something that the OAO is interested in doing, and it's especially concerning that they continue to tell the public that they are waiting for us to return to the mediation table when, in fact, that is not the case. We, as the government, are ready to go back and resume those discussions, but the Ontario Association of Optometrists is not.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, I have to say that it's really interesting to see what's happened here in Ontario. The first thing that happened was the Liberals delisting eye care services; allowing of course seniors and kids, but then seriously underfunding those services for many, many years. And now this Premier is making it much, much worse by refusing to come to the table and negotiate a fair deal and refusing to properly fund eye care. Granted, the Liberals refused to do it for years and years as well, but the problem has become worse under this government. That is no way, Speaker, to govern. That is no way to govern. This government needs to get serious about cutting a deal, a deal that is fair.

My question to the Premier is, why does he continue to say yes to his buddies, to his developer buddies, to the big box stores, but say no when it comes to providing the necessary eye and vision care for our kids and our seniors?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I really appreciate the opportunity to set the members of the opposition—to understand what the situation actually is, as well as the members of the public. The situation is such that the optometrists have refused to come back to mediation. They're choosing to demand an outcome before we even get into negotiations.

However, I also appreciate the chance to advise of what has actually happened: The government is making a payment of \$39 million into the accounts of optometrists who have provided those services to cover what's happened in the past, and I totally agree that the optometrists were not treated fairly by the previous government. But we're paying the \$39 million, recognizing the same rate as what physicians would have received from 2011 to when their deal expired, to now. That's how we calculated that \$39 million.

We've also offered an immediate OHIP-fee increase of 8.48% retroactive to April 1, 2021, and to engage in further negotiations with the optometrists about their

overhead costs, because we have a responsibility to do that as we attempt to achieve—

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

And the final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the government has a duty and a responsibility to negotiate, not dictate. They haven't figured that out yet, but that's their responsibility. This Premier is easily saying yes to his buddies, but he said no to students, teachers and parents last spring. He said no last summer to long-term care residents and their families who needed the government's help. And now we're seeing it again, as he says no to our kids and our seniors who need to have vision care and deserve to have vision care here in our province.

My question to the Premier is: Will he finally say yes, get back to the table, put proper funding in place and commit to negotiating a fair deal, so that our kids and our seniors can get what they need in terms of their vision care?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll ask the members to take their seats.

Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: The short answer to your question is yes. We are ready, willing and able to go back into mediation, but you can't negotiate when you're the only party at the table. We have said that we are ready to proceed with the optometrists. We're ready to proceed to rectify their very relevant concerns to deal with the back-pay issue, to deal with an increase going forward, to deal with their overhead and to have an ongoing monthly discussion with them, which is something that is not done with every health care group.

We want to remedy their complaints. We want to reach a deal with them, but they need to come back to the table. We are ready to go to the table. We have agreed to the mediator's request, but the Ontario Association of Optometrists has not. They're not our conditions; they're the mediator's conditions. We're asking them to please come back to the table, so we actually can negotiate, but you can't do that by yourself.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Sara Singh: Good morning, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Medical exemptions for not getting the COVID-19 vaccine are very rare. Dr. Moore has said that about one to five out of 100,000 Ontarians would be eligible for a medical exemption to the vaccine, yet somehow two members of the PC government caucus both claim to have medical exemptions. It's statistically curious that two out of 70 members somehow have these medical exemptions. Dr. Moore says it's supposed to be very rare, and that these exemptions will need a review province-wide.

The question to the Premier: Can the Premier help explain this statistical anomaly in his own caucus?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'm not entirely certain what this has to do with government business, but I'll say this, Mr. Speaker: The Premier took immediate action to ensure that all members of this caucus were vaccinated and to ensure that those who had not received their two doses presented a medical exemption. Of course, those exemptions are provided by medical professionals, and we have to assume that the medical professional providing this exemption has done so based on the guidance and recommendations of the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: Ontarians should be getting vaccinated unless it's absolutely cleared with a medical exemption, and, as Dr. Moore has stated, these exemptions are exceptionally rare.

As we've all come to learn, one of the PC members, the former parliamentary assistant to the Attorney General, revealed to her House leader that she hadn't in fact been vaccinated, as she previously let on, and misrepresented her vaccine status. Will the Premier be demanding that these exemptions be reviewed, or will he once again just be taking his members' claims at face value?

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

Hon. Doug Ford: Thanks to Ontarians and the front-line health care workers, we have vaccinated over 22 million people in Ontario. We're one of the world leaders, with 87% of eligible Ontarians vaccinated and 82% fully vaccinated.

But I find it pretty rich when the leader of the NDP should recognize that, considering her own position evolves day to day—depending on which way the wind blows, that's the decision of the NDP leader. And I find it ironic that the Liberal party, with only seven caucus members, still can't figure out who's vaccinated or not.

We were very transparent to the people who had a medical exemption. We don't get involved in people's personal medical records, but we were very transparent.

Again, I find it very rich that the NDP—depends on the day—can't tell us who's vaccinated and who's not.

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GREEN POWER GENERATION

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is for the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. Firstly, I would like to congratulate the member for Northumberland–Peterborough South on his new appointment. The people of Ontario are very fortunate to have such a hard-working member at the helm of a very important government portfolio, and I look forward to seeing all of the continued work that you will be undertaking on behalf of the government for the people of Ontario.

Our government is continuing to lead the country in driving down harmful emissions by expanding the availability and use of clean fuels. One such clean fuel that our government sees potential in is hydrogen.

Could the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks share some details of the government's low-carbon hydrogen strategy?

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you to the tremendous member from Flamborough–Glanbrook for that excellent question. She's right; Ontario leads Canada in driving down GHG emissions and building a more sustainable future. We're doing that thanks to the leadership of this government in expanding renewables in clean fuels. That's the equivalent of taking the emissions of over 300,000 cars off the road. We're doing it through building subways and GO service lines like we've never seen before in Ontario. When families are spending less time in gridlock, they're spending more time with their loved ones.

Finally, thanks to the leadership of the Premier and the Minister of Economic Development, we've seen a historic renaissance in manufacturing: \$6 billion in investments. Ontario is an EV powerhouse thanks to their work.

One of the things I'm most excited about is hydrogen. It presents incredible potential. Ontario is, again, among the leaders in Canada in establishing a hydrogen strategy working group. Work is under way to finalize this strategy, and with it, I'm confident that Ontario will be among the first movers in this space, leveraging our clean energy advantage and continuing to be a leader in Canada.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you, Minister, for that explanation. Hydrogen appears to be key to the government's plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions but is something many Ontarians are simply unfamiliar with. Could the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks please share with me some of the interesting applications for hydrogen that our government is exploring?

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you again to the member for that great question. There are countless ways low-carbon hydrogen can be used in one's day-to-day life. In communities, it can be blended into natural gas pipelines to heat our homes and our businesses. In industry, it can be used as a replacement for fossil fuels that are used in high-temperature applications, like in the production of steel and cement. Imagine a building sector where these materials could be produced with minimal carbon emissions. And did you know that 80% of Ontario's 2018 greenhouse gas emissions came from transportation? Enter buses and trucks fuelled by low-carbon hydrogen.

I'd like to give a special shout-out to the incredible folks that I visited at Cummins in Mississauga, leaders in the exciting work they're doing for fuel cell technology.

Our government will continue to fight climate change and build an Ontario where green, clean solutions thrive and prosper.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Minister of Education. Eight provinces have signed on to the federal government's promise to roll out \$10-a-day child care, but Ontario hasn't, even though many parents in Ontario pay some of the highest child care fees in Canada—upwards

of \$20,000 a year. Child care has become so expensive that parents, mostly women, are giving up their careers or going part-time because they can't make it work. Women's participation in the workforce has dropped to a 30-year low. If this government is committed to equality for women and a strong economic recovery, then families need access to high-quality, affordable child care.

So this is my question: When is this government going to sign on and provide \$10-a-day child care to help the parents and children who live in Ontario?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. I think what the member opposite and I could agree on is, under the former Liberal government, for 15 years, child care rose to the second-highest in Canada, after the New Democratic province of BC, I should note—a 40% increase in child care fees. That is simply unacceptable to the Premier and our government, making it inexcusably high for average families and middle-class people. It's why the first act the government took in our first budget was to introduce the Ontario Child Care Tax Credit, to put money directly into the pockets of moms and dads and recognizing they are best positioned to make decisions with respect to their child's care.

During the pandemic, we enhanced that in the last budget. Yes, we are negotiating in good faith with the federal government to get a good deal—not any deal, a good deal for the people of Ontario that recognizes our unique advantages. We're one of the only provinces that funds all-day kindergarten. So yes, we are working with the federal government, the Prime Minister's office, with Minister Ahmed Hussen to deliver a deal that provides affordability for families in this province.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is back to the Minister of Education. This is about child care centres, because they are also struggling to survive during this pandemic. Many have seen a drop in enrolment because parents have lost work and are choosing to stay at home and also because the fees are so expensive. Child care centres have also had to bring on more staff in order to implement important infection control measures to keep children and staff safe. Many centres are now at risk of closure, many have cut staff hours and many have closed. Our public and non-profit child care sector is struggling when it should be thriving.

This is my question: What is your plan to ensure that every parent who needs a quality non-profit or public child care space for their child can get one?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. In fact, 99.67% of child care centres are open in the province of Ontario today, in part because we have provided backstop funding to them to ensure they are open for the benefit of moms and dads so they can get back to work.

This government is investing \$2 billion in building child care spaces, \$2 billion to help ensure sustainable, quality and affordable child care. Thirty thousand child care spaces is the commitment we made, 10,000 within

new schools, which we have undertaken in each and every budget to expand access to make life more affordable.

We enriched the Ontario Child Care Tax Credit. We expanded that benefit, providing funding directly to parents' pockets—now \$1,500, on average, per child. That's going to make a difference. Working with the federal government, we hope to get a good deal that advances affordability, that makes child care more accessible in all regions of Ontario.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Premier. John in Orléans is in his sixties and he has cataracts. John relies on his optometrist to closely monitor this critical aspect of his health, and he's very concerned about his long-term eye health without regular examinations. And John isn't alone. Like I think everyone in this chamber, I've heard from thousands of constituents who support world-class OHIP-covered eye care and are frustrated with the government's inaction to ensure its continued delivery.

I've heard from moms like Andrea who, like many parents, have risen to the challenge this year, juggling work, kids at home, maintaining a household and keeping their family safe. Now that their kids are headed back to school, they can't get an eye test. She wants to ensure that her children are able to see the smart board and participate in extracurriculars they've been missing due to COVID, but due to the government's inaction, OHIP-covered eye exams have been non-existent for about a month, basically since school came back, Mr. Speaker. Like so many other issues facing the government, they wait until the absolute last moment, until they've broken the system and chaos has ensued, before they start to try to address the problems.

Mr. Speaker, my question for the Premier: When will the government take action on eye care? Now that they've broken it, when will they start to try to fix it?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member opposite for the question. In fact, I know that people like John and Andrea and thousands of people across the province are relying upon their optometrists to provide them with the care they need, whether it's glasses for school or people with cataracts, seniors who have other eye care problems. That is why we are very disappointed that the OAO has walked away from the mediation table. We are ready, willing and able to correct some of the problems that they have been experiencing pursuant to the previous government. Their last agreement expired in 2011. I know that they are frustrated. We want to work with them. We want to bring them back to the table but, to date, they've refused to agree to the conditions that have been put in place by the independent mediator, not by the government. We have agreed to those conditions; the optometrists have not.

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We are very anxious to resume those discussions, but as I indicated earlier, you can't negotiate when there's only one party at the table. So I urge the optometrists to come back to the table. We are anxious to resolve your

issues. We have put \$39 million into your accounts that will be paid mid-October, but optometrists have already received the statement as to what they will be receiving. We urge them to come back to the table so we can reach an agreement that is satisfactory to both the optometrists and to the taxpayers of Ontario, because we have a financial responsibility there as well. But we are ready to discuss their concerns any—

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: My supplementary is for the Premier.

For months, optometrists were trying to engage the government in meaningful discussions to address the eye care funding issues in the province, and the government simply said no. The government and this Premier like to say no, Mr. Speaker. The Premier said no to supporting workers with paid sick days. The Premier said no to vaccine certificates. The Premier said no to smaller class sizes. And now the Premier is saying no to OHIP-covered eye exams.

Sheryne in Orléans is a mother of four. Her kids need eye exams so that they can go back to school and see the board, but they're also suffering from headaches, and this eye exam is a critical aspect in diagnosing that particular problem. She has tried to book an OHIP-covered eye exam for her kids and she was told no.

Mr. Speaker, when will the Premier actually start saying yes? When will he say yes to OHIP-covered eye exams and sit down and hammer out a deal to give Ontarians world-class eye care once again?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Through you, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to correct another fundamental misapprehension here: The government is still funding OHIP-covered eye services; however, the optometrists have chosen not to provide them. The reason for this impasse lays at the feet of the optometrists at this point. They need to come back to the table to discuss this with us.

We had had a number of discussions, four months before September 1, which was the date they decided that they would refuse to supply these services. We had several mediation efforts. We came to a delay or to a standstill because the optometrists wanted us to agree to a foregone conclusion. We can't agree in advance to something that has to be negotiated.

We are ready, willing and able to discuss this with them. We've said that for months and months. We want to come to a conclusion with them to deal with their past issues, their present issues and their future issues. I would urge all of the members of the opposition to please discuss this with the association of optometrists, ask them to come back to the table so—

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

ELECTRONIC SERVICE DELIVERY

Mr. Mike Harris: My question is for the Associate Minister for Digital Government. I would like to be, I

believe, the first in the House to congratulate him on his new appointment to this very, very important ministry.

Our government has always focused on keeping the people of Ontario safe, and we have not wavered from that commitment through the entire COVID pandemic, Mr. Speaker. We will get through this health crisis. We will continue supporting Ontarians and businesses, and we will get the economy back on track.

Could the minister please explain what our government is doing to help businesses operate safely and how that is working to support our economy?

Hon. Kaleed Rasheed: I would like to thank the member for Kitchener–Conestoga for the question.

Speaker, we know businesses have faced significant challenges over the past 18 months. That's why we are continuing to do everything in our power to provide businesses with the support and the stability they need and they deserve. That's why, this month, our government will be delivering the enhanced vaccine certificate, with a unique QR code and an accompanying free verified app for businesses that can be downloaded from the Apple app store and the Google app store onto a smartphone. The app will allow businesses to quickly and easily scan QR codes so that they can determine if a person has received full vaccination or not and can enter the indoor establishment. The made-in-Ontario app is the best option for businesses, because it makes the vaccine verification process quicker, easier and more secure.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: I'd like to thank the minister for that response and of course his commitment to developing tools that support the Ministry of Health's public health measures.

Our government continues to urge every Ontarian to get vaccinated, and I'm happy to say that proof of vaccination policy has resulted in meaningful increases in the province's vaccination rates. Over 82% of eligible Ontarians are now vaccinated, and that, Mr. Speaker, is fantastic news.

As we move forward with the next phase of the proof-of-vaccination policy, could the minister please explain how this QR code and verification app for businesses will work?

Hon. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to the member for the question. Vaccine certificates will help make sure certain higher-risk businesses and settings remain safe. They will also help protect our hard-fought progress and avoid future lockdowns. Much like other leading digital jurisdictions and governments, we are building the verification app and plan to release it as open-source software. It is transparent tech, Speaker, that can be continuously improved.

But we want to stress that digital first doesn't mean digital only. On October 22, Ontarians will have the choice to download the QR-code-enhanced vaccine certificate or they can continue to use the print version.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Ms. Suze Morrison: My question is for the Minister of Education. Winchester public school in my riding of Toronto Centre sits at the very top of the list of schools that are in dire need of repair in Toronto. In fact, the cost to repair the school is estimated at over \$7 million—for one school. The urgent repairs at Winchester include water boilers that have passed their useful service life, parts of the roof and the foundation, and upgrades to the ventilation system, which we know is vital to preventing the spread of COVID-19 in our classrooms.

For years, the Liberal government ignored these problems, and now this government is refusing to spend the money that our schools actually need to get into a good state of repair. When can students and education workers at Winchester public school expect to see actual action from this government to tackle their \$7-million repair backlog?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I thank the member opposite for the question. I appreciate there are significant needs to remediate a multi-billion-dollar backlog we inherited from the former Liberal government. We recognize building new schools and renovating existing schools is critical. It's why we have now announced over \$1 billion of net new school builds in this province. We are going to be unveiling another half-billion-dollar allocation to build additional schools, to renovate existing schools right across Ontario, here of course in Toronto and in rural and remote parts of the province as well.

We're allocating \$14 billion over the next decade to do that, part of a long-term commitment to improve the learning facilities that our children are within. There was \$750 million, for example, last year when we announced 50 new schools, including two joint-use school projects. We approved 23 permanent additions and another \$129 million to do that, and \$56 million to build over 1,700 net new child care spaces. The work continues. We will, of course, invest more to ensure our schools meet the needs of our kids today—

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

The supplementary question.

Ms. Suze Morrison: With all due respect to the minister, I didn't hear him say that a single penny was coming to Winchester public school in Toronto Centre, a school that sits at the very, very top of the repair backlog in Toronto.

Annette Carling is a grade 7 and 8 teacher at Winchester, and she told the CBC in an article that "The windows are awful," and "It gets really cold or it gets stifling hot ... We can't breathe."

These are critical issues, and unhealthy in the best of times, let alone during a pandemic. We are in the fourth wave of this pandemic, and ensuring that students are safe in their classrooms is an utmost responsibility and should be an utmost responsibility of this minister. Why isn't this government working to prevent outbreaks and fix the repair backlog in our schools, specifically Winchester public school in Toronto Centre?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We're proud that there are two million children learning today in school, where they belong. The plan that we've unveiled has been endorsed by the Chief Medical Officer of Health. It aligns with the Ontario science table. It ensures \$600-million of ventilation improvements within schools in Ontario and the deployment of 70,000 HEPA units to schools in Ontario. That school and all schools would have received a benefit and an enhancement to their ventilation as a consequence of our government's investment and improvement.

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Mr. Speaker, we know that the plan we've unveiled is helping to ensure that 84% of Ontario schools have no active cases at all, but we're not taking that for granted. The Chief Medical Officer of Health announced yesterday another tool in the tool kit to ensure we keep schools safe and keep them open. It's why we've announced a targeted deployment of rapid antigen testing to high-risk schools, in addition to a layered approach of masking, distancing, cleaning of schools and, of course, ventilation improvement.

We are going to continue to invest and will be announcing, forthcoming, a new round of capital improvement, so that we can improve the schools and the facilities that our kids learn in every day.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Good morning. My question is for the Premier. Let's put some facts on the table. Independent, third-party research shows that the operating costs to provide an eye exam in Ontario without doctor compensation is \$75.51. In Manitoba, optometrists are reimbursed \$77, in Quebec \$106, in Alberta \$137; but in Ontario the government pays \$44, forcing optometrists to lose \$30 for each OHIP eye exam they provide. It's not fair, it's not sustainable, and children and seniors are paying the price of inaction.

Speaker, the previous government failed to fix this issue. The current government must fix it so seniors and children get the eye care they deserve. Will the Premier commit today to saying yes to eye exams and paying the full operating costs of OHIP eye exams in this province?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member for the question. I can certainly agree with you that the previous government did not address the concerns of optometrists, which is one reason why they are so concerned right now about reaching an agreement. Their last agreement expired in 2011. We have made payments into their account to cover that time period, based at the same rate as a physician's rate of increase, which is what they asked for.

We are ready, willing and able to sit down at the table and discuss their additional costs, but some of the comparisons that they have provided to the public are not entirely accurate, particularly with respect to Manitoba, which makes payments every two years, not every year. So we're not comparing apples to apples in this situation.

However, having said that, we are prepared and we are continuing to fund OHIP-operated services for children and seniors. But we want to sit back at the table with the optometrists to discuss their additional costs. I'll have more to say about that in the supplemental.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, with all due respect to the minister, this is about simple math, not magical math. The \$39 million basically equals out to an extra dollar per exam over the last decade, still meaning that optometrists are losing around \$30 for each exam.

The proposal the government has on the table increases compensation from around \$44 to \$48, meaning they're still losing \$27 per exam. What business can survive if they're losing money on every exam they offer? No other health care service is told, "Hey, you know what? To keep the lights on or to pay for staff or maybe pay for heating, you have to do that out of your pocket because we are not going to cover it." Speaker, it's just wrong. It is wrong and it's letting down seniors and children who need access to critical eye care, which is health care.

So will the government at least commit to covering the operating costs—not even compensating the doctors, covering the operating costs—of eye exams in this province?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Once again, I appreciate the opportunity to correct another fundamental misapprehension: With respect to the \$39 million that's being paid into the accounts of optometrists, it's not being paid pro rata to every single optometrist in the program. It's not another \$1.50, or whatever it is that is being suggested. It's actually a payment to cover them for the OHIP-funded services they provided during that time period; a very significant difference. In fact, there are some optometrists who will be receiving over \$100,000 as a result of just this one payment.

However, we're not suggesting that that should be the only payment. We don't expect optometrists to pay out of pocket for the services they provide. We are prepared to pay the \$39 million in back payments, 8.48% going forward, retroactive to April 1 of this year, and then to enter into an agreement with them to talk about their operating costs. We are willing to look at their overhead costs, but we can't just write a blank cheque. We have to do our—

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

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: There have been concerns raised in my community around vaccine hesitancy and how to encourage younger Ontarians, particularly those born in 2009 who have lower vaccination rates, to get the information they need to feel comfortable getting vaccinated. I know the best way to protect ourselves and our communities is to get as many Ontarians as possible to come forward and roll up their sleeves.

It's clear that our government has had one of the most successful immunization campaigns in the country, with

over 86% of Ontarians over 12 having at least one dose and 81% of Ontarians being fully vaccinated. We've made great progress, Mr. Speaker, but we are still seeing significant vaccine hesitancy among younger age groups.

On behalf of my constituents of Carleton, I want to ask what our government is doing to help address this concern and what supports are available for youth looking to get vaccinated.

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I want to thank the member from Carleton for this very important question and for the great work you do on behalf of your constituents every day.

Our government has had one of the most successful vaccination campaigns in the country. As the member mentioned, to date, we have administered over 21 million doses, more than any other province or territory. This means over 86% of Ontarians aged 12 and over are benefiting from a first dose of immunization and more than 81% are fully immunized. But we're not finished.

According to the science table's latest modelling, unvaccinated people have a seven-times-higher risk of symptomatic COVID-19 disease, a 25-times-higher risk of being in hospital and a 60-times-higher risk of being in the ICU compared to people who are fully vaccinated. Because of this, we are continuing our last-mile strategy to reach eligible individuals who have yet to receive either a first or a second dose.

To support this last-mile strategy, the province and public health units are focusing on smaller, community-based and easy-to-access settings for vaccinations, like hosting clinics close to schools and at community centres. In addition, we worked with SickKids hospital to create a hotline for families to call to ask health care professionals about any questions or concerns they have concerning vaccines for youth.

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Thank you to the minister for that response and all the work she has done this past year and a half to support Ontarians during this pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, I know that my constituents and all Ontarians will be very happy to hear about the specific initiatives we are taking to make vaccines more accessible to youth. I often receive questions about what is being done to support a more community-based approach in the last-mile strategy. I was happy to see that Ottawa Public Health created their own Vax-o-Bus after the success of the GO-VAXX bus initiative.

My question to the minister is, could you please elaborate on some of the specific initiatives included in the government's last-mile strategy?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Yes, of course. Our government is working with public health units to target areas with low vaccination rates, as identified by postal codes, to support localized vaccination strategies as well as targeted marketing by the province in these areas.

Our strategy does include mobile clinics, like the GO-VAXX buses, and community-based pop-ups, dedicated clinic days for families with people with disabilities and

town hall meetings in multiple languages. In fact, just last weekend, the GO-VAXX buses attended several sites, including the Caledonia Fair, the Islamic Society of North America in Mississauga, the Midland marina, the Listowel Fair, the Markham Fair and the Lang Pioneer Village Museum in Keene, Ontario. Additionally, the buses will be parked at several college and university campuses as well as GO stations this week.

Speaker, to ensure maximum protection against COVID-19 and the Delta variant, I encourage all Ontarians to please attend these sites to get your vaccination as soon as possible.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Joel Harden: My question is to the Premier. Ottawa's light rail transit, our LRT system, is off the rails, literally and figuratively. On September 19, the Confederation Line train derailed, damaging both the car and the track. Thankfully, no one was injured, but the entire system has been disabled for three weeks and no date has been provided yet as to when we can expect the resumption of service.

1130

Speaker, I'm frustrated and so are people at—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Stop the clock. The minister of heritage will come to order. The member for Ottawa-Orléans will come to order. Neither of you have the floor.

I apologize to the member for Ottawa Centre. Please restart the clock. You have the floor.

Mr. Joel Harden: That's okay, Speaker. As a parent, I'm used to ambient noise.

But my point is, people at home are upset. They're upset because this derailment is just the latest in a long string of failures: doors that don't work and wheels that go flat. The latest is awful stench in some of the tunnels.

The province paid \$600,000 for phase 1 of this LRT and it has paid \$1.2 billion for phase 2, so we as a province can't just pass the buck to the city of Ottawa. We have an interest in this.

I'm asking the Premier and the government: Will you join me today in asking the Auditor General to investigate Infrastructure Ontario's role in bottom-lining the procurement of this project, so we can get to the bottom of this mess?

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

Hon. Stan Cho: Thank you very much, Speaker. I appreciate that this is a very frustrating situation for the people of Ottawa. Transit, while a priority for our province, has to be done right.

We're well aware of these municipally led projects, and the city is responsible for the procurement that has gone off the rails here in Ottawa, but we're going to do our part. We're going to work with the federal government and we're going to work with the city of Ottawa. Those discussions with Mayor Watson are ongoing.

Despite the member from Orléans, who sits in this chamber and was part of this process, Speaker, we will continue to fix the mess. We will fix the mess of those Liberals who were sitting in this chamber and were elsewhere. We're going to make sure we help the people of Ottawa and get the LRT project back on the rails.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: I'm just going to invite my friend opposite to take some responsibility, because it was this government that made sure the contract was signed. It was this government that made sure Infrastructure Ontario bottom-lined procurement of this project, which was a public-private partnership, Speaker. It's the same development model this government is promoting—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. The member for Carleton will come to order. The member for Flamborough–Glanbrook will come to order. Please restart the clock.

Mr. Joel Harden: That's okay, Speaker. It's not unlike the screeching of the wheels of a broken LRT that I hear over there.

The fact of the matter is, Liberal and Conservative governments have embraced this public-private partnership model. But do you know what it means to the people of Ottawa in practice?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to caution the member on his language. Please conclude your question.

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you, Speaker. Do you know what public-private partnerships mean to Ottawa in practice? It means the public pays the price for failure.

Infrastructure Ontario acted as an underwriter and an adviser to the city of Ottawa in this procurement project. The Auditor General should use the full powers of her office to investigate this matter. It's about value for dollars for Ontario citizens.

Will the government join us today in asking the Auditor General to investigate this mess to make sure we get the LRT in Ottawa right?

Hon. Stan Cho: There's no question that improving public transit is a priority of this government. That's why, when it came to the Ottawa LRT, this government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, committed \$1.8 billion for the project between phases 1 and 2.

But Speaker, it is crucial to note that this is a municipally run project and the procurement of this project is a responsibility of the city of Ottawa. Perhaps we should ask the former City of Ottawa Transit Commission chair, who sits in his seat today, the member from Orléans, on what went wrong, because this government did its part. It's going to continue to do its part and invest in public transit in Ottawa and across this entire province.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Throughout this pandemic, my community of Scarborough–Guildwood has been a hot

spot for COVID-19. My question is to the Minister of Education.

This government's lack of proactive planning has put people at great risk. I co-hosted an education town hall last week and one of my constituents, Dave, shared the story of his daughter's class size increasing, despite the fact that they are supposed to be safely distancing. The reason given was budget restraints, this despite the FAO reporting today that the education sector has actually unspent \$2 billion.

You are not taking the steps to make sure that there is safety in our schools. Why are classes getting larger? Why is there no rapid testing in schools from the start of the school year? This government's pattern of delay has been costly for all of us, and your constant flip-flopping on rapid testing does not provide clarity to parents. Speaker, will there be enough rapid tests for every student in Scarborough, and how much longer do parents like Dave have to wait?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I remind members to make their comments through the Chair. The Minister of Education to respond.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to quote the Chief Medical Officer of Health who, I think the member opposite and I would agree, is an authority on school safety and on transmission in Ontario. He said:

"I hope the parents can understand that our schools are remaining safe. We've got excellent protocols in place and the addition of testing strategy, asymptomatic testing strategy will only further build confidence and support our school system.

"If you compare us to any other province, we're keeping our schools open. We're keeping our schools safe. We're minimizing the disruption in schools, and we will build an asymptomatic testing strategy for test and stay and ... surveillance....

"Our risk of infection remains relatively low in Ontario as compared to any other jurisdiction in North America, and that's because our system is working."

Mr. Speaker, we put in a layered approach that aligns with the best medical expertise of the Ontario science table, who opposes a province-wide, broad-based asymptomatic testing program but supports a targeted approach, which is exactly what the government has adopted as another tool in the tool box to keep schools safe, to keep them open and to keep our kids learning.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, back to the minister: Why is this minister ignoring the fact that a third of all COVID cases are in schools? We know that vaccines are the best way to beat COVID-19, yet this government refuses to mandate COVID vaccines for in-person learning and is still willing to pack more than 30 students in a classroom. Over 25% of eligible students are yet to receive their second dose. We know that children between the ages of five and 11 will soon be able to receive their vaccine; however, like many places in this province, in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood, we have many parents who

must work multiple jobs at extensive hours and cannot take their young ones to get their jobs.

Speaker, my question to this minister and this government: Will you provide a plan and funding to schools so that those children five to 11 can get a coordinated way to receive their vaccines, or will you delay and keep them waiting again?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I think when it comes to the immunization of citizens we should not politicize this. We should celebrate, as parliamentarians, the fact that this province has one of the highest rates of immunization in this country, one of the highest rates of immunization for young people in Canada, and yet juxtaposed against one of the lowest case rates in Canada. We're proud of that. We should all be proud of that. That has been, in part, because of the leadership of our medical front-line staff, our teachers, and I think parents and students who are leading by example.

Speaker, we have put in place \$383 million for the second year in a row to ensure distancing within our classes, to ensure that our schools are safe. In addition to that funding allocation, we have stepped up the air ventilation: an additional \$600 million, over 2,000 projects, 70,000 HEPA units within every school in Ontario, including in every kindergarten class. And in the schools within our respective communities that regrettably do not have mechanical ventilation, while we are fixing that, we have put a HEPA unit in every single learning space: every gym, every classroom, every library, every tech lab. We're doing that because the Ontario science table and leading pediatric experts have said that is the way to keep our schools safe. That is exactly what we're doing in consultation with the Deputy Premier to ensure students are safe, schools are open and kids continue to learn.

DOCTOR SHORTAGE

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: My question is for the Premier. I was contacted last month by constituent Mairead O'Higgins-Human. Her husband had a serious medical condition, and Mairead had to jump through hoops, calling everyone she could think of to try to get a family doctor. But it shouldn't have taken all that effort, especially for someone who has a very serious medical condition.

Too many people in northern Ontario can't find a family doctor accepting new patients. This government had three years to solve this issue. What is this government doing to make sure everyone who needs a doctor can get one?

1140

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond on behalf of the government, the Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much to the member for the question. This is a concern for many people in different parts of Ontario, particularly northern Ontario and, in some cases, rural Ontario.

We have been working very hard to increase the number of family physicians—that has been increased, and more people working in teams as well—but there are

some situations where they have virtual teams. I would call the Renfrew virtual triage unit, one that does provide those services, where people, if they don't have a family doctor, can call in to this service. They can then be treated by triage by the appropriate medical person, either online, virtually, or in-person visits.

So there are different modalities that we are using now in situations where we don't have a large number of family physicians, and I think that with the advances we've made in virtual care and technology, that will be one additional tool we can use in areas that are underserved.

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

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: My question is for the minister, then. I agree: The doctor shortage in Ontario, especially in rural and northern Ontario, is nothing new. The Northern Ontario School of Medicine estimates that we're going to need 300 doctors immediately, and that is not accounting for the retirements that are coming up.

The pandemic revealed what so many people knew all along: that health care was in crisis. For far too long, it has been underfunded and people have slipped through the cracks. People do not have access to primary health care. Too many people need a doctor, but cannot find one, and none of them are taking new patients.

We can't allow this to continue. Will this government commit to providing a family doctor for each person who needs one?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Well, what I can certainly indicate to the member opposite for raising a very legitimate concern is that we are listening to what the Northern Ontario School of Medicine is advising. We are moving forward to provide that kind of integrated care that people across Ontario require.

That is why we have started on the transformation of our entire health care system: to make sure that within geographic regions, we have Ontario health teams. Ontario health teams are there to integrate primary care with hospital care, with home and community care and long-term care, to make sure that people have the supports that they need throughout their entire health care journey. We have seen the benefit of these teams throughout this pandemic, because the teams have come together to fill in the gaps in service, to make sure that people receive the care they need.

We're also trying to deal with the social determinants of health, which we have said we wanted to deal with for a number of years but haven't actually really done yet. We can do it through the local Ontario health teams by bringing in the social service agencies to be part of these teams, to make sure that people receive that—

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

The next question.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Good morning. My question is for the Premier. Back in July, the Premier promised that we were not going to have a two-tier society.

Eight weeks later, the Premier was announcing a two-tier passport system that is denying millions in Ontario the ability to access services, including public services paid for by the taxpayer, facilities, and in many cases is resulting in people losing their jobs.

Upon announcing the passport, the Minister of Health instructed facility operators to call the police to enforce the passport, and sure enough, in a couple of weeks, that's what happened. Does the Premier defend the idea of using police services to enforce passport rules and arrest hockey moms as a good use of taxpayer dollars?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As we've said from the beginning, when we introduced the vaccine certificates, it was to ensure that we had safe workplaces, safe community centres, safe opportunities for our children and ourselves to be able to start to slowly but safely gather inside. The vaccine certificate does just that.

We are asking people to be respectful of the fact that when business operators and municipalities ask for proof of vaccines, people do that and they do it respectfully. There are so many people who have worked so hard to get us to this point, where we are over 80% vaccinated. We need to go the final mile to make sure that we protect everyone—and, yes, that includes parents and individuals who want to use our public facilities and participate in sports and other activities inside.

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

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: The government mentions health and safety. What's interesting is, the new passport regulations from this government do not make any allowances for those who can show a negative COVID test. Millions in Ontario, vaccinated and unvaccinated, do not wish to participate in this witch hunt forcing them to disclose their private health information.

Let me give you an example: On Monday I was the only MPP to access this legislative chamber with a negative COVID test, but some in here still wanted me expelled, even though the science shows you could all be carrying and spreading COVID, while the test showed that I was not.

If this is all about health and safety, why doesn't the government allow for Ontarians to access facilities and keep their jobs by showing a negative COVID test or showing immunity to COVID, as has been done in other jurisdictions?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I thank the member for the question. Obviously, the protocol was put in place here at the Legislative Assembly to ensure that all members could have a safe working environment. As the Minister of Health has said on numerous occasions, we do encourage everybody to get vaccinated: It is the best way to protect the people of the province of Ontario. But again, it does respect the fact that members of Parliament have a right to

access the precinct. That is a right that we were not prepared to take away from the people of the province of Ontario—from the members who are elected to this place, excuse me. It is a protocol that the Speaker put in place with the support of most of the members of this House. As the member highlighted in her question, Mr. Speaker, she was granted that access that she has a right to have in this place by virtue of a negative test. We've protected—or I should say the Speaker has protected—that right for all members of Parliament. I am grateful to the Speaker for allowing that precedent to continue on.

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

MEMBERS' ANNIVERSARIES

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

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Yes, point of order.

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

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: I know that we had a lengthy debate earlier today about what a relevant point of order is, but there are a number of members in this Legislature today who are celebrating 10 years since first being elected: the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues and the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, as well as the member opposite—my tourism critic, Michael Mantha—from Algoma-Manitoulin. I would like to wish them, as I know all members would, a happy 10-year anniversary in this esteemed place.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Congratulations to all of you.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 101(c), changes have been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business, such that Ms. Fife assumes ballot item number 3, Madame Gélinas assumes ballot item number 69, Ms. Morrison assumes ballot item 23 and Mr. Hatfield assumes ballot item number 64.

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

The House recessed from 1148 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

STAY HOME IF YOU ARE SICK
ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021
PERMETTANT AUX EMPLOYÉS
MALADES DE RESTER CHEZ EUX

Ms. Sattler moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 8, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to paid leave / Projet de loi 8, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne les congés payés.

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 would like to invite the member for London West to briefly explain her bill.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I would also like to recognize the co-sponsors of my bill, Ms. Andrew, Ms. Begum and Ms. Singh.

This bill makes a number of amendments to the Employment Standards Act, 2000. It amends the sections dealing with sick leave, family responsibility leave and bereavement leave, and replaces that with a new section that provides for personal emergency leave due to an illness, injury, medical emergency or urgent issue, and it makes employees entitled to 10 days of paid leave in a calendar year.

It also provides for leave in situations related to declared emergencies and infectious disease emergencies, and ensures that employees are entitled to take the first 14 days of any such leave in a calendar year as paid leave.

Finally, the act is amended to require the minister to implement a financial support program for employers to help them adapt to any increased costs associated with paid personal emergency leave, and ensures that employers are able to provide that leave.

NON-PROFIT SECTOR
APPRECIATION WEEK ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021
SUR LA SEMAINE DE RECONNAISSANCE
DU SECTEUR SANS BUT LUCRATIF

Mrs. Wai moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 9, An Act to proclaim Non-Profit Sector Appreciation Week / Projet de loi 9, Loi proclamant la Semaine de reconnaissance du secteur sans but lucratif.

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 Richmond Hill like to explain her bill briefly?

Mrs. Daisy Wai: In fact, this is a bill that has been presented before and now is re-presented because it is the opening of a new session. It is my pleasure to be sharing with you this private member's bill, the Non-Profit Sector Appreciation Week Act.

Ontario's non-profit sector is a major contributor to innovation, job creation and economy. The one million professionals driven by this mission are experts in delivering social, economic and environmental solutions, especially at the local community level. They enrich our quality of life by promoting mental and physical health, social equity, education, the arts, sports and recreation, the

environment, child development, senior care and much more.

I was inspired to introduce this bill as I was reflecting on my interactions with many non-profit organizations and the charities in my community of Richmond Hill. For years, they have led in initiatives and programs aimed at building upon the social infrastructure and improving the quality of life in our community—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. I should remind all members on both sides of the House that when we're introducing our bills, it's most appropriate to inform the House by way of the explanatory note that's included in the bill and then keeping it to that.

STOPPING HARASSMENT AND ABUSE
BY LOCAL LEADERS ACT, 2021
LOI DE 2021 VISANT À METTRE FIN
AU HARCÈLEMENT ET AUX ABUS
COMMIS PAR LES DIRIGEANTS LOCAUX

Mr. Blais moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 10, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to workplace violence and harassment policies in codes of conduct for councillors and members of local boards / Projet de loi 10, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les politiques en matière de violence et de harcèlement au travail prévues dans les codes de déontologie des conseillers et des membres des conseils locaux.

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 Orléans care to explain his bill briefly?

Mr. Stephen Blais: It's a privilege to reintroduce the Stopping Harassment and Abuse by Local Leaders Act again, following prorogation.

The bill amends the Municipal Act, 2001, and the City of Toronto Act, 2006. The amendments require that codes of conduct for municipal councillors and members of local boards include a requirement for those councillors and members to comply with workplace violence and harassment policies. The amendments also permit municipalities to direct the Integrity Commissioner to apply to the court to vacate a member's seat if the commissioner's inquiry determines that the member has contravened the code of conduct by failing to comply with workplace violence and harassment policies.

PETITIONS

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I have a petition here entitled "Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario." I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Sheldon Salaba, who is my optometrist, and I thank all the people who have brought

these petitions to us. I've never seen such an extraordinary response.

"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;

1310

"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, along with all these folks, support this petition and will affix my name to it.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further petitions? I recognize the member from Niagara Centre—and I got you right this time.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thanks, Speaker. Great job. Good to see you in that chair.

I would like to present this petition and thank the hundreds of citizens in my riding of Niagara Centre for coming forward to sign this "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 affix my signature and send it to the Clerk.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further petitions? The member from Brampton Centre

Ms. Sara Singh: Thank you, Speaker. Congratulations on being in the chair. It's nice to see you there.

I'm proud to present this petition to save eye care here in Ontario. I'd like to thank Dr. Jerome Shankman and the patients at his clinic, which operates both out of Brampton and Niagara Falls, for this amazing 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 am proud to affix my name to this and I'll send this over with a page.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Toby Barrett: I have a petition entitled "Caledonia Needs a New School." It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas, as a result of many young families moving to Caledonia, we need to plan for the growth pressures on our local schools;

"Whereas a number of Caledonia schools are already overflowing and for years to come we must ensure our youngest learners have a great place close to home to start their educational journey;

"Whereas it is time for a new school in Caledonia;

"We, the undersigned, advocate to the Ministry of Education for a new school in Caledonia."

I agree with the sentiments contained herein and affix my signature.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I too have a petition from the optometrists and those who are eager 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 covers an average of 55% of the cost of an OHIP-insured visit, the lowest rate in Canada; and

“Whereas optometrists must absorb the other 45% for the over four million services delivered annually 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 wholeheartedly support this. I will affix my signature and send it to the table.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Speaker, congratulations on your appointment. We’ll certainly miss you this afternoon in the questions-and-comments sections of the bills.

I’m going to be reading a petition from the Ontario Association of Optometrists. It’s 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 support the petition. I’m signing it and will be giving it to the Clerk.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further petitions? I recognize the member for Guelph.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you, Speaker, and congratulations on your new appointment.

I have a petition:

“Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

“Whereas the government’s continued neglect resulted in 96% of Ontario optometrists voting to withdraw OHIP services beginning 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. I will sign it and send it to the table.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I would like to thank London West optometrist Dr. Allan Bernardi and the many London West families, children and seniors who signed “Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario.” It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

“Whereas optometrists have never been given a formal negotiation process with the government; 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. I affix my signature and will send it to the table.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further petitions? The member from—I have it here—Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much. That will be a long struggle for you; I feel your pain. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to read a petition entitled “Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario,” and I would like to thank Dr. Tyler Brown and the folks at the Ancaster Eye Clinic for providing just a few of the many, many, many petitions that we received in my office.

“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
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“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 entirely support this petition. I will affix my name to it and have it sent down to the table.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further petitions? I recognize the member from Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you, Speaker. It is a pleasure to see you in that chair, my friend. We are separated by a big canoe and I’m happy to see you in that chair.

Guess what, Speaker? I have a petition from the good people of Algoma-Manitoulin and northern Ontario. It’s 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 wholeheartedly agree with the thousands of signatures from the good people across northern Ontario and present it to the table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

YORK REGION

WASTEWATER ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LES EAUX USÉES DANS LA RÉGION DE YORK

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 6, 2021, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 5, An Act respecting York Region Wastewater /
Projet de loi 5, Loi concernant les eaux usées dans la région de York.

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

Interjections.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I thank my colleagues for the generous and as yet unearned applause. I’m about to settle into what will be a one-hour lead, which is my opportunity to present, on behalf of the official opposition, on government Bill 5, which is the York Region Wastewater Act, 2021.

I wear a few hats in this Legislature, as we all do. One of them is, it is my privilege to serve as the official opposition critic for infrastructure, transportation and highways, so it is through the infrastructure lens I will be looking at this.

Also, Speaker—now that you are a presiding officer of this Legislature—we have the opportunity, as presiding officers, to sometimes serve in interesting capacities in the province. I’m able to serve as Ontario’s representative to the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Legislative Caucus, which is a binational body with state representatives, senators and provincial representatives—me—on issues facing the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence. There’s a colleague who joins me from the National Assembly in Quebec and then it is just I who is a part of that executive.

Why I mention that is because I have done a lot of homework in a couple of days to prepare for this one-hour lead on this bill. It is about waste water. It’s about Great Lakes health—a lot of conversations around environmental concerns, infrastructure concerns, all of those pressures that governments are faced with and communities have to live with. At the heart of this is an issue around what to do with what no one wants to talk about: that which we flush or that which we clean off of our streets, our sewage. Where does it go? What do we do? What happens when the sewage lagoons get full? What happens when we’re anticipating growth?

Speaker, you may recall that I enjoyed the licence plate scenario and the play on words and puns. I am going to do my best as a former grade 7 and 8 teacher—I'm going to do my best—to avoid toilet humour today. I'm going to try really, really hard to avoid it, because I don't want to make light of this issue. There are lots of considerations, and so I come prepared today with a lot of voices and a lot of opinions from various groups. If you're waiting with bated breath, Speaker, to know exactly which option, number 1 or option number 2—I guess all options are number 2 options in this case. But if you are waiting, Speaker, for me to choose, that's not what today is for. Today is to make sure that we hold this government to a higher standard. Often we stand in this House and we talk about government backroom deals, and I just want to make sure that we're not here to discuss government bathroom deals.

Moving forward, Speaker, this York Region Wastewater Act had been essentially tabled the last minute of the last day right before the recess. It was then government Bill 306, with a different minister. So we have a new minister in the file. This is the first order of business, basically, in terms of government legislation—a couple of minor changes, but substantially the same.

I'll read the explanatory note: "The minister's decision-making on the Upper York Sewage Solutions Undertaking is suspended and all actions by the regional municipality of York related to that undertaking are prohibited."

What does all of that mean? This is having to do with, as I said, the Upper York Sewage Solutions project, which I will delve into. This says that the new minister can't make any decisions about this project, that the regional municipality of York can't do anything about it and that the government can't be sued or held liable for anything to do with any of this, or before this or after this. That's the Coles Notes, but don't worry I will delve.

This bill is dealing with the Upper York Sewage Solutions Undertaking, which—I'm going to read directly from the bill—is a project that "includes a water reclamation centre, a project-specific phosphorous offsetting program and modifications to the existing York Durham sewage system, which was proposed to accommodate population and development growth in the Upper York waste water service area." The "Upper York waste water service area," according to this legislation, is "the area proposed to be serviced by the York Region waste water project and includes areas in the towns of Aurora, East Gwillimbury and Newmarket."

There's so much to this, and my pile is huge here, but this is saying that a long time ago, give or take 10 years, the region of York started trying to figure out how they were going to solve their waste water problems—their own in that area, but also looking at projected growth of neighbouring communities—and put together an environmental assessment. They had been waiting a long time—they would say seven years, as I will read later—for a government decision. This is before the Liberal government—for a long time, waiting for a decision: Will they or won't they? It's a \$715-million project, and there's

obviously a lot riding on whether they can move forward or not.

What this bill actually does: It says that "the minister shall not make any decision ... in respect of the application for the Upper York Sewage Solutions Undertaking that was submitted for approval by" the region. It says that there's a section 10 of the Environmental Assessment Act that has to do with a deadline provision that no longer applies and is deemed to have never applied.

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There is a section: "No cause of action arises against the crown, any current or former member of the executive council or any current or former employee or agent of or adviser to the crown as a direct or indirect result of,

"(a) the enactment, operation, amendment or repeal of any provision of this act;

"(b) anything done or not done under the authority of or in reliance on this act"—and a new part that has been added since the Bill 306 incarnation:

"(c) any representation or other conduct that is related, directly or indirectly, to the application for the Upper York Sewage Solutions Undertaking...."

It goes on with proceedings that are barred, since the minister is sort of frozen—I haven't seen this before; has anyone else? The minister has put forward a piece of legislation that says the minister actually isn't allowed to make a decision. So it ties the hands of the minister until the section is repealed. It says that the region of York isn't allowed to go forward with their plan in any way until that section, basically, is repealed.

The government has talked about an expert panel and inviting folks—details yet to be determined. We'll be watching for that and hope that it is indeed a fair and transparent process—not just how those folks are chosen, but who they are and their backgrounds, beliefs and druthers, frankly—to have this expert panel that will, at some point, yield a recommendation, I guess, or make a decision. And then the minister will have more information, and then hopefully we move forward.

The other piece, though, as I had started to say—and then I derailed myself with a totally unintentional pun—is option number 1 and option number 2. Option number 1—again, that's not a comment on better options. That's just the first thing is, this Upper York Sewage Solutions plan is a plan that exists. It has been before the last government, and now this government, waiting for an answer. It's highly contentious. Different groups want it to move forward; others do not.

Then the other option was one that had been ruled out a long time ago through the environmental assessment process. It had been ruled out and is now apparently back on the table, and that is to have a southern option or a sewage pipeline down in through the Oak Ridges moraine to the Duffins Creek area. It seems like not too long ago I was standing here defending Duffins Creek. This is the same area, give or take, but not the protected wetland. This is an existing treatment facility in Durham—in Pickering, actually—that releases the effluent into Lake Ontario. Apparently, now that option is back on the table. So as you

can imagine, you have a water treatment plan—will they or won't they?—and now all of a sudden, surprise, though this has been in the works for 10 years, we have Durham region that gets to find out a year ago that maybe they're going to have to take this—I forget the measurements. I'll look at it; I won't try to remember the numbers. A lot of—I'm trying to pick words that aren't rude—anyway, a lot of the waste, then, from the upper York area that isn't from Durham region.

Now, we do take—and the pipeline does exist to get rid of a lot of York region's waste already, about 80% of it. When you look at a map, you can understand why in terms of land locks and borders and whatnot, but this additional stuff—I can stick with “stuff,” right? I'm just looking to the Speaker—is above and beyond. And so you can imagine that folks are not happy. Also, they were surprised.

That's kind of the background. I'm happy to come back to this section about the government protecting itself. I may get into that a little bit later, especially since, in the last version of it, now you're adding that “any representation or other conduct”—the government can't be on the hook for it. The proceedings are barred: “No proceeding, including but not limited to any proceeding for a remedy in contract, restitution, unjust enrichment, tort, misfeasance, bad faith, trust or fiduciary obligation and any remedy under any statute that is directly or indirectly based on or related to anything referred to in subsection (1)....”

There's also a retroactive clause. I'm not allowed to suggest that the government would ever do anything that would break the law. That would be unparliamentary. But I have to wonder why it has been added into legislation. Do they know something we don't? Is there a lawsuit waiting in the wings? Is there an intent to—I don't know. Anyway, I will leave that there, but there it is in legislation.

Actually, if any of the government members would like a refresher, there was a great article earlier in September—the government has lost more than a dozen court cases, and here's a list. So there were a few reminders in there. One of them that I will highlight, though, just as I'm talking about that indemnity clause and self-preservation and self-protection—on this list, number 9, “shielding government from negligence suits,” says, “The government lost its appeal of a \$30-million class action award related to Ontario's jails' use of administrative segregation, a form of solitary confinement. The ... government fought the case in part by invoking new legislation it had introduced in 2019 that aimed to give the province broader immunity from negligence lawsuits. However, in its March 2021 decision, the Ontario Court of Appeal ruled that the operations of government cannot be shielded from liability claims.” Just a reminder, while we're here.

Speaker, I'm going to try to bring it back to focus on the overview. My colleagues were trying to ask a bit more about this, a bit of the background, so I'm going to do my best to distill it down and then branch into some of the other concerns.

It is an odd piece of legislation. It really just seems like the purpose is to manage what seems to be a pretty clear

political problem for this government. It's basically a stop-work order on what is a controversial municipal waste water project in York region. For whatever reason, this government has assumed control over that municipal project, which is pretty unusual, frankly—that the government just kind of takes over that local municipal infrastructure. The retroactive blocking of lawsuits against this government related to any actions having to do with any of this before, after, during is quite remarkable—I'd say heavy-handed. As I said, the one key difference that I highlighted from the last bill that was introduced on our way out the door before summer recess: This new bill blocks lawsuits related to government misrepresentations or misconduct, or representations or conduct.

A bit of background: The Upper York Sewage Solutions project is, as I said, a proposed \$715-million municipal waste water project. It would construct a new sewage treatment plant in East Gwillimbury which would discharge the treated waste water, called effluent, into the Lake Simcoe watershed. Its purpose is to accommodate, I guess, or deal with the waste of 153,000 new residents the provincial government plans for East Gwillimbury, Newmarket and Aurora. Folks who aren't living there yet will have waste requirements, and so this is part of that. There are rural communities in and around the greenbelt that are currently serviced by lagoons that are near or at capacity. So this has been, as I said, a project that has been in development for over a decade, and York region has waited five or seven years or so, has waited a long time for an answer that has actually cost the folks in York region, at last count, \$100 million, which is a lot of money to put to something that now the government has tabled legislation that says they can't move forward and no decision can be rendered.

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However, in June 2020, there was a letter that was sent from the then Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks that informed York region that the provincial government was essentially taking over the planning for the project. So, we're not really sure under what authority the government would assume this kind of control over a municipal project. The letter further said—by the way, this is a secretive letter, like everything sort of has been, non-disclosures and things like that. Anyway, a lot of folks were not aware of these things until relatively recently.

But the letter said the government was considering an alternative proposal to run a big sewage pipe from upper York, through the Oak Ridges Moraine, to the Duffin Creek Water Pollution Control Plant in Durham. And as I said, that had been an option that was screened out during the former EA process. And fun fact: There has been no updated environmental assessment or cost-benefit risk analysis that has been provided for the government's Durham big pipe alternative.

So this is where we are now, with the government talking about an expert panel that they are planning to convene to advise on waste water solutions for York and Durham.

We had the opportunity this morning to listen to the hour-long speech of the parliamentary assistant, and I

applaud her for the hour. There were some pieces in there that I'm hoping to tease out as we continue on. Some of the rationale for why we're here, I would like to have a better understanding of, because I'm planning to poke some holes in some of the things I've heard. So I'm looking forward to the questions and responses at the end of this.

But Speaker, folks are on both sides of this issue. There's actually more than just those two sides: The environmental groups and many community folks are saying that it's a false choice between option 1 and option 2, between the Upper York Sewage Solutions project and the Durham southern route, the Durham pipe. This is a conversation about fundamental planning and urban sprawl, and that all municipalities, really, have factored in their own growth and been required to submit plans and really look at that carefully and thoughtfully. It's that age-old conversation around intensification, utilization and appropriate planning of community resources and infrastructure, versus urban sprawl, developer wish lists—kind of like, “Oh, there's somewhere new that has never been developed. Let's throw everything there rather than utilizing what we have and planning for a sustainable future.” So that sort of option number 3 is something else.

So I'm going to present all of them today, because the environmental groups have criticized these plans that direct the growth to these rural areas that would be served by the—you may hear it called the UYSS, the Upper York Sewage Solutions project. Because we're talking about threatening farmland, water systems; the integrity of the green belt. It's said over and over that the true beneficiaries of that project are those well-connected land speculators: big developers who are always, always seeking to profit. And that's a fair comment; they're in it to make money and build. But to make profit from publicly funded infrastructure—we want to make sure that maybe this expert panel looks very clearly at all of the pieces, not just the two.

So I'm going—apparently I'm just throwing my notes on the floor. I hope I don't need that one again.

There's been a lot said and a lot written in local media and provincial publications. I have stuff here from *Barrie Today*, from *Newmarket Today*, *East Gwillimbury*, *Innisfil*, all the areas that the member opposite is well acquainted with. It's her stomping ground, I would say, and we heard a lot about that this morning.

From the *Barrie Today*, “Controversial Upper York Sewage Solution Stuck in Perpetual Limbo.” It says, “The massive sewage facility proposed by York region has been in the works since 2008, but is stalled with successive provincial governments refusing to approve—or reject—a 2014 environmental assessment....”

“The Upper York Sewage Solutions project has garnered years-long opposition. Area municipalities, the Chippewas of Georgina Island, and environmental organizations like the Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition, have all questioned the Upper York solution, concerned about the impact it could have on Lake Simcoe. A

change.org petition asking the government to reject the proposal garnered more than 35,000 signatures....”

“The province has proposed an alternative—expand the lines to a plant at Duffin Creek jointly operated by York and Durham regions. The plant already handles some York region sewage.”

Durham's director of environmental services, John Presta, is quoted as saying, “It has to be noted there hasn't been any refined planning on how that's going to get done, or engineering to look at some of the impacts bringing down a pipe to transfer sewage. It appears from a conceptual level, that it's going to be more expensive.”

There is steadfast opposition. There are folks who are desperate to have it. I appreciate that the government finds itself in a mess, part of which, arguably, they inherited from the last government, which ragged the puck for I don't know how many years—a lot. So I acknowledge, especially from reading all of the opinions and pulling from the expertise of various groups, that this does need to be the right solution. But let's make sure that, at the heart of it, it's about sustainability, environmental protections and long-range growth plans, not just a matter of—I hope it's not—money talks and who owns what land and stands to profit.

Another article by Emma McIntosh from this past June: “The Ontario government is seeking to punt the question of what to do with millions of litres of greater Toronto area sewage to an expert panel....”

“York region is ‘extremely disappointed in the proposed bill, said Mike Rabeau, its director of capital planning and delivery for environmental services, in a statement Monday. The municipality has already spent \$100 million on the project, and the province's failure to make a decision is ‘disrupting planned employment and residential growth,’ he said....”

“The Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation, located on an island in Lake Simcoe, wants more details before agreeing to participate in the panel, said the nation's environmental department manager, Brandon Stiles. The community is currently working to remedy a boil-water advisory and has long opposed the project.” He said, “We're shrouded in mystery, basically, on what the next steps look like.”

I hope that meaningful consultation doesn't just look like token engagement or a quick phone call to make sure that it can be crossed off the list that First Nations folks were consulted, because what we're seeing here with the opportunity, as the government celebrates, to engage and invite folks into this expert panel—it's interesting to hear from this Brandon Stiles, the voice of the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation, that they're not sure what their role might be or what the terms would be. So I certainly encourage the government to clarify, not only for them but for everyone else. As folks have said, it doesn't matter which one they pick, it's not going to work out well.

Again quoting: “Officials at the region and the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority have said they believe the treated effluent would be clean enough to improve water quality on the river.

“Last year, the ... government sent the project in another direction, telling York region it would rather see the sewage flow south to Lake Ontario. Under that plan, the effluent would be sent to the Duffin Creek Water Pollution Control Plant in Durham region.”

Let's talk about that for a minute. You have Lake Simcoe, and I've got lots of voices here that want to keep it safe and clean and protected. So do I, but we also have Lake Ontario, which we all want to see safe and clean and protected.

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Our Great Lakes—and I'm going to go back to that hat I was telling you about that I wear as an executive member on the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Legislative Caucus. That's not a partisan space; it's binational, it's non-partisan and it is intended to share best practices and focus on legislation and opportunities to protect the health and wellness and future of the Great Lakes, the tributaries, the watersheds that feed the Great Lakes. Picking one over the other, rather than really looking at what is best for the health of the Great Lakes generally and the health of all Ontarians—that has to be a priority of this government.

Again, quoting from this article: “Lake Ontario is a bigger body of water.... But the treatment plant there isn't as rigorous as what York region is proposing.... That path could also require digging into the Oak Ridges moraine, a portion of the protected greenbelt....

“York region says it can't clean up a series of lagoons filled with raw sewage until the question of how to expand its wastewater system is resolved.

“Both regions lie in the vote-rich 905, a region where the Progressive Conservatives must maintain strong support if they want to win the next election, scheduled for June 2022.” People have lots of thoughts on what is driving any of these decisions, so again, my challenge to this government, to the member opposite who spoke this morning on this, is to make this a transparent and open process, and make sure that none of us actually think that these are backroom deals or that we're beholden to the development industry and big money.

We all want Ontario to be a safe and helpful place for generations, and we all will stand here and talk about—I have a stand-up paddleboard, but others have been talking about canoeing or kayaking or what have you, and we all love and enjoy the lakes. I believe we all have that in common, without needing to take a survey. But let's actually stop and think how we're actually going to protect them and what we're willing to do to ensure that they're protected: put in the work, invest the time, invest the money. More on that later, Speaker.

Then this section: “Environmentalists have questioned why York region is seeking to build communities it doesn't have the capacity to handle. They say the sewage skirmish is emblematic of a larger problem: provincial growth targets that experts have criticized for being too aggressive. The same population targets are being used as a rationale for other contentious projects like the Bradford Bypass....

“The Chippewas of Georgina Island note that Lake Ontario is also a part of their traditional territory ... they say it would also require consultation and review....

“Municipalities in Durham ... have said they're unwilling to bear the dirty fallout of development happening somewhere else.”

So, Speaker, I think you get the point: It's a tangled mess. I'm glad that we're standing here talking, but I won't tell you how little sleep I got last night in preparing for this, because this bill just got dropped right before we left, and then a new one was newly introduced. When I called the folks in the community of Durham and the region of Durham, they didn't know this was going to be the first order of business. So again, what does consultation look like?

I'm throwing my notes on the floor, Speaker. It's not for effect; it's accidental. You'll know when it's for effect.

I asked a couple of questions of the last minister, and I'm telling you right now: I'm pretty excited to re-table those questions for the new minister, and I'm hoping for a different answer.

Interruption.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you very much. Don't go far; it could happen again.

I had tabled what we call written questions or order paper questions—questions 296 and 297, for those following along at home—and I'm going to read them.

The first one: “Would the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks provide details with respect to the Upper York Sewage Solutions project, identifying the estimated financial and environmental costs of the minister's proposed design change that would run a sewer pipeline through the Oak Ridges moraine to the Duffin Creek Water Pollution Control Plant, clarifying who will pay these costs, providing a cost/benefit/risk assessment to justify these costs.” That was the first question.

The second question was, “Would the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks provide details with respect to the Upper York Sewage Solutions project, explaining the lack of public consultation prior to announcing this proposed change, and clarifying under what authority the provincial government is assuming such control over a municipal infrastructure project.”

Usually, when we table these written questions, however many days—the table could tell me. Anyway, there's a maximum number of days within which the government has the opportunity to respond.

I tabled two questions; I got one answer. I even got an answer that almost—I'd have to really compare, but it appears to be identical to the government's statements to the press. So much for parliamentary privilege or whatnot. I asked thoughtful questions, and I got this one answer to both of them; one answer to both different questions. It says:

“York region identified that their current waste water system will require additional waste water capacity to service expected population growth in Newmarket and East Gwillimbury.

“A decision has not been made on the Upper York Sewage Solutions environmental assessment application.

“The government is committed to working with York region to accommodate growth in a protective way.” I’m going to put an asterisk there: They didn’t say “working with Durham region.”

“Appropriate environmental protections for any servicing solution will be required in accordance with provincial environmental legislation.” Maybe.

“Our government remains committed to protecting and restoring Ontario’s lakes and waterways.” I don’t want them to have to restore them if they’re the ones who have done the harm. So maybe avoid the harm first. But I do like the sound of “protecting.”

A lot is missing there, though. I had asked specific questions around who would bear the cost, what would those look like, why the lack of public consultation.

Speaking of consultation and duty to consult, the Upper York Sewage Solutions decision—this is back in 2018 that this was signed. The font is small, so I’m going to do my best, Speaker—this is the official decision of the Upper York Sewage Solutions proposal: “This is the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation’s official decision of the Upper York Sewage Solutions proposal by York region to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forests (MNR) to build and operate a sewage plant that will dump 40 million litres of treated sewage daily into Lake Simcoe within the traditional territories of the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation. This project is known as the Upper York Sewage Solutions (UYSS). The project is proposed to be constructed by the Holland River where pollution will flow into Lake Simcoe, further contaminating Georgina Island’s already taxed water source. The territory is traditionally known by locals as Aashooniyaang (people of the shining waters) and is not only a life source but a spiritual place for the Chippewa people.” It goes on to express very clearly that it is opposed to this project.

I’ll read something else from them:

“Imagine not being able to drink from your tap water for over two years and finding out that the Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change”—at the time—“received a proposal that will dump over 40 million litres of treated sewage daily into your only source of water.

“This is exactly what the people of Georgina Island First Nation have been dealing with. GIFN have been raising concerns about the impacts of the proposed Upper York Sewage Solutions treatment plant project on the Lake Simcoe watershed.

“The York region municipality is claiming the project will have no adverse impacts on the lake.”

They object to this proposal and outline their concerns in a homeland declaration—I’m going to pull bits and parts here, but it is absolutely worth the read:

“We have the right to free, prior and informed consent to developments on our lands and waters; and will exercise our jurisdiction on a nation to nation basis.

“We have the right to consultation, where it must be carried out with deep and mutual respect, through fair, independent, impartial, open and transparent processes.”

So the government has said—and they can correct me, because I’m not going to quote them directly. It’s my impression that the government is stopping the presses and halting this decision and, as we read, punting it to an expert panel, partly because, as they have said, that they haven’t—that the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation had not been properly consulted. That seems to be a piece of this. They can correct me if I’m wrong and I won’t argue that, because anything that I have read in different publications and articles is that they have been caught off guard—or surprised—by things, rather than being involved in various parts of this process.

1400

Also, as we read earlier, the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation highlight the fact that Lake Ontario is also part of their traditional territory. Well, the Missis-saugas of Scugog First Nation I also haven’t heard discussed in this House yet. If we’re going to be shipping refuse, piping it—most governments shovel it, but here we have piping—to Lake Ontario, where is this rush and demand from this government to consult with First Nations impacted by that southern alternative decision, by the southern route and that sewage pipeline? It’s not a matter of picking and choosing with whom; it is a duty to consult with First Nations that are impacted by this or an alternative solution, I’ll say.

I’ve shared some of the voices from the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation, and they have been wonderfully vocal on this. The community of Georgina stands with them in opposition to the Upper York Sewage Solutions project. But here I have a different voice—oh, no. Sorry. This connects to what I had been saying about that duty to consult and where we are right now.

This summer, in the wake of the tabling of then Bill 306—the early Bill 5—“The decision left York region politicians fuming and caught the Chippewas of Georgina Island off guard.

“Georgina Island environmental coordinator Brandon Stiles said Chief Donna Big Canoe was surprised to learn about the expert advisory panel shortly before it was announced by the province.

“While they have been asked to participate, Stiles said Georgina Island is waiting for more information and the terms of reference of the panel before deciding if they will participate.”

I don’t actually think that it’s good form, frankly—I’m just speaking freely here—for the government to say, “Oh, but they’re going to have a seat at the table,” and the First Nation says, “Well, we don’t really know what it’s about.”

“No decisions about us without us” is what we hear from a lot of community groups, but certainly First Nations shouldn’t have to keep championing their rights. By this point, we should all be well aware of what meaningful consultation needs to look like.

“While the province said that the delay on a decision on the UYSS was because of its duty to consult with the Chippewas of Georgina Island, Stiles said there hasn’t been what he would call close consultation on the project.”

I’ll let that stand. Hopefully it is remedied.

As I mentioned earlier, Speaker, different municipalities have different opinions on what to do. Politicians from York region, Newmarket, Aurora and East Gwillimbury are furious that this long-delayed project has been halted. Anyone in this room can understand why.

Politicians from Durham region are furious that the government would stick them with York region sewage—surprised them with, I would say—and Durham taxpayers are possibly going to be forced to pick up some of the costs. We don't know. While it's a Pickering plant, the community of Ajax along the waterfront already struggles with phosphorus-related algae issues. Folks haven't been consulted. There's a lot going on.

“‘There Is No Plan B’: Newmarket Lacks Water Capacity Alternatives to Controversial Sewage Plant.” This is from *Newmarket Today*. They're not sure what they're going to do.

“Newmarket mayor John Taylor said the province is rumoured to favour a southern solution to increase capacity at an existing Durham Region plant, but that would require a new application process, delaying things further.

“He has also speculated that the province might be waiting for the next provincial election in June 2022 to resolve the controversial issue.

“‘We're in a very constrained atmosphere,’ Taylor said. ‘It's their responsibility to make a choice even with the political challenge.’”

As waste water plan adviser Tracy Carrigan has said, “‘There is no plan B’ ... ‘We're doing everything we can to bridge the gap in anticipation of some sort of decision from the province.’”

“Innisfil Rejects Motion to Challenge York Region's Lake Simcoe Sewage Solutions Project....

“Innisfil town council, in a close vote, has decided not to challenge the Upper York Sewage Solutions project, which would pump sewage from northern York region to a new state-of-the-art treatment facility before discharging the effluent into Lake Simcoe”—I'm just sharing headlines right now, because there's a lot. The member opposite is nodding because this is her neck of the woods.

I'll read a little bit here now, switching to the Durham perspective. This is from Durham Radio News, an article from this past July:

“Durham Officials Against Potential Sewage Pipeline from York Region to Pickering Lakefront.

“The town of Ajax argues effluent from the facility is responsible for waves of green algae washing up along the lakeshore and subsequently rotting. ‘We have seven kilometres of publicly owned waterfront in Ajax,’ said Mayor Shaun Collier.... ‘We're very proud of it, we've invested a lot of money in that, and to not be able to use and enjoy it because of the nuisance algae that has been washing up is an enormous problem.’”

Folks who talk about the impact on Lake Simcoe say very similar things. They're concerned about what this effluent will mean to the ecosystems there.

John Presta, director of environmental services for Durham region, has said, “They've spent a lot of money

and time to conduct that environmental assessment”—referring to the Upper York Sewage Solutions plan. “‘Who's paying to twin the big pipe and bring the sewage down here?’ asks Collier. ‘That question has been asked by us and the region many times but has not been answered.’” I also asked it in my written question and didn't get an answer.

But as John Presta said, “‘It would be a region of York project’.... ‘It's in the order of 800 million to 1 billion dollars for them to divert sewage down to Duffin Creek.’”

That number is based on estimated costs, but the region of Durham has no idea because they were just—I will not say they were looped in. They heard about this—a year ago? October, give or take; a year ago. That they could be on the hook for all of this upper York waste—it's a lot of money. And the thing is, in Durham region, Speaker, our population is going to double in however many years it is. We've got our growth plans in Durham region and the infrastructure set to grow with it. There's the twinning of the pipe that is happening anyway to ensure handled redundancy and capacity. But if we're going to factor in all of this additional waste, well, then that speeds up when we would need to build new infrastructure or expand or broaden the capacity or whatever's involved. And that cost—is that to be borne by the Durham region taxpayer? What does that look like? We don't know. We just found out. And by the way, government—and I haven't had the chance to be government yet—I don't think that that is how you build strong and positive partnerships with municipalities, but I'm hazarding a guess there.

Gosh, so many thoughts, so many voices, and they are all on different sides. The push and pull here is—the struggle is real, Speaker.

“Durham regional council adopted a resolution that if the province goes ahead with the Lake Ontario option, Durham's residents should not have to pay for any financial implications, such as any sped-up expansions at Duffin Creek to deal with the extra sewage. As well, the region called for the same environmental protections at Duffin Creek as those at Upper York Sewage Solutions.” That would seem only fair.

The Durham perspective also: They are supportive of the Upper York Sewage Solutions project. York has invested all this time and energy—\$100 million so far and 10 years of waiting. We've known about this less than a year. But certainly they are supportive of the region of York.

Durham region has also said that Durham is currently operating the Duffin Creek plant to meet the objectives within the phosphorus reduction action plan and ensure waste water treatment in the most environmentally and financially responsible way. So any plant upgrades have already been factored in, but again, not without this additional stuff—waste.

1410

York region has invested more than a decade of study and planning under the process set under the province's Environmental Assessment Act at a cost exceeding \$100 million to date. This has been more than a 10-year process.

York region began working on the Upper York Sewage Solutions project in 2009. Seven years have passed since York region submitted the final environmental assessment report. There has been no such analysis and no environmental assessment to study the affect on the York-Durham sewage system.

Let's see if I can find something here. Ajax council: I'm going to share some of their thoughts from a letter dated in January. Ajax council strongly opposed the Lake Ontario option for York region effluent. They have sent a letter to the ministry: "Ajax council request that the Chippewas of Georgina Island (and any impacted Durham region Indigenous peoples, as appropriate) continue to be consulted as full partners in the process, and that their concerns be respected and considered in all decision-making...."

The expert panel will have their work cut out for them, I think.

Some of the community comments—you know how they say not to read the comments? Well, sometimes when you're an opposition member and you're reading the comments about government legislation, it's actually quite worthwhile to read the comments.

Johanna Powell, in a comment in a public forum, had said, "We need new ways of treating our waste—ways that do not pollute our precious and limited water resources. This debate has been going on for more than a decade. Why isn't there a new answer, a new choice besides A or B?"

Betsy Cornwell has said, "We can no longer 'solve' our human excrement problem by diverting it; as the Victorian sewage system did by dumping it into the Thames. Have we not managed to advance beyond that out of sight/smell, out of mindset?"

She goes on to say, "California, with its semi-perpetual state of drought, has been forced to recycle its waste water. It is only exploitative capitalism that prevents us from pursuing the 'common good.' Developers want to wreak their profit-making on the cheap. Make them pay for their destructive process; make them meet conditions for building permits that solve this crisis of human waste and human greed."

Louis Bertrand said, "The bit about the vote-rich 905 area is exactly what it's all about. Most municipal and provincial politicians (red or blue, doesn't matter) in that area receive substantial campaign contributions from donors linked to sprawl-friendly house builders and road construction companies."

These are just folks out there and how they perceive this.

So a reminder, as this government is putting together an expert panel that it says wants to achieve something and come up with a better recommendation: Give them the ability, in your terms of reference and all that, let them actually look at different options, and maybe leave them out of those back rooms with developers. Let them actually look at the science and talk to folks and see what else is out there so that we can have healthier communities.

I have something here that was a joint submission from Environmental Defence; Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition;

Save the Maskinonge; Pickering Ajax Citizens Together to Protect Our Water, or PACT POW; and Simcoe County Greenbelt Coalition. They sent this to Minister Clark. It's a joint submission. They have said, "Any approach adopted for the treatment and disposal of additional sewage and waste water from upper York region must meet the following minimum criteria:

"—it must not result in the creation of new sewage plants or outflows on Lake Simcoe...;"

"—it must not result in the running of new sewage pipe or similar infrastructure through the Oak Ridges moraine or" any "environmentally sensitive areas;

"—it must not increase nutrient loading in Lake Simcoe;

"—it must not increase nutrient loading or increase temperature in Duffins Creek or any tributary to Lake Ontario or Lake Simcoe."

Then they go on to say: "As Ontario and the affected municipalities are plainly unable to demonstrate that either of the two main present options for directing sewage 'pipe' satisfy these criteria, we submit that neither of them should be pursued."

And there we are back to "It's not just option 1 or option 2; it's look at something new."

They go on to say:

"Ontario and relevant municipalities have already put years of study and negotiating into protecting and restoring Lake Simcoe and safeguarding Oak Ridges moraine in perpetuity. These protections should be treated as the abstract and permanent 'bounds' for growth in the region: Only such development should take place as can be undertaken without infringing them...."

"Neither Ontario nor any party has demonstrated—or offered—any reason to hope that sewage from Upper York region can be directed to Lake Ontario without gravely compromising the Oak Ridges moraine."

They have also said: "Given the importance of the Oak Ridges moraine and the scale of infrastructure and excavation required to convey sewage from upper York region, the onus must be on proponents to demonstrate that there will be no damage to ecological and hydrological functions. Neither the government nor any of the affected municipalities has done anything approaching the work required to accomplish this."

I had mentioned sprawl earlier and talked about intensification versus urban sprawl. I'm going to read again from this joint submission from environmental voices:

"As it has not been demonstrated that either of the two most developed options for disposing of additional waste water from upper York region protects the Oak Ridges moraine, Lake Simcoe and Duffins Creek, the most prudent approach is to cease expansion of sewage output in that part of the region. We submit that that this can be accomplished without compromising the public interest because there is no real need for such expansion.

"First, as Environmental Defence has said elsewhere, there is ample capacity for Ontario to accommodate all the new greater Toronto area households created from now

until 2051 ... within the GTA's existing neighbourhoods and built-up areas. There is no sound justification for directing new GTA households to use upper York region, in particular, and certainly no justification for accommodating any demand that does not arise outside existing neighbours in the area....

"Governments should use their legislative authority and funding that would otherwise be directed to treatment facilities to drive upstream reductions in household and industrial waste water volumes, such as reuse of low-grade waste water."

There's a lot to that, and that's bold. That is saying, "Okay, well, all of this time and attention spent here: What if that was in the wrong direction?"

Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition would love me to ask you when the government will release the results of the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan. I think they were expecting that this summer. They would love to know after all the consultation, when that consultation window is closed—but then where are the results of that?

Sprawl—how on earth have I run out of time? I could talk about sprawl all day. I'll read this:

"Environmentalists say the demand for new sewage capacity is a symptom of the province's flawed approach to development.

"This is part of a bigger issue we are calling the big sprawl, and we are seeing these infrastructure issues across the province," said Phil Pothen, a program manager for advocacy group Environmental Defence. "The province's insistence on pushing forward with either of these options is part of their agenda of diverting population and job growth to areas where it will make land speculators and sprawl developers richer, rather than diverting those funds to the existing neighbourhoods which desperately need investments to improve services and aging infrastructure...."

"Ajax Regional Coun. Joanne Dies said if the province wants to add another pipe to bring more sewage to Lake Ontario, they should also upgrade the technology used to treat 630 megalitres of sewage....

"If they twin that pipe, they are going to add a lot of effluent going into the lake," said Dies."

The concerned are saying, "If we've got this massive concern over here and all of this investment that's needed just to handle what we have, why aren't we doing that? Why are we now creating massive and new problems?" The sprawl conversation is, who is driving that? Who benefits?

The MPP for Niagara Centre wrote a letter to the Auditor General of Ontario inviting her office to investigate why the government maintains one set of municipal growth projections for its own while requiring municipalities to use a different set for land use planning purposes and to look at land use planning, to look at sprawl, to look at what is driving that. Planning experts have criticized the government's growth projections. It's not a matter of simple inflation; it's that motivation behind, or what numbers we are using.

1420

We've called for a value-for-money audit of the methodology and accuracy of the government's land needs assessments. Again, the province has trust issues with this government, so prove to us that not everything is based on who you play golf with. You've got a chance here with this expert panel. Who are you going to pick?

This morning I asked the question of the parliamentary assistant about the phosphorus reclamation plant—the feds are ponying up about \$16 million to cover the cost—which would remove massive amounts of phosphorus from the Holland River and just do a remarkable job of cleaning up and protecting the fresh water. This is a big deal, but York region has said that they can't move forward with this project that the member opposite called a "game-changer" this morning unless the province approves the Upper York Sewage Solutions environmental assessment. Well, this bill before us says that that's basically illegal until it's repealed. So we're at an impasse. You have different, in this case, councillors, communities, who are calling on the government to put money into this: If the region of York won't pay for their half of this, for the reclamation plant, will the province? So I asked that, and I heard about advocacy and community need. But I again will ask, and I know, as it says here that at the time of writing, the ministry does not have a position on whether or not they will actually cover that cost and make that happen.

Speaker, the Bradford Bypass, urban sprawl; I think my colleague is going to talk later about boundaries. Let's talk about clean water. Let's talk about the future. Let's not talk about an EA that only looked at one year. Let's talk about looking at the future. I know people are going to get up and talk about swimming and fishing and enjoying the lakes, but it's not just about us, eh? It's about the future generations and ensuring not just the growth of where we put those houses, but that the lakes are healthy and well—not just meeting our needs; that we are meeting their needs.

This is a bigger conversation. I would hate to waste this opportunity to talk about the fact that we have an opportunity to figure out waste solutions, maybe be a bit bold, but to consult with folks to come up with the right way to move forward to protect all of our ecosystems, the health of our children and our communities, for now and for many generations to come. So I encourage the government to take that to heart as they move forward with this piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): That finishes the lead for the official opposition. We now move to questions and comments. I look to the member from Waterloo.

Mr. Mike Harris: Kitchener–Conestoga.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you, Speaker. While I may not agree with everything that the member from Oshawa brought up in her debate today, her last statement, though, I do agree with. When we talk about clean water, making

sure that it's enjoyable for generations to come—I'm going to have, like I said earlier, a chance to debate this bill here in the House, and I am going to talk about swimming and fishing, but I'm also going to talk about my children and how they really enjoy being able to use our wonderful waterways here in the province.

My question, then, to the member is: We do have an opportunity to do something good here and get things right, so why would we want to use an environmental assessment that is seven years old? Sorry, 10 years old. That data is—looking back, even from the process to when that started—is well over 10 years old. My question is, wouldn't it be more prudent to have more up-to-date data, to make sure we're using the best technology, to make sure that, for generations to come, they can enjoy and use the water as well?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: That is an interesting choice of questions for the member. I will make sure that I'm here also to hear him talking about swimming and fishing and his kids. I appreciate that.

To say that this environmental assessment is part of the impetus for this change, when we see the government kind of picking and choosing with other environmental issues—if I look at the Bradford Bypass and the public consultation, it hasn't occurred since the 1990s. But that's okay. That's not out of date. Like, let's just move forward with that, right?

It's the picking and choosing that I will put back on this government. If your policy is going to be to be current and up to date and factor in environmental concerns, then look at the Bradford Bypass and use that same lens. Have at it.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm always impressed by the member for Oshawa's grasp of policy files, and also her knowledge of her local communities, but I think her speech really illustrated the pitfalls of governments approving sprawl developments without addressing infrastructure needs first. I wondered if the member would like to comment on what good planning should look like, versus the process that resulted in this bill, undertaken by both previous Liberal and Conservative governments.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Yes, but I only have a minute to respond to you.

On the face of it, good planning would be open and transparent. All of the non-disclosure agreements and the backroom deals—I can make a joke about this waste water issue being a “bathroom deal,” ha ha, but it isn't funny. The idea of closed doors and people not knowing, or groups that deserve to be consulted, or those where the government actually has a duty to consult with them—they shouldn't be surprised.

Planning decisions should be made alongside and with the people who are qualified, the actual community planners. It's not just that they go to school for that; they've been doing this a long time. Looking at capacity issues, growth plans and all of that—for it to be meaningful, it should actually be relevant and current. To the member's earlier point, I agree that things should be

current, but factoring in environmental considerations, not picking and choosing, not making the Bradford Bypass—

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: —exempt from restrictions, or whatever I'm trying to say. Anyway, I'm out of time, but good planning would actually be good planning.

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

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you to the member for her long speech and for giving shout-outs to my area and, of course, beautiful Lake Simcoe, which I talked a lot about. She made it clear in previous remarks and today: Obviously you don't want this in your backyard.

We can't base it off of NIMBYism and what we do or do not want; we have to base it on science. So what do you tell all the Ontarians when they're saying they don't want this in their backyard? Shouldn't we be basing these things on science, rather than just politics and gut instincts?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm so excited to talk about science being the basis for decision-making. That would be a wonderful, wonderful thing to have, not just in this House but across the province—across the country and around the world, even.

The “not in my backyard” is a real thing for, I think, every community, but we can't all have outhouses in our backyards, so there needs to be a more sustainable solution. Obviously the folks in the Lake Simcoe area—there seems to be a lot of political pressure up there to not have the Upper York waste be deposited into Lake Simcoe, cutting into the Oak Ridges moraine. Then do us the same courtesy and do not just that environmental assessment, but due diligence.

If that is actually where the government is pushing, if that's what the government wants, then say it, because folks are surprised. The whispers that are happening around this are that this is the solution, that this pipeline to Lake Ontario seems to be the government's druthers. Prove us wrong. Show us the science. Show us the actual homework so that we know where on Earth this is coming from.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further questions? The member from Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you, Speaker. Again, we're just a canoe-float away.

When we talk about water, I can't help but think of an individual who is from the Wiikwemkoong traditional lands. She has been a water protector and I don't have to talk to her, but she does have an influence on how I present myself here in this House when I'm speaking about water, because she has been protecting waterways and speaking about waterways for a very long time, and the importance of it. So I know she would have trouble with this, and this is the question that I want to ask the member: This present Bill 5 is very similar, if not identically named, to Bill 306; however, the stark difference in this bill is that this bill will block any lawsuits related to government misrepresentation and misconduct.

1430

Now, I know that my friend Autumn would have a lot of problems with this. Why would the government introduce, or go down the path, where they're going to have to protect themselves from wrongdoing? If this is a good bill that stands on its own, which is going to be based on science, why do we have to put these mechanisms into law to protect wrongdoing going forward?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Your guess is as good as mine, but I think it sends a message to folks that maybe the government should consider. If the government is going to put into legislation so thoroughly all the proceedings barred and “no cause of action may arise against the crown” and all of the ways that the government can protect itself from any challenge—why they're putting it in there, I can't speak to that. I don't think that it speaks to trust, frankly, and maybe the government should sit down and take a hard, long look in the mirror.

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

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member opposite for her leadoff speech and all the comments she made. I was listening very intently, and I understood you to say that you appreciate the fact that this will make up-to-date, current, scientific information available. I also heard you say that you think planning should be done by experts, and that, of course, is the intention of this planning advisory panel. Finally, I think you did talk quite a bit about how important it was to consult with impacted communities, especially with our First Nations, which have not been consulted with up until this point in time in the process.

I would just ask the member opposite why she can't support this legislation, seeing how it helps with all of the things that you've identified as so important?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you for the chance to stand up and say that they're not your First Nations, first.

Second of all, I didn't say that all of this expert opinion will be made available, I said I hope it is. No offence, but I don't trust you. Let's hope that whatever comes from this will be open and transparent—which was my ask.

To say that I suggested that the experts will be experts—I don't know who they're going to be. The folks who are saying they've been offered a seat at the table, they don't even know the terms of the table or who else will be there or whatnot. That hasn't come out yet, so please don't put words in my mouth.

I will support a sustainable future, I will support good government and I will support appropriate planning that is not based on urban sprawl, developer wish lists, favours, snuggles or golf games. That's what I'll support. You let me know when I'll have that opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Before we proceed with further debate, I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 101(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Ms. Horwath assumes ballot item number 1 and Mr. Bisson assumes ballot item number 19.

Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I appreciate the opportunity to address Bill 5, the York Region Wastewater Act, and I'd like to put forward some of my thoughts. Let's assume the expert panel is going to follow some of the debate in this Legislature once their empowered by the legislation to be established, but I have some thoughts on this proposed waste water treatment plan, and, of course, the environmental impact, the social ramifications and the financial considerations that have to be considered, ever bearing in mind the importance of a detailed and an evidence-based analysis from this expert panel to be created by this legislation, if it were to be passed and receive support.

I'd like to focus on Lake Simcoe and some of the things that we have learned from the previous debate, previous legislation, previous committee hearings, with a caution that some of that information is a year or two old, hence the importance of bringing everything up to date to 2020, 2021, to have the most up-to-date and relevant information, not only for our deliberations but for future deliberations by the community, various stakeholders and the expert panel.

Lake Simcoe is a relatively small lake. It's shallow. It's in a watershed that contains the gigantic York region.

York region, Ontario's third-largest municipality, continues to grow very rapidly with respect to not only numbers of people but business activity. The population is projected to be something like one and a half million in 10 years and more than two million by 2051.

For many, Lake Simcoe has served as an invaluable natural recreational resource for many decades, but it has a history going back much further than that. If we go back 10,000 years ago, both Lake Simcoe and Lake Couchiching were formed by glacial meltwater. The ice retreated. There were preglacial mastodons and mammoths, giant beaver—I find this hard to believe—whales, grizzly bear. And then, 10,000, 11,000 years ago, human beings started arriving.

Fast-forward to 2,000 years ago: Two groups comprised the area, the Iroquois and the Algonquin. They did not get along. Hostilities between these two main groups, in my view, would probably make the goings-on and the lawsuits of a few years ago—I think of Big Bay Point—look like a teddy bears' picnic.

We can anticipate, given the history of the Lake Simcoe area and conflicting, competing interests, that there are going to be disagreements and challenges to continue. I wish this expert panel, if it is to be formed, all the best on that one.

Big Bay Point: This was a few years ago, and I remember reading this in Toronto Life—it was titled “The Battle Over Lake Simcoe.” At that time, there was well over \$250 million in lawsuits going on. This became the mother of all development wars, and a war that was described as one of the messiest and most acrimonious in recent history. Let's not go down that road with these deliberations.

So many other issues—phosphorus, something we have a big concern with, with respect to Lake Erie.

I'm down on Lake Erie, as some may know, although I have family on Lake Simcoe. My mother-in-law was from Orillia. On the Barrett side, we had pottery manufacturing in Beaverton, in that area. My dad's middle name is Bemister—the Bemister family. So I have a bit of an interest.

Phosphorus from urban sources and from rural sources can really disrupt the ecosystem of any body of water and truly threaten the sustainability.

We also know—and I know this from committee hearings in the past—those living near the lake are affected by some of these issues. People really care about Lake Simcoe. People have banded together over the years to launch a number of education efforts, advocacy efforts, fundraising initiatives. I think of groups like—I'm not sure of their status today—the Ladies of the Lake. There's another group called the Wave. They did a tremendous amount of work a few years ago, raising awareness of the deterioration of the lake. I understand that there has been progress made.

1440

It's a beautiful lake. It's part of the Trent-Severn Waterway. I travelled that waterway for several weeks with my father. I was maybe 12 or 13. We had an 18-foot cedar-strip boat. I've still got that boat in my shop. Maybe next summer I'll get it in the water. As many know, in this job you don't get to get a boat in the water or look after a horse or do things like that.

The Trent-Severn connects Lake Ontario to Georgian Bay through Lake Simcoe. We got lost in the middle of Lake Simcoe at night. For some reason, something strange was going on there; our compass did not work. I've never seen that happen.

Apart from the Great Lakes, it's southern Ontario's largest body of water. I think that's really significant. And it's located an hour's drive from half the population of Ontario.

It's an area that provides safe drinking water for, what, at least five significant communities on the lakeshore. It receives waste water from maybe 14 sewage treatment facilities. And what's in there? Well, you don't catch everything, like I mentioned: phosphorus, perhaps other pharmaceuticals or birth control chemicals, microbeads, things like that. You don't catch everything.

It's a tremendously populated watershed. It's well north of 350,000 people, and there's another 250,000 people coming. I really question the sustainability of that; however, that may be a debate for another day.

It supports valuable agricultural industries. We talk about, "Okay, there's option 1, option 2; Lake Simcoe, Lake Ontario." If we were in Arizona, there would be other options. They use waste water to cool nuclear facilities. They use waste water for irrigation. We're blessed with a surplus of water. We don't have those kinds of water wars you see in California, for example, and in the dry country.

So we know the population's going to continue to grow, whether it be Durham region—my numbers may not be up to date. There's well over 530,000 people, heading for 960,000 people; York—760,000 people or more to 1.5

million, as I mentioned; Simcoe county itself, the city of Barrie, Orillia—they're heading for, like, 607,000 people, something like that.

As the population goes up, phosphorus goes up. Apart from the mitigation, it's numbers. The more times the toilets are flushed or the more agricultural activity, for example, the more phosphorus we see, in spite of the government grants and things like that to try and deal with it.

So here we are. We've got the Minister of the Environment's decision on the Upper York Sewage Solutions undertaking that it is to be suspended and all actions related to the undertaking are to be prohibited under the legislation we're talking about today. What remains is some improvements, but Lake Simcoe, in my view, continues to be threatened with sediment and nutrients, as I mentioned. It's become a bit of a canary in the coal mine. It's a pilot project, if you will, to address issues of what I consider overpopulation and pollution. Let's see what the expert panel can come up with to weave its way through this myriad of issues. That's why this bill is so important.

Other pressures: zebra mussels and other exotics; atmospheric pollution; it lost much of the cold-water fishery—I understand at one point even the carp were dying; algae growth choking beaches; the threat to marinas, existing cottages on the shoreline and the recreational industry; the baitfish industry.

I've done a bit of work on that, as PA to MNR. At one point, Lake Simcoe had to import baitfish from Port Dover harbour. Lake Simcoe is a very heavily fished inland lake.

It's home to provincially significant wetlands, significant woodlots, and specialty crop areas like the Holland Marsh. There's something like 50 different species of mammals, 141 species of birds, 61 species of reptiles and amphibians, and one species of human beings—I don't think there's another species out there. Maybe in my riding, if there is another species, maybe in my family; I don't know.

Phosphorus, I feel, is top of mind. It encourages the growth of algae and microscopic animals. They feed on it, they die, they sink to the bottom, they decompose, and they consume oxygen.

Phosphorus levels in the 1800s: The estimate in Lake Simcoe—we're talking about 32 tonnes a year going in. By the 1990s, it increased to 100 tonnes. They feel it has decreased a bit—again, due to the efforts of the province and the various municipalities, but also industry and these community groups that I mentioned, and key individuals.

Improving Lake Simcoe, apart from all of this, is a long-term venture. There are a number of short-term goals: reduce phosphorus; maintain water quality; protect and rehabilitate areas such as recharge areas, buffer zones.

There's a lot more you can do beyond specific treatment measures: add a plant; preserve the wetlands, the absorption quality that we have there.

Again, I welcome this bill, Bill 5. It gives some breathing room to get up to speed.

And of course, if established, we would defer to the experts on that panel.

What's the ideal way to go forward? I would take the liberty of suggesting to a panel: Collaborate. Expand that process. Try to align the interests of business and citizens. Align the interests of the varied levels of government. I'm just throwing out some advice. Obviously, base decisions on science. Ensure coordination of any remediation. Don't just come up with an action plan; come up with an action plan that can be funded and resourced. Coordinate communications and education. That gets into the transparency area.

The York Region Wastewater Act, I feel, could open the door to future work, future analysis based on a number of principles. As I mentioned, involve all levels of government; focus on the needs of the lake, regardless of which lake it's going in; communications and consultation; stay away from any duplication and overlap. The bottom line is strong monitoring and strong science. And build on the success of the past. A lot of work has been done on this. There has been a lot of debate in this House about Lake Simcoe, for that matter. So it opens the door, what we're doing here, for future work based on some of the frameworks of the past, things that are already in place. There are already laws in place. The Nutrient Management Act, 2002: Again, that deals with phosphorus. The 2005 provincial policy statement—and there are other ones in addition to that, I'm sure. The Clean Water Act, the Safeguarding and Sustaining Ontario's Water Act—that was in 2007—and of course the Lake Simcoe Protection Act, the Great Lakes Protection Act, another fairly recent piece of legislation. And, of course, take a look at my proposed legislation.

Maybe I'll direct this to the parliamentary assistant to environment: Take a look at the Great Lakes Protection and Promotion Act. I drafted that. I'd like to get it before a committee. We'll see what happens. It focuses on the Great Lakes, but we can include Lake Nipigon. We can include Lake St. Clair. We can include Lake Simcoe. It has relevance for these smaller lakes.

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I guess there's this concept that governance does not necessarily equate to government. It's the process where organizations come together—there's always strength in organizations—to relate to those that they represent, inclusiveness, to try and include everybody—we have Zoom calls now; we didn't have that a few years ago—and pull in all the interested stakeholders and hear the debate.

In the previous speeches, there were some common objectives coming forward here. I find that quite heartening. We're under a system of accountability that, in part, is guaranteed by law and by regulation, or agreement. We acknowledge responsibility for any actions or decisions and policies that may generate from this particular piece of legislation. Transparency was mentioned. That's so important. Allow the public to see what's going on; timely release of information; clear tracking, step by step, of progress; in this case, specifically, the progress of the proposed expert committee. Continue to involve people. Simplicity: try and make it as simple as possible. It's easy to have scientists get really complex about things and this

whole process has to be made understandable for everybody. It has to be resourced. There's got to be adequate funding, of course, without busywork that involves duplication and overlap and unnecessary obfuscation.

I propose that we focus on the lake and the watershed and the rivers and the streams. Everything is connected, essentially. If it goes into Lake Simcoe, it ends up in my Lake Erie eventually. If it goes into Lake Ontario, well, it's down the St. Lawrence watershed. Make the lakes the single point of contact, really—almost a one-window approach. Always think about where this is going to end up.

In all of this, for success, I think of the expression “involvement breeds commitment.” People want to be involved in this process and we'll certainly be hearing about it over the coming year. If people are involved, then they become committed if it's, in part, a decision that they've heard about and have had an opportunity to comment on it. So share that information, coordinate, and then we end up with some shared ownership of what may be the end result of this legislation or the work of the proposed committee. So many people take a great pride in that lake. I don't live up there but I take pride in that lake, just the feel that I have for the lake.

There's a proposal we take an ecosystem approach—again, there are various terms. Sustainable environmental management: It's not just about the technology for what's going to turn out to be a pretty expensive sewage treatment plant; there's much more to that, upstream and downstream, if you will. Everything can affect the ecosystem and all of these elements are linked and have to be taken into conversation.

Let's fall back on science and research-based evidence. Especially in issues like this, there's a very strong case to be made to use that approach for informed decisions. But it's got to be up-to-date scientific data. Let's not do the work on some of the data that I have; let's get this new data through. Let's bring everything up to date.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): It is now time for questions and comments.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I just wanted to know if the member believes their government will have a plan in place with regard to this legislation before the next election.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Well, you know we have legislation with several pages—it's not very long to read—and in many ways that lays out the plan. That sets the stage for a planning and a decision-making structure. I advocated for simplicity. It makes it simple. Sure, people like us, as elected representatives, pass on what we've heard, what maybe we've heard in past committees, the readings that we do, the emails that we receive and the phone calls, but the plan, ultimately, puts all of this on the doorstep of this panel of experts and then we defer to them. They make a decision. The government can make a decision. This would be, what, over a year from now, probably. Then they could make a decision whether to accept or reject it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): The member from Barrie—Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: A question to the member—it was a great, great speech. Thank you for talking about my watershed of Lake Simcoe that I am fortunate to represent. But you mentioned something really important, which is the ecosystem approach, and not just basing it all on technology, but also looking at the ecosystem and why it's so important to think about upstream and downstream. I was wondering, based on the things and your experience at the Ministry of Natural Resources, if you can elaborate a little bit more on that.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I have a farm. I've been involved in agriculture. I was involved in the Nutrient Management Act well over 20 years ago. We thought that was going to be kind of simple, and then we realized we're dealing with Mother Nature and we're dealing with a broader ecosystem.

When I took grade 13 biology, botany and zoology—it was a number of years ago—we didn't really talk about ecosystems. It was much more focused. We didn't really think of the myriad constellations of impacts and influence. We still have very little idea about how our world works, let alone how water relates to land, absorption and land, and watershed flowing patterns.

We're blessed in Ontario; we have a watershed approach to environmental issues through our conservation authorities. And I give credit to that conservation authority up in that area. They've done a tremendous amount of work. They have an excellent committee. So, yes, let's broaden it out.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I turn the floor over to the member from Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you, Speaker—my first chance to say hello to you in that chair. It's nice to see you there.

To my friend, it was great to soak in some of your wisdom and some of what you've done on this file. When I think about the question you were just asked from my friend from Humber River–Black Creek, however, if I want to understand you correctly, I heard you say that you didn't feel there would be a decision made on this particular project. You mentioned a year as far as this expert panel convening, rendering a decision.

So I just want to clarify: Given your experience seeing policy develop in these kinds of projects, these kinds of areas, do you think the people affected by this project are going to have an answer about what they can expect before the next provincial election?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Further to that, and I appreciate that, we're elected representatives. We're elected to represent the people that elected us. It's that simple. That involves consultation. All of us spend a tremendous amount of time in our ridings. And on a project like this, this legislation sets the stage. If it gets passed, it gives us well over a year of breathing room for consultation and citizen participation. There are so many existing groups out there. I would be very disappointed if there were any barriers for people upstream or downstream of Lake Ontario and Lake Simcoe to not be able to have their say or to have a really—I'd like to think of it as a very sophisticated mechanism to provide input.

I mentioned Zoom calls. It used to be you do a six-hour trip to go to a meeting. You remember doing that? Now you go on a Zoom call. Instead of meeting with one person, you can have 25 people there, and everybody gets maybe half a minute. You take minutes, of course, and document it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I turn the floor over to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Protecting our water resources here in Ontario, now and in the future, is really a top priority for this government. I know that the member from Haldimand–Norfolk, who had just spoken, is very concerned about our Great Lakes. Our government has certainly invested a lot in the Great Lakes because, of course, we recognize their importance, and we all live alongside them and enjoy the benefits that they provide. I just wanted to invite the member to tell us about the role the Great Lakes play in our economy and how we can work to protect them, and some of your insights on that.

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Mr. Toby Barrett: That's a big question. I guess the bottom line: We are blessed to have the Great Lakes, and we know—largest body of fresh water in the world and things like that. We are truly blessed. Just think if the Great Lakes were in the Middle East—and they used to have fresh water there, I think, before the Atlantic came in to the Mediterranean basin. That would change the politics and the advent of war in the Middle East. So we're blessed. Why would we take it for granted? In Phoenix, Arizona, they don't take it for granted. My family ranch in both California and in Oregon, in the high desert and in the sierras, they do not take water for granted.

This legislation, this planning going forward, given the population pressures—we get lots of water: I don't know, 42 inches a year or something like that—too much water this summer. Let's do it right and defer to the expert panel: this lake or any of the other lakes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I turn to the member from Brampton Centre.

Ms. Sara Singh: I want to thank the member from Haldimand–Norfolk for enlightening us on his experience and his love of the waterways. I want to say the Trent–Severn Waterway is actually on my bucket list of places to kayak or canoe. So hopefully maybe you can provide me with some tips next time that I'm out that way.

But my question is about engaging people in the process in this expert panel. You spoke at length about the importance of consulting with community and ensuring that their voices were also being represented at the table, but unfortunately, I didn't hear you make reference to First Nations peoples and Indigenous communities that are also going to be impacted. Could you perhaps share with us how this government is going to engage First Nations people in this environmental impact assessment that's going to be conducted?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I didn't specifically mention the Chippewas of Georgina Island, and there would be other Indigenous communities that should be consulted. I'm sure they will be involved in this process. I did mention

Indigenous people 2,000 years ago, but I didn't get to the present day.

It's so important, I find, and especially in recent years—and I'm the former MPP for Six Nations. That's the largest Indigenous community in Canada. I also represented the Mississaugas of the New Credit, who pretty well had to leave this area, as we know, and are down near my riding. So those mechanisms—it's a given, it almost guarantees there will be involvement of Indigenous people and the kind of knowledge that they have. If you're living on an island right in Lake Simcoe, you've got some ideas, you know what's going on. You know a lot of the environmental aspects, but also the economic and recreational opportunities to take advantage of.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I turn the floor to the member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: To the member from Haldimand–Norfolk: Just to circle back on one of the—well, actually two of the questions, I guess, that were asked by the opposition, talking about timelines; I think this is very important. We've seen what's happened with arbitrary timelines with this project in the past, and I think when we're moving forward, it is important to have some kind of frame of reference as far as time frame goes when we're moving into the future. But I think it is very important to let the expert panel that has been convened to do their job.

I guess my question to you is: Do you think that a timeline should be imposed, or do you think that the expert panel should be allowed to do what it's being put in place to do and move forward and bring forth the best recommendations possible?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): For a very short answer, the member from Haldimand–Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: If you're going to set up a panel, you've got to set a timeline, you've got to set a budget. Don't let them go on for five years. I've seen some inquiries where millions of dollars are spent and it goes on for years and years and years—

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: It's an honour to rise as a representative of my lifelong home of Humber River–Black Creek and to discuss this newly resurrected Bill 5, the York Region Wastewater Act. I say “resurrected” because this bill used to be called Bill 306, and it was a casualty of the choice of this government to prorogue, meaning that a lot of work was lost, literally flushed down the toilet.

But let's return to this bill, which actually happens to be about the same thing. Here we are, in the midst of a problematic government dealing with another set of problems. The problem here, namely, is a decision that had been fumbled around by the previous government and fell on their laps.

Now, I talked about timelines because this matter actually came up when I was the newly appointed transit critic for the official opposition. I had been meeting with stakeholders, talking to them, and some of them happened to be representatives from York region. At this time, they

had pointed out this very conundrum that the government is in, and they were looking for an answer. They also pointed out at the time that they had been repeatedly calling the Premier, and it was unusual, because the Premier, as you'll know, always talks on television about returning people's phone calls one by one, but on this matter they were hearing nothing.

Certainly it's not easy. The job of government isn't often easy, and this has been a tough one for them, because on one hand you have representatives from York region who spent about \$100 million on an EA some years back under the previous government and have been waiting for an answer on whether or not to go ahead with it. You've heard from people living along Lake Simcoe—First Nations communities and others—saying, “Don't proceed this way.” Now they've brought forth a plan—or the possibility of a plan, in this case—and you're hearing from representatives in Durham saying, “Well, you should be dealing with sewage issues in one region, as opposed to foisting it on another.” So they're dealing with a lot of issues here.

They've now come and they've tabled this legislation to do one thing—at least as it appears to me—buy time before June of next year, because they've got tough decisions to make, and certainly they don't want to be held up with it. And so we've heard a key word here: “expert panel.”

We also heard—when we put up our wonderful member from Oshawa, who gave a really, really well-informed and detailed lead on this matter—we heard from her as she got up to speak and answer some of the questions that were laid out, you could hear a majority government's members on bated breath trying to figure out what the official opposition was going to do with this legislation.

So I think I'm going to spend some time today commiserating with the Speaker—commiserating with him because, as I said earlier, I'm going to miss his questions. But now, as a neutral body of this chamber, I can commiserate with him, because we as the official opposition have to make a decision on legislation. We've got to go through a number of different criteria, categories and thoughts on how we arrive at that. Namely, it's hard to trust this government. It's really hard to trust this Conservative government. We heard a little bit about accountability and transparency from the government speaker just before me.

Then, I think about accountability during the pandemic, where they grant themselves massive emergency powers and then, as a compromise, say to all of us, “We're going to create a committee. The Solicitor General is going to come there and face the tough challenge of answering every single possible detailed question on the pandemic response”—this after she reads about half an hour of updates to emergency oversight procedures. Now, this committee doesn't have the ability to even issue dissenting reports. That's accountability for them. That solves all the issues that have been pointed out. That's transparency for them. Even in this committee, when we asked who initially were part of the science table and all of these details, we got none of that, but that's transparency.

This is the same government that is tabling legislation today. This is a government that's talking about—and now we've heard a lot of this here—protecting the environment. Now, to hear a Conservative government talk about protecting the environment is something that I always would like to look forward to, but then I reflect on the track record of this Conservative government when it comes to protecting the environment. I think of legislation to weaken regional conservation authorities. I think of, in fact, a recent decision of an Ontario court that found the government broke the law by failing to adhere to the Environmental Bill of Rights and stating that they had acted unreasonably and unlawfully on their issuances of MZOs.

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MZOs, certainly—where do those come from? In this chamber, we've heard discussion about developers, developer donations—

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Point of order, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Point of order, the member for Barrie—Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I listened a few times, but it seems that he may be imputing motive here.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I'll remind all speakers that you can't say that which you wouldn't otherwise say.

I will return to the member for the rest of his dialogue.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you, Speaker.

I've said this in the chamber before: I do believe in coincidence. I do. And I believe in unusual coincidences, Speaker. So I will not impugn motive. But I will talk about the fact that a lot of environmental, infrastructure and other plans of the government seem, coincidentally, to fall in line with the interests of developers. Again, I will not impugn motive. Certainly, how could I be party to these decisions that the government makes? But coincidentally they seem to be on the same page—very often, actually; very often—but often at odds with environmental groups, First Nation communities, and other communities as well when it comes to developmental matters.

Also, the handling of criticism: But why do I mention that here? This bill was resurrected. Bill 5 is the resurrected form of Bill 306, but it's had some changes made to it. Namely, the government is once again making itself lawsuit-proof. Why? Now, if they're doing the right thing—and this was mentioned earlier by one of my excellent official opposition colleagues—if they are doing everything right, why add clauses to legislation to make them lawsuit-proof? If you're doing the right thing, I'm sure we could all see that. But once again, we are here dealing with that.

As well, in terms of handling criticism, and I would like to once again go back to before we broke for the summer, when we were all called back here in the middle of the night because they had invoked the “notwithstanding” clause, because they did not want criticism. They did not want groups and others to come out there and remind them of their record on handling this pandemic and a number of

other issues. Once again, we see that the legislation has had a new clause added to make it lawsuit-proof.

Now, the issue of consultation: In many different forms, I have heard criticisms levelled against this government in terms of consultation, whether it was changes to legal aid and things like that. There are so many different things that have been debated in this chamber where we have heard from groups about consultation. As a matter of fact, out on the lawn around lunchtime today, we heard from transit advocates who had been saying that there was no consultation around transit plans that were going through a number of ridings here, in fact, in the Toronto area. They were saying that plans were being laid out, but no consultation of communities. Once again, it's a big concern.

I know that there have been groups that have reached out. It is my understanding that the Chippewas of Georgina Island have not been consulted in terms of Bill 5. Certainly they've made submissions and they've made their opinions known. But were they consulted on these new plans?

Now I'd like to talk a little bit about expert panels, because this is a catchphrase that they have said here. I tried to ask a member of this government a little bit about timelines, because I wanted to understand is it possible here that they are trying to save some time before making a difficult decision before an election. The term “expert panel” came up. It's my understanding that details about this expert panel are not, in fact, in the legislation itself; in fact, not even the words “expert panel.” “Expert panel” are two words that have come up after this legislation was been tabled. What's this expert panel going to look like?

I could think of how this government likes to create and staff boards. All I have to do is think of Tarion and where we had advocates, people who have been fighting for reform of Tarion, for instance, coming here, sitting in the galleries, speaking about it in public and on news, stating that they had concerns that the board of Tarion, and now HCRA, did not represent the consumer's interest. If they're going to convene an expert panel that they have not mentioned within the legislation here—no details of it, nor the fact that it will even exist. They're now saying they have no timeline as to when this panel will be convened. We have no idea who will be on it. So a question that I have is, what's that expert panel going to look like? Will it be developers that coincidentally agree with everything the government seems to want to do on issues? Will it be that? Will we have representatives who understand the environment and protecting the environment? Will we have members of communities, planners and others? Who will be on this expert panel?

I'd like to go back to what I talked about at the very beginning and when it was that I'd heard from elected members from York region, again on an unrelated topic, who were saying, “Come on. We've been reaching out. Is there any way you can get the Premier to return a phone call?”

All right, I wasn't going to make a coincidental comment on that one. I'm sure he returns some phone calls very quickly. But for some reason, on this one, they

weren't hearing back, and they were very concerned. Then I thought to myself, as this was brought to my attention, they wanted an urgent answer, and I thought, this government, when it wants to, can act really quickly, really urgently. Once again, I go back to shortly after 2018, after the elections, when we were here again in the middle of the night, tearing apart city of Toronto council, in the midst of an election. This was so urgent that in the midst of an election, we were seeing changes to actual boundaries. What that informed me, and it informed me as a member, was that if this government wants to do something and if it wants to act, it's going to jump right all over it. It doesn't matter if things like electoral rules or democracy, anything is going to get in its way—no way. If this government wants to make a decision, it's going to go right through it like a train.

So as I'm contemplating this and I'm hearing from these elected representatives from York region saying, "Well, come on, we just need an answer," now I'm hearing today, "Well, we need more time." They're dropping the words "environment," "expert panels," "We have no idea about it." It just makes me scratch my head, and it makes me wonder: Are they trying to buy time on a decision?

The things that I'm hoping that this government will really focus on is that if they're committed to forming an expert panel, there has to be fulsome experience here, on this panel. I don't know if that's something that will be viewed as a priority. I think that this government often looks to finding people that they agree with and then putting them in positions to make decisions that they would have already made. That, to me, is concerning, because certainly, on issues pertaining to this, you want to see information and expert advice coming from planners, individuals knowledgeable on our water systems, the environment, community groups—real, active consultation.

Again, when the court found that the government broke the law around the Environmental Bill of Rights, they had gone and issued MZO's and then claimed consultation following a decision that was made. How do you claim consultation after you've made a decision? You're consulting on how angry these people are? The thing is, again, they're not so interested in these opinions because, as I mentioned, we were here in the middle of the night ensuring that people will not be able to go out there in the public and criticize this government, certainly in ads or any form of that type of information. So that's something that I certainly would like to understand: what this expert panel is going to look like.

I think the people who are out there now, because—I have a lot of different articles and things that I've read here. I've heard a mayor in the Durham region saying that, again, York region should be solving its own waste problems. So their plans to put a stop order on this and take control of all of this has added—well, I guess there are going to be a lot more eyes on them as a result of this.

1520

But to simply state, without any sort of timeline or details, that they're going to take forever to make a

decision—can you imagine the frustration now? First you have York region, which is already frustrated because the last government was just kicking this ball around, not making any decision. This government takes this—certainly was reached out to by York region—and they provide no form of answer to York region for years, until we are here now being told that they are actually legislating themselves to not make a decision on this. And then, later, and this is not in the legislation, they will tell us that they're going to put together an expert panel, but they're not going to describe who's on it, and then they'll make a decision. Then government members are asked, "Okay, fine. Will you have a decision or an actual plan in place before the next election?"

Interjection.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Well, I don't know. I heard about a Zoom call. That's all I remember. It wasn't clear. I wasn't sure where they were going with that. It was probably a difficult question for a member of the government who is not a minister on this to handle. Certainly it was a challenging question.

Can you imagine what Durham region, their elected representatives, or what York region is thinking right now? Because now York region is being told that there are more and more delays, and that Durham region now, all of a sudden, might be dealing with sewage that's going to be coming through them and eventually going into Lake Ontario. So they've put themselves in a position that's certainly messy.

These are some of the things that I'm looking forward to hearing a little more about as government members get up and speak to this. Maybe there might be some crumbs about what the expert panel might look like, who they're looking to invite and all that, because I think these are very, very important things that we definitely need to know as we move forward, as we make decisions on this as the official opposition, and as people who are out there are waiting to hear where the government is going with this. As this continues to go on, maybe they'll put those plans out there, not just till after an election, but actually give people in the different regions some knowledge about where they are going with this as a government. Certainly as a member who is going to be asked to vote on this, I would like to hear a little bit more about these plans.

I'm also going to mention this one thing, because as I mentioned when I spoke to a different issue before, we've now been basically dealing with matters that are being tabled here as a result of prorogation. I am looking forward to fighting for more issues that matter to my community as we move forward.

This is a majority Conservative government. They will get their way on this, as they have with everything else. But I hope that the legislation that continues to get tabled as we move forward is going to do the things that my community of Humber River–Black Creek is looking for, namely the hiring of more front-line health care workers, access to rapid testing in our schools and many other places so communities can feel safe, and the list goes on and on and on.

I'm looking forward to this government tabling more legislation to help us get through this pandemic. I'm naming some of the things that we need to see: certainly support for small business. I know that this government and many of its members claim to be on the side of business. Well, let's give small businesses the support they need.

So I'm looking forward to all of that, and I am looking forward to hearing more details on this legislation by government members, namely what the expert panel is going to look like, and give a timeline to these regions. They want to know because huge multi-hundred-million-dollar decisions are being made that are going to affect your environment and the health, ability and future of these communities.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak on that. I look forward to questions and comments.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Just before we move on to questions and comments, I just remind everyone that when we're wearing masks, when you're having those active discussions, it really actually does echo a lot in here. I would just ask you to move to your respective lobbies so the person who is speaking can be heard clearly, and I can make sure that there are no inappropriate things going on that I might miss.

I now turn that to questions and comments.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: What I haven't heard in this debate and would really like to know from the member opposite is: Does he support this bill and does he support science?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: You've got to love their questions, right? It's so simplified: Do you support this bill, because if you support science, therefore you support this bill.

What I have to say is this: I don't trust this government's track record on the environment and the reasons for the decisions they make around infrastructure plans. I'm looking to hear a little more information on this bill, namely expert panels and whatnot. I studied the sciences; I have a lot of respect for science. But as I have said before, I do believe in coincidences, and I do definitely listen to scientists way more than I'm going to listen to developers when I make a decision.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I turn the floor over to the member from London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I appreciated very much the remarks of my colleague on Bill 5 and also his interest in learning more about the expert panel. I wondered, however, if he is concerned about the fact that Bill 5 excludes any mention, any reference, no language about an expert panel, and its sole purpose is to suspend the minister's decision-making power and to indemnify the government from any legal action taken against it on the basis of misrepresentation or misconduct.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you very much for that question. I certainly have concerns. We've seen a lot of legislation being tabled here by this government that makes it lawsuit-proof. We've heard, "Trust us. We're making the right decisions." But again, they're building

clauses into their legislation to make them lawsuit-proof, as though they're presupposing people will have issues with what they have. Certainly, we keep being offered this expert panel: "Let's leave the decision up to an expert panel." But we know nothing about this expert panel and it's not, as you mentioned, even listed in the legislation. So what is this other than buying time on a very difficult decision they have to make?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): The member from Barrie–Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I know what the Liberals would have done: They sat on an EA for 10 years and then they didn't approve it; and then, when they were going to approve it, they were going to base it on political boundaries. What I haven't heard is what the members opposite would do in the sense of, would they base it on science or would they just base it on gut instinct of political boundaries?

I have not yet heard support for this bill or not, which would allow us the mechanism to establish an expert panel. I have not heard anything from the member opposite.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Well, first off, mentions to the Liberal government prior to this: Certainly we did see them also act very quickly when it came to privatizing hydro right after the former Premier was re-elected at the time. And again, yes, they fumbled this decision. York region was waiting for you for three years and certainly waited many more years for the previous government.

That being said, whatever it is we decide and however we vote, your majority Conservative government is going to pass the legislation it wants and it is not dependent on what we have to do. The burden of proof is here for you to provide what this expert panel is going to look like and not for us to actually structure it on your behalf. This is your legislation. Give us the confidence that you're doing the right thing here. Give us all the details; that's all we're asking.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I turn the floor to the member from Oshawa.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to ask a couple of questions. Frankly, I don't know if you've got the answers, though, for me, but I'm going to ask them anyway. We've heard some interesting things today and I'm a little confused.

The government has said that the expert panel shouldn't be rushed; let it run its course—the expert panel that's not in the bill. But then, on the other hand, the long-term-care inquiry that we wanted was going to take too long and cost too much. So I'm just not sure: Which is it?

The upper York-Simcoe decision can't be made without consulting First Nations, the Chippewas of Georgina Island, and yet there has been no consultation or mention of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island and consulting with them. So which is it?

They want a current EA, because 2014 is too old, and yet the Bradford Bypass is relying on a 1997 EA that they're disregarding. So which is it?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Yes, those are—sometimes, when I try to understand where the government is going with the legislation or seeing what they're saying on one day versus the others, it's kind of like looking in a laundry machine on a high-spin cycle and it's just spinning and spinning. It can be very confusing at times. Certainly, you've pointed out—I'm not allowed to use the word "hypocrisy." You've pointed out—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): You are correct; you're not allowed to.

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Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Yes, you're not allowed to use it, so I will not use it again.

It's very difficult to understand the rationale, because on some issues they seem to want this and on some other issues they want something else. And those issues are pretty much apple-to-apple issues, so I don't really understand how they prioritize decision-making at times, when it comes to things, because it's, quite frankly, confusing.

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

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member from Humber River–Black Creek for his comments. We've discussed things before. I understand he does have some trust issues and I'm just hoping to try to address some of those things.

The expert panel will consist of experts in land use planning and waste water infrastructure and would consult with stakeholders and engage with potentially impacted First Nations. It would provide advice on:

- additional sewage capacity needed to accommodate forecasted population and development in the upper York region waste water area;

- all options for providing additional sewage capacity necessary to accommodate future populations and development in both York and Durham;

- the costs of developing and implementing Upper York Sewage Solutions options and any alternatives; and

- sustainability and efficiency of all options, including consideration of the use and optimization of existing waste water services and protection of human health.

So, really, we think that this is the best way of proceeding because it gives up-to-date information and consideration by an expert panel in the relevant areas. Don't you agree?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I really appreciate the details you've provided. It still begs the question—since you have this all written down in a binder that you've read from—why this wasn't actually implemented in the legislation itself.

You say that there will definitely be the input of planners and that's going to be what the expert panel is about. They're going to consult. I would like to ensure and make sure that they are listening to the interests of communities and environmental experts as well when they go there. If you say that it's just being limited to planners themselves and not necessarily people who are within the communities affected or experts, let's say, environmental

experts, as well, as part of that, I would like to see assurances that the interests of a community as well as environmental experts are prioritized, not just the interests of developers.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: I listened intently to what my friend from Humber River–Black Creek said as I was thinking about the way in which debate has happened on this bill. We talked about consulting stakeholders. Our friend from Kiiwetinoong is sitting right over there. I've heard so many times debated in this chamber the need for us to realize what reconciliation actually is. I'm wondering, member, if you could just help us reflect on this debate. We seem to be thinking about our reconciliation and treaty obligations as just a box to tick. Why not actually have the Mississaugas of Scugog Island, folks like the Chippewas of Georgina Island involved at the heart of this process, if we're actually going to say reconciliation matters and it confers decision-making power to the original water keepers of this land? What do you think?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: That's an excellent question. When my friend the member from Kiiwetinoong speaks often about what First Nations communities are going through, especially in the north, it's very, very difficult to hear. The idea that just being a simple checkmark is—

Interjection.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: It is. It's disturbing. Sometimes it feels like that, when you read what this is about, because at the same time if they say that they're consulting or listening to the Chippewas of Georgina Island, well, then, if that's the case, why is it that there are communities in northern Ontario that still don't have access to clean drinking water? This is something that baffles and shocks me. It's very, very disturbing. These are things that need to be a priority. If they are committed to actual consultation, there's a long list that needs to be addressed if there's going to be reconciliation. So if they are committed to that, I hope so, and I hope that they'll certainly change the minds of us here on the official opposition side about them moving forward positively on that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): We have time for a very short comment.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'll be very, very quick. It's interesting to see how the NDP have turned. It was, of course, the member for Sarnia–Lambton who finally got the NDP to support oil and gas in the province of Ontario, and now we're hearing that the NDP is against the environment—

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you to the Speaker, who's celebrating his 10th anniversary here today. Congratulations.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): And back to you, sir.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to support my colleague the Honourable Dave Piccini, Minister of the Environment, Conservation

and Parks, on his bill introduced this week, the York Region Wastewater Act, 2021. This important legislation, if passed, will enable the regional municipality of York to establish the right evidence-based solution to meet its waste water servicing needs. York region is currently the province's third-largest municipality and, like many urban areas, is growing rapidly. I know the minister referenced earlier this week that this growth is meant to bring their population to 1.5 million people in the coming decade.

Speaker, I serve at the privilege and pleasure of the great residents of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, but I also serve this government as the parliamentary assistant to my friend and great Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Minister Steve Clark. We have made it a priority as a government and in our ministry to ensure that the province's growth, moving forward, has an adequate housing supply. We believe that everyone deserves a place to call home. We want the economic growth of our province to put affordable home ownership within the reach of Ontario families and provide more people with the opportunity to live closer to where they work.

In 2014, York region submitted an environmental assessment application for a new waste water treatment plant that would discharge treated effluent into the East Holland River, which drains into the Lake Simcoe watershed. As the minister noted during the introduction of this bill, given the length of time that has elapsed since the application was made, the government wants to ensure that we have the most up-to-date information on the environmental, social and financial impacts of the potential waste water service options of York region.

The people of Ontario need assurance that their water resources are being protected by sound decision-making that is evidence-based. Bill 5 reflects our government's commitment to supporting Ontario's communities to meet their infrastructure needs and grow their economies while maintaining public health and providing strong protection for air, water and land—a healthy, clean and prosperous Ontario with jobs, opportunities and the quality of life Ontarians deserve.

Ontario's environmental assessment program is an important process that ensures impacts to the environment are considered before building infrastructure or other projects in our communities. Speaker, our government has been updating the almost-50-year-old environmental assessment program, and we have made a series of amendments through the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, 2020, to support strong environmental oversight while getting shovels in the ground faster on projects that matter most to our communities.

I have been privileged, alongside Minister Clark, on another initiative, to aid in the building of new housing that will support the future growth of Ontario, as in York region. We have been actively consulting on transforming and modernizing the delivery of building code services. Ontario's building industry generates \$38 billion annually, making it a key economic driver in our economy. Our government is ensuring the building industry has the support it needs to navigate Ontario's highly technical and

complex building code and continue to support the growth of Ontario's economy.

In the fall of 2019, we consulted on ways to transform and modernize delivery of building code services to help speed up construction of new housing while protecting public health and safety. Informed by these consultations, we amended the Building Code Act, 1992, to enable the future creation of an administrative authority that could help deliver faster and better services to support the building industry's ability to meet Ontario's building code requirements.

We are excited to support the growth of our province, including the proposed growth assessments in York region. The issue at hand is that many years have passed since York region's environmental assessment began. The previous Liberal government refused to make a decision; instead, they delayed it for years. It is this kind of hesitancy that our government is determined to avoid so that the housing supports for communities like York can meet their ever-increasing demand, protecting the environment while producing needed housing supply.

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Under the Ford government, we are committed to making an informed decision, taking into account the financial, environmental and social factors and getting this done right, instead of delaying and thinking of votes. The lack of current information from technical and other experts is only holding up this project. It is needed to capture significant environmental, social and financial implications of any waste water servicing solution for York region.

All Ontarians need to be confident that their water resources are protected now and into the future, and we know that we have to increase our housing supply because Ontario is on its way to post-COVID economic growth and we can't sit idly by. That is why the minister is prepared to act, not diddle-daddling, on the York growth expectations with Bill 5.

In his introduction to the bill, Minister Piccini stated the legislation will help enable the regional municipality of York find the right solution to meet its waste water servicing needs. With the pause included in the proposed York Region Wastewater Act, 2021, the government will be able to obtain advice from the recently established advisory panel to provide advice on the need and timing for additional sewage servicing capacity to accommodate forecasted population and the development growth in the upper York watershed area.

The advisory panel advice will allow us to bring together experts in a variety of areas, including land use planning and waste water infrastructure, and it will consult with key stakeholders and engage with potentially impacted First Nations. Protecting our water and protecting our communities is the goal of this project, so impacted Indigenous communities must be key contributors to the path forward. If passed, this bill would create an expert panel tasked specifically with engaging with the potentially impacted Indigenous communities. The advisory panel will lead this important work, and it is expected that

the membership of the advisory panel will be finalized by the end of 2021, and will be tasked with providing its report to the minister by September 2022.

So unlike the previous government, we are providing real action, real expertise and real timelines to support the municipality, the building community and affected stakeholders and, of course, those who will be looking forward to work, live and play for generations to come. However, given the time that has passed, it is important to ensure there is up-to-date information available for the Upper York Sewage Solutions and any alternatives.

Just to talk about some of our own issues back in South Glengarry: When I was first put on council back in 1994, shortly after we went through the amalgamation process—we were amalgamated with Lancaster township—we had an issue with our landfill site. We were running out of space and we were, at that time, paying fines to get it renewed. So we had made an application for the renewal, and it had started and gone through. And we had a significant number, I'll say, of delegations to the minister to get final approval. We had an estimate. The consultants we had on hand had just had a project approved in a different municipality, so they expected a fairly timely approval and a cost of somewhere around \$500,000, which we had in our reserves.

So I remember visiting, under the former Liberal government, about eight or nine years into the process. We met with the minister. We talked about it and he was saying, "Well, you know, we're not really sure. We're kind of rethinking the land use around landfill sites and whether we should proceed with that direction." I said, "Minister, we've spent eight years on this. We've spent about \$4 million or \$5 million by this point. It's too late to be changing. We're a small municipality of about 13,000 people. We just can't raise that extra money again."

It just talks about when you delay projects this long, technology changes, especially when you're talking about the environment. In that case there, what we thought would be something less than \$500,000 turned out to be closer to \$5 million, and that was money we had to go back to the taxpayer to collect, and the project that was approved was the same project that we applied for with the original application.

You can delay things and delay things and talk about different technologies, but unless you're going to take action, that money came out of our taxpayers' dollars and did nothing but make a lot of consultants rich.

It just talks about the idea of delaying projects. We need to get them through in a timely manner, and certainly a year to review all the documents that have been collected and to get a final decision is what we owe our residents in our province. That's why we have to get it right and get it done, as Ontario sets course towards the post-pandemic economic growth that is just around the corner.

Mr. Speaker, the introduction of Bill 5, the York Region Wastewater Act, 2021, and the creation of the advisory panel is consistent with many other actions our government is taking to meet the needs of growing populations

and economic activity, to reduce impacts on our air, water and land.

Our government is committed to working with municipalities to ensure municipal sewage systems can meet today's environmental standards, and that people are informed of sewage bypasses and overflow incidents that happen in their community in a timely manner.

More than 50% of Canada's manufacturing is located in this region and a significant proportion of the country's employment in agriculture and food processing, with much of this activity happening in places like York region.

We are firmly committed to working with the region, as we are committed to working with all municipalities across Ontario, to ensure that they are able to meet the waste water servicing needs of its residents. This path forward gives the government time to re-examine the need, timing, cost and technical feasibility and impacts to human health and the environment associated with the possible waste water servicing alternatives for growth in upper York region.

In the summer of 2019, I was proud to support our Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing when he introduced Bill 108, the More Homes, More Choice Act. We recognized that there was a specific need for increased housing supply and more affordable housing.

Our government believes that everyone deserves a place to call home. But a lack of housing supply is driving up housing prices across Ontario farther and farther out of reach of hard-working Ontario families, due to a lack of housing supply.

I regress again and talk about another project we had under the former Liberal government that predates my time in council. Interest rates were high, hitting up to 20%. We, the council, or the previous council of the day, had been working on a water and sewer project for the Glen Walter area for many years and many meetings back and forth. I remember reading about it in the paper. They finally got approval for it, so they went ahead with the project.

Looking back—of course, interest rates were high and inflation was high. They started the project and realized quickly that they had to scale it back because the cost of the project had climbed significantly and the accounting of the project doesn't allow you to collect the interest back to the taxpayer until the project is done. So the project would take four or five years, and you can imagine that at 20%, when you're dealing with a \$10-million fee, the interest rates alone ate up about 30% of the costs of the money that was given.

Now, the municipality today—when I was mayor, of course—we're suffering because the plant we put in place was barely sized to meet the needs of the community of the day. So, basically, it was put in, completed and was already too small. On top of that, the residents, because of the interest and the delays in the process, were forced to handle the extra interest rate. So the cost of the project and the yearly cost was much higher than it might be, certainly today, with the interest rate at 1% that's attainable by some municipalities. It just speaks about another need to get things going.

We're talking about interest rates possibly going up. I think they're easily looking at them going up to a 2.5% prime rate in the next year or so, and that's a start, but these projects, if they last 10 or 12 years like we've seen in the past in our region—things change. We look at our competitors, and we know the Premier talked about car companies looking for a place to make a decision and knowing, if they come to Ontario, it's a five-year project. When they go to our neighbours to the south or they're talking to another province, they're talking as low as six months. I mean, time is money, and if there's a need for a product today, you can't wait five, six years to get it on the road. You've got projects that would like to set up in York region. Knowing there's a water issue, they can't commit to moving there. They'll move somewhere else. It's a loss of jobs, a loss of employment. I think that's key.

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So as we look forward to this, our government believes everybody deserves a place to call home and a place to work. It's all integrated, and we have to remember that when we move ahead on these projects. Sure, a government that sits there and takes years and years to make an answer typically turns it over to the next government. Governments last about eight years, on the long session. The people pay the price for that, and it's our job to make sure that we make living and working in Ontario as affordable as possible.

It's not a "one of;" it's not this issue or that issue. It's an integrated process that involves everything from the original planning up front to making sure we make the right decisions on the process, making sure we stop the ones that don't belong and making sure we put the conditions in place so the right projects get built in the right and timely time.

Our action plan puts Ontario first. I can't stress enough that the key word is "action." We are cutting red tape and helping to build the right types of homes in the right places, to make housing affordable and help taxpayers keep more of their hard-earned money. More Homes, More Choice included a broad range of measures to address the speed of development approvals, the mix of housing types, the cost of development, the supply of rental housing and other innovative ideas to increase housing supply.

We've also worked hard to allow more housing supply near transit. We are providing greater flexibility for communities to plan for transit-oriented communities, with mixed uses near major transit station areas that are in provincially significant employment zones. Increasing the vertical integration of transit and housing is a key element to moving more people more efficiently and providing more housing to aid our economic growth. That is something we've heard from experts for years and years, and we have not seen action on that until our government has made that a priority. I commend Minister Clark for taking that and looking at ways of really driving down the price of housing.

I was looking at an article this week from the Economist, and it rated the G7 countries. Canada was 50%

higher—the increase in housing costs in Canada are 50% higher than the second-next places, which are Britain and France. So our rates have more than doubled over the last five years, and that's unacceptable. That's money that makes us more uncompetitive.

This is how we would like to provide our individuals and families with affordable and accessible housing and transit opportunities. But additionally, we must be safely and environmentally aware of the increase in residential municipal needs, such as the infrastructure needs and residual effects of this kind of population growth and the waste water concerns associated. We are here to act on community needs and the demands associated with the projected economic growth in York region.

As we continue to debate this bill, I stand alongside Minister Piccini, Parliamentary Assistant Khanjin and all my colleagues in support of this vital legislation to continue to provide the best expertise and growth planning for today and in the future.

I thank you, Speaker, for this opportunity to speak today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Time for questions and comments.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It would have been interesting to hear what the Minister of the Environment had to say today, but I'll put my question to the member.

I know what it's like—first-hand knowledge—when our watersheds are at risk. In Hamilton, Cootes Paradise: We had 24 billion litres of raw sewage that spilled into our beloved Cootes Paradise in my riding of Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas. Hamiltonians were shocked and they were angered by this. In response, I introduced the Cootes Paradise Water Accountability Act that would ensure the Ministry of the Environment used their jurisdiction to ensure residents were informed of future spills. The government would not bring this bill to debate, and now, because the government prorogued the Legislature, this important bill has died.

This week, 1.4 million litres of untreated sewage spilled into Lake Ontario. My question to the member is: What do you have to say to the people of Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas with regard to the Cootes Paradise Water Accountability Act and how it would have protected them from future spills?

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you for that question from the member opposite. The new municipal waste water environmental compliance approvals include conditions requiring municipal waste water plant owners to develop a notification procedure in consultation with the ministry, to notify the public and any downstream water users of potential adverse impacts resulting from plant bypass and overflow events.

I guess I'd just recount that that's the importance of using the latest technology. We're now almost approaching 10 years since this application was put in. I'm sure it took at least two years to put it together. I think that what we want to do is make sure that we have the best technology today that uses all the knowledge we have for appropriate decisions.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Speaker. Good to see you in the chair there today. I'd like take part in this debate with the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

With science and best practices at the core of every decision that this government makes for the environmental assessment that is at the heart of this decision for York region and the need to continue to evolve and grow as a population and the development takes place, can the member share with the House and with myself the role that the government envisions for this York region waste water advisory panel to play?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I think I caught most of that question. The panel will be put together over the next number of months and will pull in all areas of expertise, as required for the decision.

The decision will be made; there's no benefit to delaying the decisions year after year, and we know that from experience. You look at some of the mistakes that are made in the past—not to blame a government, but I'll give you an example in our case: When we were working on the landfill site, every time we sent our revised proposal in, enough time had gone by that there was an entirely new group in the ministry reviewing the project, so then they had to get up to speed. Then, of course, they'd get another question and send it back, and it would take us a year or two sometimes to get these studies done and get them back up to speed—and by the time they got up to speed, another new one.

This is all a part of getting an expert panel to review it, make a decision and move ahead.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I turn the floor over to the member from Algoma–Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Just for the record, here is the explanatory note on this particular bill: It says, "The minister's decision-making on the Upper York Sewage Solutions Undertaking is suspended and all actions by the regional municipality of York related to that undertaking are prohibited." I've looked at this bill. It is a page and a half. I look at the definitions and I can't find what I'm looking for. I look at "No decision by minister," which is section 2. I look at "Non-application of s.10, Environmental Assessment Act." It goes into section 3, "Action not to be taken." "No cause of action" is covered under number 4, then "Proceedings barred," "Application," "Retrospective effect."

My question is: Can you please tell me, in this page and a half, where this advisory panel and expert panel are indicated in this bill, and where I can find the timelines that I can hear this government repeatedly talking about that are not in this bill?

Mr. Jim McDonell: As in if not all bills but most bills, regulations will be issued to determine that, and, of course, that's standard procedure. They will be putting dates in. They will be putting in more details about the advisory.

In my time here—which is the same as yours, I guess, looking back; it's your anniversary as well here today—

regulations are made so they can be easily put in place by the government. They can change if need be. They're not in legislation. They don't have to be re-debated, and that's a very common practice that's used.

So we will be putting this in. We're suspending any more work that they have to put into this, because they've already spent enough money on it and we're trying to be as efficient as possible.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I look to the member from Don Valley North.

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Mr. Vincent Ke: I thank the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry—an excellent presentation.

Speaker, Ontario's water is a world-class resource, and must be managed as such. Our government has improved our water-taking program, making changes that give to municipalities more direct input on allowing bottled water corporations to withdraw new or increased amounts of groundwater in their communities. To support the new rules, the province is also providing guidance on managing water-taking in areas where sustainability is a concern and where there are competing demands.

Speaker, can the member share with us more details on what the Ontario government has done to improve water management through the province's water-taking program?

Mr. Jim McDonell: If I take it right, the question is about water-taking rights and the possibilities. As we look through, Ontario specifically, but also Canada, has the majority of fresh water in the world. It's a quite a benefit that we have but, of course, quite a responsibility as well and we want to make sure that we maintain that supply going forward.

We also want to make sure that we're reasonable in our process. If we're going to get to an answer, let's get to it as quickly as possible, which is at least making the best decision. But technology is not in isolation. We have studies from all over the province, so that should go towards making faster decisions, so we will be reviewing that.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Just based on some of the earlier conversations, this bill is pretty tight and small and basic. Section 1 is definitions; section 2 is the minister is not allowed to do anything; section 3, the Upper York Sewage Solutions project can't go ahead; section 4 is protecting yourself from being sued; and then two sections will be repealed at some point. There's no regulatory authority. There's no regulation to come. All of the talk about the expert panel, that's well and good. I can google it and find the government's intent, but it's not in the bill.

But I wanted to ask this member about municipal affairs as he had mentioned: How does that ministry have any carriage over a municipal infrastructure project? I'm dying to know.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Well, of course, all applications from the municipalities go through the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. I guess they're the front

door. If it's an issue with the environment, it's channelled through that. If it's through agriculture, of course, they make sure that those applications get to the right spots.

The original environmental assessment application was submitted to York region in 2014, almost 10 years ago. The Wynne-Del Duca Liberals refused to make a decision. Instead, they delayed it for years and, no surprise, the decision-making was biased with the political map of the province.

Under the Ford government, we will take action to make an informed decision, taking into account the financial, environmental and social factors in getting the job done right instead of delaying and thinking of votes like the Liberals did.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): We have time for a very quick comment or question.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: It's clear where government stands in terms of protecting the environment. It's still unclear where the opposition stands. I want to ask the member, with his experience with municipal affairs, about the importance of balancing both the environment and municipal planning.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Time for a short answer, member for Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you for that question, because I think that's key. This is all taxpayers' money and we want to make sure we get the right decision with the right evidence and make it quickly.

We have municipalities coming to us trying to get more housing because there's a shortage of housing, and these are the answers we need to put to—

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

Mr. Joel Harden: It's a pleasure to rise today to talk to the government's proposal of Bill 5, the York Region Wastewater Act.

I want to start this afternoon by reflecting on two people who are motivating my comments today. The first actually is my son. My son in our home is a big environmental advocate. He is always wanting to know what Dad is doing down here to stand up for the environment. On a note of levity, I have to admit to my colleagues in this chamber that I had a conversation with him last night and I couldn't bring it to talk to him about this bill, and that's my note of levity before getting into this, because there I was on FaceTime talking to my son—it was a big night for him; he had just earned his brown belt, Speaker, as a young karate student. I was very proud of him. Normally what I'm used to with Emery is he'll say, "What are you doing at the Legislature, Dad?" He is a big environmental advocate so I wanted to talk to him, but I just know, given the kind of kid he is, he wouldn't be able to stop laughing about an enormous sewage construction project. So I let him go to go have ice cream with his mom and his friends. But this is a serious matter, Speaker. It is about the protection of our water.

The second person informing my remarks this afternoon, Speaker, is the great Claudette Commanda.

Claudette is the granddaughter of William Commanda, who is perhaps one of the more influential and respected Algonquin elders of the last 100 years. William Commanda was not only an eloquent elder for his community; he was a fulcrum. He would attract people from all over the world to come up to the territory known as Kitigan Zibi, which is on the other side of the Ottawa River from where I live in Ottawa, up in what is known as Maniwaki, Quebec—but that's Kitigan Zibi territory—to try to help convene conversations about what we can do to protect the planet and to respect each other. These were the watchwords of what William Commanda used to do when he would try to convene conversations. The Dalai Lama visited with William Commanda. Nelson Mandela visited with William Commanda. Prime Ministers, mayors, major leaders from well outside Indigenous communities visited with William Commanda, because there was something powerful about the kinds of courageous conversations he wanted to convene.

What Claudette has asked me to think about today—I've had a number of interactions and conversations with her in getting ready for this debate. She said, "Joel, do you remember what I told you right after you were elected, when you held that celebration to talk about the campaign? Do you remember what I told you your number one job was? To protect the water. To protect the water and then, after that, to respect your neighbours, to try to figure out how to push the debate. But number one, because in my community and many Indigenous communities," Claudette told me, "we are water protectors, we must protect the water."

So a big part of what Claudette asked me to think about when I talked to her about this particular measure is, what will this current measure that is attempting to make an intervention in this current discussion, as my colleagues in government, my colleagues in opposition have been debating—what will this do to protect the water?

I've heard friends from the government suggest that what it will do is break an impasse, break a lethargy, break an inertia of kicking the can down the road, as it were, Speaker, that we're just delaying a decision, that the folks of Lake Simcoe have made points about how they can't handle this degree of waste water in their communities, so now this has to be a Lake Ontario problem.

Obviously, as my friend from Oshawa said so eloquently in her one-hour lead, that's created a number of ricochet impacts. But I'm also mindful of one thing she said: The Chippewas of Georgina Island, who are absolutely implicated in this—on their island, they live currently under a boil-water advisory. The Mississaugas of Scugog Island are actually trying to fulfill their role as water protectors.

So what Claudette asked me to remind all of us today is that reconciliation is not a box-ticking exercise. It is not a box-ticking exercise where we can say, "Okay, we've consulted Indigenous communities." If we take seriously the history of these lands on which we are, we will know that long before European contact, there were generations, thousands of years of folks who preserved the integrity of

and who lived in harmony with this land. And since hundreds of people, thousands of people, hundreds of thousands of people, millions of people have come here, we've increasingly severed our relationship with the land. We've severed our relationship of understanding how we can protect the land.

So at the heart of this, as my friend from Oshawa and my friend from Humber River–Black Creek said, is the issue of how we build homes—of how we build homes and where we build homes. And if we continue to encourage our communities, our municipalities, to encourage the development of suburban sprawl without a requisite understanding of the impact on lands, wetlands and water, Speaker—I resolve that that's the big issue, that's the crux of the issue we have to resolve, not whether or not we green-light massive waste water pipelines.

You can tell, Speaker, I'm critical, as many of my friends in opposition have been, of this proposal. But why don't I actually point out a positive example of something the government could look towards for inspiration? It comes out of the news, hot off the presses in Ottawa today: Today the National Capital Commission announced that the remediation of Victoria Island—people who have visited Ottawa, you might know what Victoria Island is, it's a sacred place, not just for the Algonquin peoples but for many Indigenous peoples—is going to be conducted by Decontie Construction, which is an Algonquin-Anishinabe-led construction firm, which will be guided by the elders of neighbouring Algonquin communities. That is more than a signal and a box-ticking exercise, Speaker. That, as my friend Claudette has told me, is a move in a direction that ensures Algonquin leadership at the heart of the remediation of Indigenous land.

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So we can do this right; we can do development right. But we have to remember that our Indigenous neighbours are not just one of many stakeholders. They can help us guide development decisions—can and must, in the case of Victoria Island.

And I want to talk about one more significant Ottawa example that can help us understand how to deal with this particular intractable matter better. It's a debate over a development in Ottawa called the Tewin development. This is a parcel of land in the southeast area of Ottawa which, until recently, could not be zoned for development. If you've been to Ottawa, and you go south and east of Ottawa, or if you know where the airport in Ottawa is and you just go maybe a couple of major roads south and east of that, you'll know why: because it's a wetland; it's a flood plain. The folks who live there now, literally when they build homes or have built homes there in the last decades, you have to incorporate metres of Styrofoam into the foundations of your homes so they don't sink.

The notion that we would have a massive suburban development in this area raises a number of concerns, concerns that were made apparent to the city of Ottawa by the province of Ontario, by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and by the urban planning staff that work for the city of Ottawa and that provide advice to

councillors. They told folks, as this proposal that was being debated—on land that couldn't even be zoned for development yet—that this was a bad idea.

Although, wait a sec: The developer at the heart of this project said that this was a move in the direction of reconciliation. Reconciliation. They said they had found an Indigenous partner to develop a project called Tewin, and that it was a step in the direction of reconciliation. It created a furor of debate from hereditary Algonquin leadership in my neighbouring communities. Claudette Commanda was at the heart of that furor, and she said very clearly to our city: "Don't call a land purchase reconciliation. You have not consulted us. The experts are telling you it's not good for the flood plain; it's not good for the community. Don't try to pretend that this is a move in the direction of reconciliation."

A story as recent as yesterday from Kate Porter from CBC Ottawa news, talking to Monica and John Brewer, corroborates these facts that if we allow 45,000 folks to move to this part of Ottawa and we think about all the municipal services that are going to have to go in to serve this community, this is an enormous cost—an enormous cost.

So Claudette has asked me to share with my friends in government, to share with all of us, that this is not reconciliation. A land purchase is not reconciliation. When Indigenous hereditary leadership is driving and involved in the decision, that can be justifiably argued as a step in the right direction, when decision-making is shared.

Tewin, this project—we're talking about 445 hectares, talking about 45,000 new neighbours, we're talking about something dropped into a city council debate when the land was not even potential to be zoned for development. But not surprisingly, Speaker, in subsequent council meetings, the urban boundary of the city changed: snap, presto, changed. And it was changed to allow for this development to happen. How absurd—how absurd.

So let's go back to Bill 5. Let's go back to this expert panel and think about what the remediation of Victoria Island, what the Tewin project tells us about how this project could be done well. Think about all the Indigenous communities you will need to not consult if this is a serious initiative, but to have at the leadership of this initiative to make sure it's actually going to help the original stewards, the water protectors of this land. That, to me, sounds like a project that would get Canadians excited again.

Because I've got to tell you, Speaker, I'm not sure what everybody else's experience was last week, but when I got around the community—and I know Ottawa is the national capital, so sometimes politics get blown up on a level that doesn't happen in other communities—I saw so many kids going to school in orange T-shirts. I saw so many workplaces participating in that first-ever TRC day. I saw a willingness from the Canadian people to move forward that I have never seen in my whole life of watching and observing politics when it comes to real steps on reconciliation.

So think about Bill 5, my friends, in this way. Think about Bill 5 as an opportunity for you to do more than give

us a page and a half, as my friend from Algoma-Manitoulin said, about where you're going to go with this bill. And please don't leave us in suspense about what might come in regulation. This needs to be known now. We need to know now who is going to be driving this process.

When we hear about a massive pipeline project that is going to go through the Oak Ridges moraine, that is going to go back to the debates that we've already had on Duffins Creek, I want to know from the original water protectors of these lands, is that in keeping? Is that in keeping with how we are supposed to treat our water system?

Sometimes, Claudette likes to tell me an ancient Cree prophecy. You may have heard it before but I'm going to say it, just so it's in the record for this debate: Only when the last tree has been cut, the last fish caught, the last river poisoned, only then will we realize that we can't eat money. It's a caustic assessment of the way we do development too often. But if we are going to be hopeful, if we are going to look to an example like the remediation of Victoria Island and say, "You know what? We don't have to treat reconciliation as a box-ticking exercise. We can do reconciliation in a way that confers decision-making power," then I think we can get past this colonial mindset of thinking that we know best, of thinking that experts that the government picks might know best or making sure that if we do pick an expert-driven process, that it's representative and inclusive of the people who have historically been given the obligation to make sure these lands are developed in a good way.

I also want to reflect on something related to this, Speaker. We can't get away from our waste, whether we're talking about waste water or whether we're talking about other kinds of waste. There's another debate in my community that is very resonant to this as well.

You and I, Speaker, have had the debate in the past on nuclear power; I know you're a big advocate of it—fair enough. But nuclear power and nuclear waste has a particular resonance in my community, in our community, because upriver from us, the federal government is promoting an enormous mound, an enormous nuclear waste facility that is the size of 72 NHL hockey rinks. It is a mound that will encase in concrete decades of nuclear waste. We already have an issue of nuclear waste in the Ottawa River. People are mindful about it. They are vigilant about it. But literally, Speaker, if you—and we can argue about this after the fact, when you're allowed to debate and not moderate the discussion. But when you look at the federal government's nuclear waste policy for the country, it's two paragraphs long.

Our country has been criticized by atomic scientists, by all Indigenous leadership in and around the Ottawa River, on which two million people depend for their water, for the way in which we are cavalierly thinking that we can massively expand nuclear power and not think about the waste.

I think about the health and well-being of anglers and fishers and people who hunt, people who use the water for their sustenance in their daily life or their ecotourism

operations. This is not a trivial matter and we cannot get away from our waste, and we can't say to another community that "if you don't do it upriver from me, in a place like Rolphton"—we can't go to another community and say, "Hey, can we put our waste deep into the ground in your community?"

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Maybe what we should be doing, guided by teachings that Claudette would point us to, maybe we should be thinking of how to produce less waste or no waste. Maybe we should be embracing the green energy revolution going on around the world, where we see other countries, like Denmark, taking the rooftops of hospitals and schools and churches and creating energy—creating energy that can put us on a path of actual harmony with our natural environment, not confrontation and not destruction.

I think about what Emery, my son, says to me all the time. He's obsessive about what I put in my lunches. He doesn't like when I put things in my lunches that come in disposable cases, right? So I picked up these little jars of pesto from the local grocery store. They come in little plastic things, and he gave me a really hard time. He said, "What are you doing? You and I can make great pesto, dad. We'll get the parmesan cheese, we'll get the pine nuts, we'll get the fresh basil and we'll spend an afternoon"—

Interjection.

Mr. Joel Harden: Garlic. Excuse me, you're right. I forgot garlic. How could I forget garlic? "We'll spend an afternoon making something together. We'll put them in little Mason jars and you can take them to Toronto." Right? So we can't get away from our waste.

I take seriously what my friends in government have been saying in this debate. From what I can tell, from the research I've been able to do for this debate this afternoon, people have been kicking this can down the road for a long time, and there are communities that are implicated by this. You can't pit one community against another and hope for a good outcome; there's not going to be a good outcome.

So what could a reasonable government do in a moment like this? Well, as we were asking through our questions and answers of previous speakers, what we could do is give people a reasonable expectation of who is going to be driving this process. So if you take one thing away, my friends, from what I've said this afternoon, I am telling you, inspired by my friend Claudette, that we need to have Indigenous leadership at the heart of this process, in a decision-making capacity, not as someone to be consulted. That's the first thing I want to say.

But then the second thing I want to say is that you have to give people a reasonable expectation of when a decision is going to happen about this. That's why we asked previously, the member for Humber River-Black Creek and I—we wanted to know from our friends in government, is this a decision that's going to be made before the next election? Are regulations going to pop out the moment this bill is passed by a majority government? Is this just going to rail ahead? Because that's pertinent

information. You don't break inertia by galloping past democratic process. You're going to miss insights. You're going to miss important insights that are going to guide how you do development.

Now, the member from Barrie–Innisfil, I know, speaks eloquently about her community and wanting to make sure there's certainty in planning and development in her community. I take that seriously. The member from Stormont–Glengarry—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Joel Harden: Pardon me. My neighbour—I should have gotten that right the first time—talks about the need to have reasonable prices in housing, and I have looked at the exploding housing market we've had in Canada with alarm too. There are families that just simply can't live in the downtown of Ottawa anymore. They're just being pushed out. So it's true: As a Legislature, we do have to make strong, decisive steps to make sure everybody can get an affordable home, whether they rent that home or buy that home. We should be working on this with a decisive mindset because there is an alarming amount of people in a very wealthy city like Ottawa living in shelter housing, living in dilapidated housing or not having housing at all.

So let's think about Bill 5 this way, folks: What is it going to do to set us on the real path to reconciliation? What is it going to do to make sure there's a democratic and transparent process that people can see coming and know they can contribute to? And how can it help us build homes that are more in concert, more aware of our natural environment, and not just look at it with that old mindset of thinking, "How can we get this done? How can we slap up enough homes and do this quickly?" Let's do it right.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Questions and comments? The member from Barrie–Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I was listening to the member and, certainly, when it comes to Indigenous communities, one, we don't tend to call them stakeholders, so I'm sure the member will correct his comments—but it's very important to work with them, of course, and with our Indigenous leaders, Indigenous communities. Certainly, that's a lot of work we've done around the Lake Simcoe Protection Act review as well. The point of the panel is to do that. Does that mean the member supports the bill and the panel so that we can include the consultations and include Indigenous communities, or does he not support it?

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you to the member from Barrie–Innisfil. I don't support the bill because I don't see transparency in it on how it's going to have a decision-making process that puts Indigenous leadership in a controlling, decision-making capacity in this process. Until I see that—and we have our own debates, quite frankly, as a caucus and we can assess if that actually is the case—I'm suspicious of where this is going to lead, because if you don't have the wisdom of thousands of years helping to guide development in this province, I fear we're going to continue to go down that path that I was

talking about in my remarks. We have to get this right. Reconciliation is not about consultation; it's about joint leadership and making sure that that happens.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further questions and comments? The member from—I just want to make sure I pronounce it right—Kiiwetinoong.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Kiiwetinoong. Meegwetch, Speaker. Thank you for the 20 minutes.

I know what we have heard from my colleague on the matter makes me think about the idea of free, prior and informed consent when we talk about Indigenous people. I think it's important—again, we've made reference about it. We've been here for thousands of years. We talk about environment. We talk about experts. We are our own experts. We don't need letters behind our names to be called experts.

I'm just wondering—I keep hearing about this "expert panel"—what do you think would be the value of having Indigenous people as part of the decision-making process on this?

Mr. Joel Harden: What I can tell you is that Wanda Thusky and Andy Decontie, who just won the remediation contract for Victoria Island, are bringing Algonquin leadership to the remediation of that place. That's why I have full confidence, as an Ottawa politician, that I support it, the community will support it and it will go well. What I would like to see, my friend from Kiiwetinoong, is that happen through this bill, written, baked into this bill: "Indigenous leadership." That would send out a big signal. It's a huge opportunity for the government to do that. If you put it, you're going to impress a lot of people around the world and you're going to put us on the right footing. So I would like to see an expert panel, frankly, be subservient to Indigenous leadership and government leadership on this.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: This has been quite a debate this afternoon, and I want to thank the member from Ottawa Centre for his comments.

I would like to ask him this question: By establishing an expert advisory panel tasked with working with stakeholders and also First Nations to understand their needs and wishes with regard to the project, our government is signaling our firm commitment that this be infrastructure that serves the people. Now, this expert panel could have people from First Nations on it. This will have to be established.

Does the member opposite agree that having these conversations is the right thing to do, or is it their intent to skip right over on proper—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Question? Member from Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Joel Harden: Sorry, I missed the last bit. "Skip over on proper consultation": That's what you said, right? Okay.

So, no, it's not our intent. In fact, our whole purpose here for the people of Ontario is to ensure that decisions in this place are made in a good way. To me, when I don't

even see in the bill before us this proposed expert panel or its composition, I get worried. I get worried because of the examples that I brought up from our community back home and things that I have seen here. If you wanted to reintroduce a bill that specified that decision-making power would be shared by Indigenous and government leadership, and that those two parties would make sure they drew upon subject matter expert panels, you'd have a persuasive case. But all I see here, frankly, my friend, is an opportunity for the government to try to break an inertia or deadlock by looking at reconciliation as a box-ticking exercise. And that's not what it is. It's shared leadership. You have an opportunity; you should take it.

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to my friend for his great speech.

You mentioned an article by Kate Porter from CBC, and I just happened to have the article sitting right in front of me when you said that. They hired a company who told the city of Ottawa it now costs \$465 per person each year to serve new low-density homes built on undeveloped land. On the other hand, high-density, infill development pays for itself and leaves the city with an extra \$606 per person per year, which is a huge, huge difference. That led one of the councillors to say, "We're about to pass a new official plan. I don't know that [residents] know it's about to cost them hundreds of millions, and into the billions, of dollars."

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A city like Ottawa, or anywhere else—when we start to talk about infrastructure and past legislation, shouldn't we be understanding how much it's going to cost and explaining that to our constituents?

Mr. Joel Harden: Absolutely. This is why the prospect of helping families live reasonably and live well, whether they rent or own, in the downtown is so important.

I didn't talk about it, but the big project we have under way in Ottawa, also overseen by the NCC, the National Capital Commission, is the redevelopment of LeBreton Flats. If we do that well, again guided by Indigenous leadership, guided by government leadership that begins the stakeholder process, that could help offer an opportunity, my friend, for families of all incomes to once again live in the downtown.

What's happening right now in Ottawa is that people who are of modest means, people who are working-class or middle-class, are getting pushed out. They're getting pushed out into suburban developments that, frankly, are not sustainable and are massively expensive. We have to find a way to work with the suburban developments we have. Those are our neighbours. I value them. We need to have transit there, power there, municipal services there.

And to move beyond the urban boundary just so we can slap up a whole bunch more homes of 45,000 people—I agree with you; it's a step in the wrong direction.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: I always love listening to the member from Ottawa Centre. He's very passionate about his community and very knowledgeable. We may not always agree on policy and procedure, but I do admire the fact that he gets up here and does what he thinks is best for his constituents and the people of Ottawa.

I'm very intrigued by this concept of talking about having Indigenous leadership as part of this "expert panel." From a practical standpoint, what does that look like? How do they fit into this? How would they be able to help inform decisions when we're talking about water flow and effluent and all of the good things that come from a sewage plant? Maybe tell us a little bit more about how you think that could work.

Mr. Joel Harden: Well, a serious counter-offer—thanks for the kind words; back at you. I've enjoyed talking to you over the last three years. I would invite you, and I'm happy to help the government follow through on these contexts, to talk to the National Capital Commission, and the process by which they've just now announced the remediation of Victoria Island, today, with Algonquin leadership and government leadership working together towards a plan that everybody is going to be—a bold prediction: In five or 10 years, this is going to be one of the best parts of Ottawa, Victoria Island. People are going to be excited about it. It's going to be a fulcrum of organizing for real reconciliation, but the decision-making process and who is involved and how it's rolled out is crucial. So today, we have a new beginning in the heart of our city. I would say the same thing could happen with this project. An open invitation: I'm happy to refer you to our friends at the NCC, our friends from Kitigan Zibi. Wanda and Andy would be happy to talk to you about the work they want to do. I think the same thing could happen with this project.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): The member from Algoma-Manitoulin for a short comment.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I always enjoy the member because he always brings it back home to, especially, his kids. We have a lot of conversations.

I've got a question for you from Emery. Emery would like to know—I don't know how old Emery is, but he would like to know: Why would the government implement a clause which would give them a free pass, or a no-grounding or a no-time-out process inside of their legislation? As you know, and as I'm sure you tell your son all the time, if it's wrong, don't do it.

Mr. Joel Harden: I think Emery wouldn't be down for that, although he has probably wanted to put Dad in a time out for a very long time.

We have to make sure that we can be held accountable for our decisions. So I take the member's point.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: I'm going to enjoy these next 20 minutes of not having to wear a mask, which is starting to become a little cumbersome in here as things get humid throughout the day, if you will, Mr. Speaker.

It's an honour, of course, to stand here for the first time in our second session of the 42nd Parliament and take part in this afternoon's debate. We've had a lot of chances to hear some different ideas on what this bill before us does, and I think today is a great example of our government's commitment to protecting the people of Ontario by working in collaboration with all levels of government.

I know that one thing that we've been really proud of through the pandemic in Waterloo region is the fact that all three levels of government have worked really well together. We've heard a lot of great comments from the community as to seeing that the federal government, of course, us, the provincial government and our municipal governments really worked together in their best interests.

I think that we've got an opportunity to do that here as well with this bill. I know that my constituents in Kitchener–Conestoga want to see strong measures in place to protect the environment and keep them healthy, balanced with a growing economy and infrastructure improvements, and that is exactly what this bill does—the York Region Wastewater Act, which is what it's entitled—and, of course, what it aims to do.

The region of York, as we've heard here a little bit this afternoon, is one of the fastest-growing areas in the province when it comes to population and economic activity, but that level of growth has put a strain on the waste water and sewage infrastructure systems. Two million people are expected to call this part of the province home by 2051.

Now, a little trivia to maybe liven things up this afternoon: Mr. Speaker, did you know that the top two fastest-growing communities in Canada are located in Ontario? That's right. According to Stats Canada in their January 2021 report, Oshawa and Waterloo region are the two fastest-growing areas in this country. Waterloo region is expected to grow to nearly one million people by 2051, and that's from the just over 600,000 residents that we have now, so we're essentially looking at doubling our population in the next 30 years.

So how do you support that level of growth and prepare for populations to double? This past year, I've made countless joint infrastructure funding announcements with my municipal and federal colleagues. By my estimate, over \$50 million in recreation and culture infrastructure funding has been provided through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program just in Waterloo region alone. On top of that, the province has stepped up to the plate to make it possible for the growing township of Wellesley to get a new arena, with a \$16-million commitment.

I've been told time and time again by my constituents that they never imagined the province would step up in the ways that it has to be there for them. They were ignored for 15 years by the Liberal government—and in the questions and comments today after we wrap up here, I certainly invite them to take part and maybe refute some of the things that I'm going to say. They've been ignored, those people in our rural townships, for 15 years by the Liberal government previous to us, just like countless other rural communities across the province.

These investments aren't just fun and games, Mr. Speaker. Nearly \$2 million also went to stormwater management improvements in Elmira.

We are here to support municipalities and their infrastructure needs, but at the same time, we're also a government that puts health and safety at the forefront. As has been demonstrated time and time again over the past year and a half, that is our number one priority. The impact that treated effluent in the East Holland River could have on Lake Simcoe is concerning and, as the member for Barrie–Innisfil has pointed out, our government has taken action to protect and restore Lake Simcoe, the largest inland lake in southern Ontario—of course, if we're not including the Great Lakes.

As an outdoorsman myself, protecting Ontario's lakes and keeping those ecosystems healthy is personally important to me. Every summer, the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry surveys anglers on Lake Simcoe. This is the longest-running fishery-monitoring program on the lake and provides vital information that informs our work at the ministry to restore the health of the lake. This survey also tells us how many anglers like me are out there enjoying Ontario's waterways.

In the past 10 years, one million hours on average were put in fishing on Lake Simcoe—that's a staggering amount, Mr. Speaker, when you think about it—and there has been a substantial uptick in people day-tripping to the area in the summer. Not only am I happy to see people getting out there and enjoying the outdoors, but these day trippers support the local economy when they eat at restaurants, buy bait and gas, or stop by a local outfitter.

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The resource-based tourism sector was especially hit hard during the pandemic, and keeping Lake Simcoe a premier destination for lake trout fishing is one way to support the numerous businesses that have been relying on outdoor enthusiasts for generations. We've done so much to improve the conditions of the lake over the past 30 years and are now starting to see cold-water fish habitats bounce back. But there is still more to do.

Moving ahead with a project that has not been evaluated to the fullest extent would be a step backwards in the wrong direction. It has been well over 10 years since the initial environmental assessment application to build this waste water treatment facility was filed. Making an informed decision means having the most up-to-date information possible, which is why we are proposing to pause the environmental assessment to get the advice of an expert panel, which we've talked about quite a bit here this afternoon, and really evaluate the best options possible. These experts would be from a variety of areas, including land use planning, watershed infrastructure—

Interruption.

Mr. Mike Harris: I'm going to ask the member from Haldimand–Norfolk maybe to stop squeaking his chair against the other chair beside him; it's a little bit distracting.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Sorry.

Mr. Mike Harris: That's not a problem.

But as we've talked about, this panel has the opportunity to be made up of experts in many facets and many forms, and I think when we look at the composition of it—certainly we've heard some interesting ideas today from the opposition and from us here as well on the government side as to what this panel should look like. Of course, this also would be people made up of the community, we've talked about Indigenous stakeholders as well, and trying to figure out the best way to make the composition of this up so it really does have the best impact on the community. This, of course, gives the people of York region confidence that their water resources will be protected by good decision-making.

One example of how informed decision-making guided by experts can improve a watershed is right in my backyard, Mr. Speaker. I'm talking about the Grand River watershed, which is the largest in southern Ontario. It includes 39 municipalities and two First Nations.

In 1998, the Grand River Conservation Authority, with the support of the provincial government of the day, launched a fisheries management plan that was completed to preserve and improve the waterway and really done to benefit future generations. The member from Oshawa, I believe, was talking about protecting our watershed for future generations earlier in her one-hour leadoff, and that's going to be a little bit of a recurring theme through the rest of my debate time here this afternoon.

Representatives from the fishing community, universities, agencies and, of course, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry all collaborated on an expert-led strategy that made a remarkable difference in the health of the river and the overall environment surrounding the waterway. What really set the Grand River Fisheries Management Plan apart was how it involved the public from the get-go.

I think this is a great example of the type of work that we are hoping to see with this new expert panel in York. Let's have specialists from across sectors and different fields come together and create a solution that not only addresses the waste water management system but also takes into account the bigger picture, because this work and the actions and results that we see out of it in Waterloo region have actually brought displaced species such as walleye back to some of the central portions of the Grand River. I promise I'm not going to start going into biology lessons on fisheries here this afternoon. I know the member from Oshawa was really looking forward to it, but I only have 10 minutes left and I literally could stand here all day, Mr. Speaker. You and I have had conversations about this before. Aquaculture is a big, we'll call it, economic driver in your region, and it's always great to get up there and see some of the good things that they're doing. I always like to get out any time we've got an opportunity to have a little bit of fish action involved; it's always exciting for me. But as I digress here, this management plan has really brought back a lot of these fisheries that had died off over the years.

Another interesting thing is, over 20,000 brown trout are stocked in the Grand River annually, and while not a

native species to the river—we do see a lot of rainbow trout in the lower Grand, as the member from Haldimand—Norfolk, I'm sure, has had an opportunity to get out and explore over the years. But while they're not a native species, the work done to restore the river, lower water temperatures and reduce erosion have made it an ideal ecosystem for these brown trout to be able to survive.

The Grand River Conservation Authority is also unique because of just how many municipalities are included within its jurisdiction. As I said before, they interact with 39 municipalities and two First Nations communities. The geography of the area that the GRCA is involved with varies from urban centres like the city of Kitchener, which I represent in my riding, to rural townships and farms. They work across sectors to improve the water in the river and protect the environment. The GRCA has put a rural water quality program in place where they work hand in hand with farmers to improve the quality of the water in and around their farms. This money goes towards a variety of projects, including control basins for erosion prevention, fencing to keep cattle out of the rivers, looking at different ways to improve watering systems etc. These are all very straightforward solutions that make a huge difference, not only in the quality of the water, but in the conditions of the farms. And farms are passed down from generation to generation, just like watersheds, Mr. Speaker, which we have talked about here this afternoon.

This program has helped farmers like the Dietrichs in Wilmot, who are able to upgrade their dairy farm to ensure that the milk house and manure pit are not impacting ground water, and the Dorens, who were able to plant trees along the river, which also acted as a wind break for their fields, resulting in higher yields of their crops for years to come.

As of December 2020, over \$20 million in capital projects have been completed through this program, Mr. Speaker, and it's a great example of how collaboration can bring about common-sense solutions that have a long-lasting impact, similar to what we are trying to accomplish here today with this bill.

Speaking of collaboration, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the role that the region of Waterloo plays in keeping our water clean in my community, and they are also looking forward to the future. It is this kind of forward thinking that is going to make it possible to accommodate all the growth that is expected in our community. It is not to say that the region of York has not done their due diligence, but rather that this issue was neglected for over a decade by the previous government.

The Planning Act obliges municipalities to ensure that there are adequate utilities and municipal services to accommodate growth. Waterloo region's yearly report on water and waste water measures outlines that each of their facilities are able to accommodate this. There are some areas, Mr. Speaker, that grow faster than others, and upgrades to these facilities are going to prepare for the development we are expecting to see and we have talked about, using that study, by 2051.

It wasn't so long ago that the region completed an environmental assessment for upgrades to the Kitchener Wastewater Treatment Plant. This is a massive project to improve the performance of our largest treatment facility that is connected directly to the Grand River. Plans for these upgrades began in 2008, just a few years after York region began their environmental assessment. While the work began in 2008, the environmental assessment did not face the level of delay that York region has seen. It will still take until 2022 for this work to be finished.

The project included the construction of a nitrification and tertiary treatment facility for enhanced phosphorus removal—those are some big words—and a bio-solid conversion plant that will reduce the amount of ammonia nitrate in the effluent by a further 75%, Mr. Speaker. It's a \$350-million project, a massive chunk of change that is worth every penny when you look at the difference it will make to the water quality that is returned to the Grand River.

The majority of the drinking water in Waterloo region comes from ground water wells, but there is a significant amount that comes from the Grand itself, and it's treated in the Mannheim Water Treatment Plant in my riding. That facility can treat 840 litres of water per second, or nearly 80 million litres every single day.

Once waste water leaves the treatment facility, it is about 95% free of contaminants. But while it is 95% clean, there are over 30 waste water treatment plants that lead into the Grand River, Mr. Speaker, so by the time water reaches Lake Erie, it has flowed by all of these facilities. Not surprisingly, that has an impact on the quality of the water. That's why a whole-picture approach is so important, in not just my community but anywhere that we're looking at doing this, because what happens on the riverbanks in Kitchener impacts the people in, let's say, Brantford and of course vice versa. Like I said, the watershed covers nearly 40 municipalities.

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Right now, Waterloo region has a waste water treatment capacity to accommodate the growth we are expecting until 2041. Now, that seems like a long time, but like I said, an upgrade to a plant has taken over 15 years to get from start to finish. So when the time comes to increase capacity, whether through the construction of a new plant or upgrades to an existing one, my constituents need to have the confidence that the plan will be backed by the best evidence.

As a parent of young children who I want to see enjoy the Grand River and Lake Simcoe well into the future, it is important to me that we make sure that we are not compromising the natural environment for the sake of growth. Water is something that is easily taken for granted here in Ontario. We've got roughly 250,000 lakes in this province. That's an unfathomable amount for many people around the world. But it is finite, Mr. Speaker. There will never be 260,000 lakes. So we need to protect the water that we have today.

The region of Waterloo, in partnership with the province, has put reasonable protections in place to keep the water coming out of the taps clean in my riding. And I will

repeat what my colleagues before me have said: We will not compromise our commitment to protecting Ontario's water resources. Ontario's drinking water will continue to be held to the highest safety standards and be amongst the best protected in the world. That's why we are calling on the House to support this bill so we can do further research and development for the best options for the people of York region.

The goal of this bill is to lay the foundation for a healthier, more prosperous York region, for the families and businesses that call it home and the ones that will in the not-so-distant future. I hope the members opposite share that same goal and want to join us in listening to the experts.

I called fishing our province's oldest hobby earlier, and the role that the waterways play in our history cannot be understated. They were the way we used to travel, the blueprints that laid where our cities were located. It is now up to us to ensure that they are around for generations to come. And that is not a responsibility that I take lightly, Mr. Speaker.

It is the responsible decision to take a request that was submitted 10 years ago and update it to the most current information possible. This way we can enhance it with the benefit of the latest science and the best evidence. I call on my colleagues from across the aisle and hope that they can see the benefits of this legislation and the changes that it proposes. This is a goal that we should all share: having healthy and prosperous communities that accommodate future growth for families and businesses.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for the opportunity to rise here today. I would like to congratulate you, as many others have, on your new appointment as Deputy Speaker here in the House, and a heartfelt congratulations to all of those who are also celebrating 10 years in the Legislature here today. It's something that I hope to aspire to myself, and maybe even stick around a little longer than that. So thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, everyone.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Burch: I want to thank the member from Kitchener-Conestoga for a very well-researched and informative presentation. A lot has been said about this expert panel. There is no mention of this in the bill, and I'm wondering why the government didn't take the time to put that into the bill and possibly embed some representation from the Aboriginal community in that. I think it would have been a good opportunity.

Secondly, if the government has already decided that the Durham option is what they are going with, then what would an expert panel be for? What would they be deciding?

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you very much to the member from Niagara Centre for the question. I'll address the second part of that and then we'll go back to the composition.

I don't think anything has necessarily been decided quite as of yet, and I think that that's what this expert panel is going to be there to look at.

When we talk about the composition, we've had some interesting discussions here today about what that might look like. I'm hoping that the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, who is of course here today and is listening—I'm sure that staff will be also listening to the conversations here today. When we look at the discussions that we've had, I'm hopeful that a lot of that will be taken into account.

But we do need to make sure that we do have expert city planners, that we have people who are involved in this on a daily basis really trying to drive forward the best solution and the most environmentally friendly solution for the people of York region.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Questions and comments? The member from Scarborough—Agincourt.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and on my behalf, congratulations on your appointment. I know it is difficult for the first few days, but I'm quite confident that you will be a fit for that chair and you will guide us through your wisdom.

My question is to the honourable member. The Great Lakes basin is responsible for 25% of Canada's food production and 30% of Canada's population, and contains 21% of the world's surface water. These vital and beautiful natural resources are the economic and cultural lifeblood of our province. Can the member please share with me some of the investments our government has made in these vital resources?

Mr. Mike Harris: Yes, absolutely. Thank you very much. It's a great question. When we talk about the Great Lakes, the Great Lakes basin, the tributaries to the Great Lakes and the watersheds that are impacted—when we irrigate our farms, when we're talking about food, we're often using water that would normally be going into or coming from that Great Lakes basin. When we look at Ontario's commercial fisheries sector, which is actually the largest inland commercial fishery or freshwater commercial fishery in the world, it's actually in our Great Lakes, and we need to make sure that when we're providing food, putting food on the table, we're doing it in a sustainable way and making sure that there is an opportunity for generations to come, like I said during my debate, to pass down to the next generation.

But when we talk about investments, we've made investments in clean water. We've made investments in litter day, which is a huge part of making sure that we keep our waterways clean. We've made investments in better farming practices, allowing, like I said during my debate, for programs to keep cattle out of the river—

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

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I'll give the floor to the member from Kiiwetinoong.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Speaker. In a very respectful way: I know one of the things that you said was "Indigenous stakeholders." We are not stakeholders; we are always partners, right? Just a friendly reminder.

Mr. Mike Harris: Absolutely.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Yes. But I think one of the things I heard the member from Kitchener—Conestoga talk about was fishing as a hobby. For First Nations and Indigenous people, it's a way of life. It's a livelihood for us. It's just so different. I see things with a very different lens.

I know one of the things he talked about was how they were ignored in his area for 15 years from the previous government. You know, I got running water in my home community in 1994; I got sewer in 1994. I've got one community that has had 26 and a half years of a water-boil advisory.

But I want to just ask this question: What type of contact has been made with First Nations, from the Mississaugas of Scugog Island and also—

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa:—from the First Nations?

Mr. Mike Harris: Absolutely, and apologies, for sure. I wasn't meaning to offend anybody with earlier statements—absolutely not stakeholders, for sure.

But I've actually had the opportunity, through the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, now the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry, and through the years of living in—I know you always joke about it with me—northern Ontario, not quite maybe as far north as you. But I have done some work with Nipissing First Nation and their commercial fishery program on Lake Nipissing and what that looks like and how we've been able to have a sustainable fishery there for both First Nations fishers and also recreational fishermen, and certainly being able to try and find ways to work together and further that consultation so that we're all able to share the land in the way that we want to be able to do it.

I know with this bill there is going to be a fairly robust consultation that will be taking place with First Nations communities in the area. I'm sure there will be more to come and develop out of those conversations.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): The member for Haldimand—Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I appreciate the comments on Bill 5 from the member from Kitchener—Conestoga. I just wanted to follow up on the fishing. I'm not much of a recreational fisherman, but two of my sisters are married to commercial fishermen. It's part of the livelihood in my family as well and we take that very, very seriously. There is the link.

To what extent can this expert panel be empowered to do a bit more work and give us a lot more information with respect to the status of the fishery in Lake Simcoe itself? You've done work on the—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I'd ask that you put your question through the Chair, please.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Sorry. I hate having someone at my back. But you know about that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): You have 10 seconds. Ask your question, please.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Okay. What kind of fish have we got left in Lake Simcoe? That's what I'd like to know.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you very much to the member from Haldimand–Norfolk. I promise I wouldn't make any funny faces behind your back if your back is to me, so don't worry.

Listen, I think there's an opportunity, when we look at what this expert panel can do. There's obviously a lot of work that's been done over the last few years in Lake Simcoe and getting a better handle on what the fishery looks like there. When we're crafting this and looking through what the expert panel may be able to come up with, I'm sure there's definitely going to be some fisheries studies that will be part of that; obviously, looking at environmental impacts. I think there is a good opportunity through this to gain a little bit more insight into what's happening in Lake Simcoe.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: I always enjoy my discussions that I have with the member from Kitchener–Conestoga. We've often met downstairs when we had receptions—something that we dearly miss at Queen's Park.

What I did want to tell the member earlier—it's not a question; I just want to make a suggestion and a statement, because earlier you asked a question to the member from Ottawa Centre with regard to the benefits and the hows

and the whos we should approach, from a First Nations perspective, to come to the advisory and the benefits that would come out of that. You shouldn't be asking that question to him; you should be walking across and having a discussion with the member from Kiiwetinoong. I think he'd have a lot of insight as far as how to help that. A lot of us, and I'm—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): A long time to answer.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'm not even going to pretend like I have all the answers myself, but it's having that discussion and having the guts to really pushing yourself to stepping out of your bounds and out of the colonial system to approaching an individual like the member from Kiiwetinoong to really understanding why we have to do it.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you to the member from Algoma–Manitoulin. Yes, I do miss enjoying the odd libation with you at the receptions that we do so dearly miss. But just to be very clear, I have absolutely no problem coming to meet with the member from Kiiwetinoong. He and I have actually had a few discussions over the last few years, so I'm always happy to have a chat.

Report continues in volume B.

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vijay Thanigasalam
Rima Berns-McGown, Faisal Hassan
Logan Kanapathi, Michael Mantha
Jim McDonell, Christina Maria Mitas
Sam Oosterhoff, Kaleed Rasheed
Donna Skelly, Vijay Thanigasalam
Vacant
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Taras Natyshak
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Deepak Anand, Toby Barrett
Jessica Bell, Stephen Blais
Stephen Crawford, Rudy Cuzzetto
France Gélinas, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Taras Natyshak
Michael Parsa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Logan Kanapathi
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Fraser
Will Bouma, John Fraser
Logan Kanapathi, Vincent Ke
Laura Mae Lindo, Paul Miller
Billy Pang, Jeremy Roberts
Dave Smith, Daisy Wai
Jamie West
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Deepak Anand
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Bhutila Karpoche
Deepak Anand, Aris Babikian
Jeff Burch, Amy Fee
Michael Gravelle, Joel Harden
Mike Harris, Christine Hogarth
Belinda C. Karahalios, Bhutila Karpoche
Natalia Kusendova
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tanzima Khan