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Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott  
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 17 November 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE  
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 17 novembre 2020

*Report continued from volume A.*

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PRIVATE MEMBERS'  
PUBLIC BUSINESS

FREEING HIGHWAYS 412 AND 418 ACT  
(TOLL HIGHWAY AMENDMENTS), 2020

LOI DE 2020 SUR L'UTILISATION  
SANS FRAIS DES AUTOROUTES 412 ET 418  
(MODIFICATIONS CONCERNANT  
LES VOIES PUBLIQUES À PÉAGE)

Ms. French moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 43, An Act to amend the Capital Investment Plan Act, 1993 and the Highway 407 East Act, 2012 with respect to toll highways / Projet de loi 43, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1993 sur le plan d'investissement et la Loi de 2012 sur l'autoroute 407 Est en ce qui concerne les voies publiques à péage.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield):** Pursuant to standing order 101, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** I am very pleased to be able to rise in this House and debate my private member's Bill 43, Freeing Highways 412 and 418 Act (Toll Highway Amendments) 2020. I tabled it two years ago, and the day has finally come.

Speaker, folks are familiar with the 407 ETR, and if you drive far enough to the east, it becomes the 407 East extension. Both the 407 ETR and the 407 East were built with public dollars and both are tolled, but unlike the 407 ETR, which got sold by the Harris Conservatives for a song, the 407 East is still public and actually costs less per kilometer to drive. And while we're here, I would be happy to get this on the record while I have the chance: Minister and government, do not sell the 407 East, please, ever, or any other of our public assets.

The province and public dollars also built two north-south connector highways, the 412 and the 418. They are new and wide-open and could serve the region very differently than they are. Unfortunately, despite the fact that they are perfectly good 400-series highways, they often sit empty. The last government surprised municipalities and communities when they decided to make these two highways toll roads. While it was the last government that saddled our region unfairly, it now falls to this government to do the right thing by the folks of Durham.

Speaker, a bit of history: This was a really hot issue across the region leading into the 2018 election. Municipalities were passing resolutions. There were advocates and folks who signed online petitions. In fact, I'll read you some comments.

Deep Rock says, "The government has treated the residents of Durham region with disdain regarding the 412. Please remove this unfair toll which is an outright rip-off. Quite the traffic nightmare this causes daily."

And Charlene Miskolczy says, "I moved to Whitby from the west where I regularly and very freely used the connecting Highways 404, 400, 410, 427 and 409. I was very surprised to learn that using the 412 came with a toll charge. How is this fair or equitable to the Durham community or those to the east? Many don't use the 412 because it's cost-prohibitive. It's a shame as it could really help more with 401 congestion."

Speaker, those are two of the over 2,500 folks who signed a grassrootschange.org petition to remove the tolls from the 412.

We all knew in 2018 that this was a hot issue. In fact, I will read to you from the PC Party News part of their Plan for the People. This was back on June 3, 2018, a release called, "Removing tolls from the 412 and 418 a priority for PC MPPs in Durham region."

"Today ... the candidate for Whitby announced that if the PC Party forms government, the first priority of Durham region PC MPPs will be to advocate strongly for the removal of the tolls from the 412 and 418 highways, running north-south between the 401 and the 407."

"All Durham candidates believe removing the tolls from the 412 highway and not tolling the 418 is the right thing to do as it will help keep life more affordable for families and drivers in Durham," said Coe. "Removing the tolls will also help to reduce traffic congestion on our local roads and allow people to spend more time with their family and their friends."

Speaker, I agreed with that statement. In fact, I made the same promise. The difference was that I followed through. In 2018, as a re-elected member, I had a public transportation town hall and heard loudly and clearly from folks that this is a matter that matters to families. I made a commitment. I tabled legislation to remove the tolls from the 412, 418. And here we are today—the government has a chance, two years later, to pass my Bill 43 and commit to folks across Durham region that they will indeed do what they said.

Municipalities have also been fighting to free the highways from the very beginning. In fact, this is from the

February 2019 budget submission; Regional Chair John Henry of Durham region said this:

“This is a long-standing issue for Durham region and we were pleased that all the successful Durham MPP candidates in the June 2018 election campaigned in favour of removing the tolls from the local links connecting the 401 to the 407. In every other community across the greater Toronto area, provincial freeways connecting to Highway 407—including Highways 400, 403, 404, 410 and 427—are free to use....

“By exempting the links from the tolls, the province would treat Durham residents fairly compared to their neighbours and encourage drivers to use the new highways taking the pressure off the 401 and local roads.”

He echoed that in the most recent budget submission, as well.

I happen to have here a letter from Don Mitchell, the mayor of Whitby, who said, “The core issue is unfairness. These are the only north-south 400-series roads tolled in the GTHA. The province has added up to eight new lanes to 427 since the 412 opened and, with the exception of one HOV lane, they are all toll-free. There should not be one set of rules for the west side of the GTHA and a different set of rules for the east side. Whatever the provincial policy on north-south 400-series roads, it must be consistent and equitable.”

The folks from Whitby came to AMO—most people in this room would have heard those pleas to remove the tolls.

I have here a letter from Mayor Adrian Foster of the municipality of Clarington, who wrote, “I am writing to voice my support for your private member’s Bill 43....

“Durham residents have often expressed their concerns of tolling on the 407 connectors and feel that they are being treated unfairly....

“Freeing the highways from tolls will be for the betterment of the whole region of Durham.”

So, Speaker, many folks support this.

Clearly, this is an issue for communities, for the residents, but it also resonates with business. When I introduced this bill, I got a lot of support. Many of the letters were unsolicited, so it was that important.

I got this letter: “On behalf of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, I am writing to express our support for Bill 43, the Freeing Highways 412 and 418 Act....

“Tolls on Highways 412 and 418 have put businesses in Durham region at an economic disadvantage, especially as similar corridors are not tolled elsewhere.... Further, tolls divert traffic to nearby downtown areas and other north-south routes, increasing gridlock and putting additional pressure on local infrastructure.

“As one of the fastest-growing regions in Canada, it is critical that Durham region be able to move people and goods efficiently.”

That’s from Rocco Rossi, the president and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

I have a pile, Speaker. I would tell the story myself, but I’m happy to share the voices of those who support this and want this to happen.

This is from the Greater Oshawa Chamber of Commerce: “Tolls are costly to our members and their employees and do nothing to alleviate the key transportation issues facing our region....

“With the continued growth in Durham region, tolling these roads exclusively in our market does not support an ‘Open for Business’ strategy,” said Kyle Douglas, board president, Greater Oshawa Chamber of Commerce.

Kyle Paterson, board president of the Whitby Chamber of Commerce, wrote, “The Whitby Chamber of Commerce supports the private member’s bill introduced by Oshawa MPP....

“In April of this year, joint chambers and boards of trade of the Durham region, representing 3,000-plus members in our business community, held a transportation round table identifying key transportation priorities. The tolling of Highway 412 in Whitby and Highway 418 in Clarington is inconsistent with the approach of other 400-series highway connector roads in the rest of the province.”

Speaker, last but not least in this pile is from Nicole Gibson, the executive director of the Ajax Pickering Board of Trade, who wrote, “This matter was ranked as the most important local transportation issue in the Ajax Pickering Board of Trade’s 2019 government relations survey. Our members placed the removal of tolls just ahead of full connectivity between Durham Region Transit, Toronto Transit Commission and Metrolinx, and the further expansion and investment in highway infrastructure.... By tolling these major arteries, the province has likely pushed highway traffic on to residential streets. Further, it has created an economic disadvantage for those local businesses relying on north/south highways. This includes our local agriculture businesses.”

#### 1810

Speaker, I think I’ve made the point that many people support this, but you might be wondering what the government members think. Well, I look forward to hearing what they think today, but right now what we know is that the minister seems to be dragging her feet on this, as we are waiting and waiting for an MTO study.

This is from DurhamRadioNews.com, called “MTO Studying Possibility of Cutting Tolls from Highways 412 and 418.” This is a quote from the MPP from Whitby: “What the minister has agreed to do is undertake a study to assess the economic impact of the tolls on surrounding areas and assess reducing the rates or removing the tolls.” The MPP from Durham is quoted as saying, “We were deep in the red as a province when we took over.... If we weren’t paying that we could take off the tolls tomorrow.”

Speaker, I don’t know where we are today. I’m really looking forward to that part of the debate. I sat across from the Minister of Transportation at committee and I’ve asked her about this. It seems from where I sit that they’re wanting to kick the can down that wide open underutilized roadway and kill the clock. However, people need this government to make the decision now. I invited the minister to come and sit at the side of the road and count the cars, maybe on one hand, so she can tally the revenue herself—it might be possible. I would encourage the

government to either commit to the region and work out the details to make it happen, or they need to walk back their original campaign promise and tell us that they don't care about fairness for our region.

Speaker, the Premier said that he would love to get rid of the tolls. He said, "We want to eventually eliminate them, once we pay for the infrastructure on the highways." Well, here's the thing: Removing the tolls in 30 years or so is not what my Durham region colleagues on the other side promised before the last election, which brings us to today. Today we debate a bill that has been sitting waiting for two years, a bill echoing the calls of a united region. The government has two choices: They can vote to pass the bill and move forward to remove the tolls or they can throw it in reverse and back away from their commitment.

I am really hoping that today is the day that the government will say, "Yes, finally, we've figured this out. We're willing to commit to remove the tolls from the 412 and the 418." It's a fundamental matter of fairness. Yes, it is a commitment that they made. It is a commitment that we all made. There are seven members elected to represent the Durham region, and all seven of us have been hearing it non-stop. So I really hope that I'm not in this alone and that, indeed, the fine folks across the Durham region will get what they need and deserve, which is a little bit of help when it comes to the costs and affordability.

I am looking forward to the debate and finding out what the decision will be, and so are many folks, families and businesses across the Durham region.

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

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** It is a pleasure to rise in the House this afternoon in my role as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation and speak to Bill 43, Freeing Highways 412 and 418 Act (Toll Highway Amendments), 2020. I would like to thank the member for Oshawa for bringing forward this important issue for debate today.

Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by saying that the Minister of Transportation and I understand the economic difficulties that Ontarians are facing during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a member of this government, there is nothing more important than making life more affordable for the people of Ontario. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the need is pressing, now more than ever.

I would like to inform the House how the Ministry of Transportation addressed affordability concerns when the COVID-19 pandemic first hit Ontario with respect to King's Highways 407 East, 412 and 418. Thanks to the Minister of Transportation's strong leadership, the ministry swiftly acted throughout the spring to suspend the collection of interest on unpaid toll fees from Highways 407 East, 412 and 418; extended the validity of government driver, vehicle and carrier fees; and froze the scheduled consumer price index increase to toll rates on Highways 407 East, 412 and 418, which were scheduled to come into effect on June 1, 2020.

Additionally, the Minister of Transportation and I took time to consult with our caucus colleagues, the President

of the Treasury Board, the Minister of Finance, the chief government whip and the parliamentary assistant to the Attorney General, on ideas to make these two highways more affordable for the residents of Durham region. Today, I have one message to the people of Durham, and that is we are listening to your concerns thanks to the strong advocacy of these four MPPs—the Durham four.

Highways 412 and 418 were two highways that were delivered as part of the broader Highway 407 East project, which brought Ontario's first publicly owned and controlled toll highways. Highway 418 is a 10-kilometre north-south link that connects Highway 407 East from Taunton Road to Highway 401 in Clarington. Highway 412 is an 8.9-kilometre north-south link in Whitby that connects the same two highways. Both highways are important routes that support the movement of people and goods within the region of Durham.

Let me be clear: I plan to support this bill in principle at second reading. This bill would benefit from further study and examination at committee, because there are various impacts, such as legal and contractual obligations that must be properly examined before making a change to the tolling approach for Highways 412 and 418. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, as previously communicated by the member for Whitby, the ministry is finalizing a study to review the economic impact of the tolls. This study, in addition to examining and understanding our legal and contractual obligations, is an essential piece of information we need so that moving forward we have an informed and productive discussion to determine a path forward.

Once again, I would like to thank the member from Oshawa for bringing this bill forward for debate. I also want to thank again the Durham four for the productive discussions we have had with both ministers on this topic. I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate this evening.

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

**Miss Monique Taylor:** I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 43, Freeing Highways 412 and 418 Act, brought forward by my colleague from Oshawa. She has been a great advocate and a fighter for her community and a champion for removing the tolls on Highways 412 and 418. As long as she has been in this House, we have seen her fight for her community and defend it from unfair treatment. This bill is an example of that hard work.

The tolls on Highways 412 and 418 disproportionately hurt the people of her community. Durham region families want to be able to move through the region without sitting in traffic. These are new highways and they are ready to be used by the people of Durham, but most people simply cannot afford the cost. The government has promised to remove the tolls on these highways. In fact, the member from Whitby made this as an election promise in 2018. Yet, here we are today and we still have seen no action. Fortunately, the people from Durham have the member from Oshawa on their side. She promised to work on getting the tolls removed in the last election and introduced the bill to remove them right away.

Ultimately, the question of tolls on these highways is a question of fairness for the people of the Durham region. All of the other north-south highway links between Highway 401 and Highway 407 are toll-free. That's the 403, the 427, the 404, the 400 and the 410—all of these are free to use for commuters and they all connect to the privately owned tolled portion of the 407. For some reason, the 412 in Whitby and the 418 in Clarington, which are the north-south highways in the Durham region, are tolled. What's worse is that these tolled highways connect to the Ontario-owned portion of the 407 East. The 412 and the 418 are lightly used and have the capacity to take on additional drivers, while the areas around them, like the parallel local roads, are completely congested, making a lower quality of life for the people in those communities.

1820

We need the Premier to act to eliminate these tolls. Businesses will benefit from the removal of these tolls too. To quote the CEO—and I believe it's a different quote from what the member used—of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, in a letter to the Premier last month he wrote:

“On behalf of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, I am writing to express our support for Bill 43, the Freeing Highways 412 and 418 Act....

“North-south transportation is critical to Ontario's economy. It allows businesses to connect to markets and supply chains, communities to attract and retain workers, and tourists and residents to travel across the province.

“Tolls on Highways 412 and 418 have put businesses in Durham Region at an economic disadvantage, especially as similar corridors are not tolled elsewhere.... Further, tolls divert traffic to nearby downtown areas and other north-south routes, increasing gridlock and putting additional pressure on local infrastructure.”

Eliminating tolls is a good thing to do for residents and good for businesses. This is a no-brainer, especially if you're working towards an eventual economic recovery from COVID-19.

I read some of the comments from an online petition, and one caught my attention. I'll read it into the record. Her name is Irene Perch:

“I have a son that has autism and other disabilities, and when I have to take him to SickKids, the 401 gets way too busy to be sitting in traffic, and my son has a meltdown because we are not moving. It is not like they deal with children like this, and they don't understand what parents go through, so sometimes I have to take the 407 and that costs money, and then I have to pay for that, and then I am left with no money for his meds and other treatments that he needs. Now this 412, I think it is ridiculous that they are going to have two pay highways. We are all not rich. Everyone is making it day by day.”

That's a constituent who has to face these highways on a daily basis, particularly when her son needs medical attention. So I want to thank her for those comments. There were tons of comments on there, but that one definitely caught my attention.

I'm happy to vote in favour of this bill. I want to thank my colleague for continuing to fight for the removal of

these tolls. Government members promised to do this during the last campaign, but as you can see, Oshawa and Durham region need a fighter like the member from Oshawa to keep this government honest.

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

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** It's an honour to stand up today to discuss this important private member's bill. I'll be splitting my time with the member for Ottawa South.

I understand that this is an important pocketbook issue for the member and the people and constituents and families that she represents. Why are they forced to pay when others in the region are not? What is the economic development impact of having these tolls on Highways 412 and 418, and how is that slowing down growth in her community? These are important questions that need to be asked and understood. Because of that, we will be supporting passage of this private member's bill to second reading.

But I think it's important to be intellectually honest with residents, Mr. Speaker. In one breath, the NDP is saying, “Don't develop on sensitive lands. Invest in public transit. Don't encourage sprawl.” And in the other breath, they're saying, “Let's scale back on road tolls; let's encourage economic development on sensitive agricultural lands,” and so forth. They can't have it both ways.

The NDP needs to decide if they are for public transit or they're not. For years and years and years, they voted against Ontario Liberal plans to expand transit across the province. For years and years and years, they fought against those plans to extend light rail in Ottawa, as an example, where the NDP and their allies on Ottawa city council are promoting congestion tactics downtown all the time. So it's important that the NDP be intellectually honest with the residents of Ontario.

I feel for them and I feel for the member from Oshawa, because like in Oshawa and Durham, residents of Orléans have also been betrayed by Conservative promises on highways. For years and years and years, Conservatives would come to Orléans, promising to upload Highway 174 back to the province: “If we ever form a government, we'll upload Highway 174.” In fact, the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario made that promise for many years, Mr. Speaker—a previous leader, I should say. For years and years and years, the candidates would come and trawl this little promise to the residents of Orléans and say, “Vote for me; vote for me. We'll upload the highway.”

Well, they formed the government, but the residents of Orléans were smarter. They knew it was a bait and switch, so they never voted for a Conservative member. Lo and behold, guess what? The Conservatives have never kept that promise in the two years that they've been here. So I feel for the member for Oshawa and how the Tories like to bait-and-switch highway promises in order to try to win elections.

In order to better understand the economic development impact of removing these tolls, in order to understand the revenue loss to the treasury while the Tory government is running record deficits—deficits we have never seen before in the history of Ontario—we'll support this bill going

to committee, so we can get those kinds of answers and understand exactly what the impact of this will be for the residents of Oshawa and Durham and, in fact, all Ontarians.

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

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** It's a pleasure to join the debate today. I want to commend the member from Oshawa. Whether it is GM or education or worker safety, she's a strong advocate for her community and continually brings the voices of her community to this place, and it's a good thing.

I'm a little bit taken aback by the member from Orléans. I will just say, it's good to know the file before you stand up and start pointing fingers, because it was actually the Liberal government that blindsided the Durham and Oshawa communities by adding tolls. That was not part of the contract. It was not the social contract; it wasn't the transit contract. It was really the privatization agenda that we saw from the former Liberal government, and I highly suspect that's why that whole side of the Legislature no longer has Liberal seats—just to put that on the record.

It's interesting to hear what the government side said to this bill as well. I think I heard the parliamentary assistant say that they're going to cap the tolls and maybe freeze the interest on the tolls. That is not what the community is asking for. That's not what the member from Oshawa has asked for. That's not the economic case. That makes so little difference in the grand scheme of what this community is going through.

She's made a strong point that this is ultimately about fairness. The community, as I've said, was completely blindsided by the tolling of the 412 and the 418. They make a very legitimate case for a review of this strategy, given the fact that there are the only two north-south highways leading to another tolled highway in the province of Ontario. Why specifically target this community? Why specifically disenfranchise the businesses in this part of Ontario? So it doesn't make any sense from that perspective.

On a go-forward basis, what we've had here is that the former Liberal government tagged on those tolls in an effort to generate revenue, which they desperately needed because they ran the province into the ground. They're very fond of privatization. But the government side, including the Premier of this province, said, "No, the tolls have to go. I would get rid of those tolls right way." It's a matter of public record. Well, I would like to let the Premier know, he is entitled to do that. The members who stood in their place and who made this promise to the community need to follow through on that. When you do say things to your community in this manner, they expect you to at least push the agenda, to at least come to this place and say, "Listen, these are the economic cases; these are the environmental cases for removing the tolls."

1830

The congestion around particularly Harmony Road: If you're a commuter, like most of us are, and you hear Harmony Road on the radio, that's really synonymous with congestion or gridlock. There's nothing harmonious about

Harmony Road because people are actually using that to avoid going on the 412 and the 418. So you've really pushed all of the congestion away from these roads that were meant to actually, and designed to, relieve the congestion in those communities.

Let's talk about the economic case of congestion, please. The OECD did an evaluation of the economic impact of the movement of goods. In the GTA, they incurred—there's a cost to this; there's a cost to not having people go on the roadways with easy access because they don't want to pay the tolls, and it's likely an affordability issue—\$3.3 billion in lost productivity. The annual economic cost from transit costs is \$2.7 billion. There is a direct hit on productivity, especially in sectors dependent on rapid delivery, like retail and logistics and food.

But there is also a much greater toll—I know the member from Oshawa also cares about this—from pollution. That's estimated as a cost to Ontario's economy of \$7.8 billion in lost productivity and health care costs, pain and suffering, and premature loss of life—estimating 440 premature deaths annually to pollution. Much of this is attributed to poor interregional transit integration, which means that people are driving longer, sitting in their cars longer, not getting to their families, not getting to work on time.

The parliamentary assistant mentioned that we're in a pandemic. Yes, we need some good news. The people of Oshawa and Durham and Whitby need some good news. If you want to help them, remove the tolls on the 412 and the 418.

There is also an additional cost around greenhouse gas emissions, around wasted fuel: \$3.3 billion. Ninety per cent of the \$3.3 billion is the value of the time lost to auto travellers in congestion. That's also from the OECD.

There are many good reasons to do this. There are many good reasons to do this in a pandemic. The issue of fairness is a real issue. The residents and citizens of Oshawa, Durham and Whitby, they have a right; they are right in feeling that this is unfair. That is why we have brought this to the floor of the Legislature.

One last quote: This is from Whitby mayor Don Mitchell. He says that elimination of those tolls can't come fast enough, and he has been advocating for their elimination since Highway 412 opened several years ago: "There was a large commitment before the last election by all the Durham area MPPs to get rid of those tolls, but they're still there. That's not a good sign. But another election is coming in a couple of years."

We shouldn't have to lurch from election to election. The people have an expectation that we will follow through. The minister is just studying and studying this and has been questioned in estimates and is just passing the buck to the Liberals. Well, it's time to take responsibility and take action. Let's make this a Ford government's "Promise made, promise kept." How about that? Let's work together and reach across the aisle. Let's get this done. Let's honour the people and those voices of Oshawa and Durham and Whitby, and let's remove the tolls. Let's do it.

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

**Mr. John Fraser:** I want to congratulate the member for bringing this forward. She's done what members are supposed to do. Her community has obviously spoken out, said they're very concerned about this. This community has been particularly hard-hit. It doesn't matter what colour sweater you wear, that's what our job is.

I do want to say, though, to the member from Waterloo, who I have a great deal of respect for: When you said we ran the province into the ground, I thought you were sitting over on the other side.

Here's the thing: We've got to get this bill to committee, because we have to understand what our choices are. Because it's all about choices, folks. Everybody says, "Don't run a deficit," but that member says, "I need a school. I need a hospital. I need a road. I need a public transit system." It's all about choices. We can't choose everything. So to suggest that we can choose everything is not real. That's the point the member from Orléans was trying to make: We can't choose everything.

I support the member in her effort. Let's get it to committee. Let's see what her choices are.

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

The member for Oshawa has two minutes to respond.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** I appreciate hearing that the government will "support in principle" Bill 43. I'll take what I can get today; although, I'm not surprised that it's not a whole-hearted, enthusiastic, supportive response.

However, passing this bill on to committee—and for the folks at home, it goes to committee or it just sits somewhere in the ether and never get pulled to committee, and we wait and we wait and we wait and then there's the next election. So hopefully, passing this bill will actually—maybe it will then go to committee, and the government can look at the whole one page of it, take it apart and figure out which parts need to be fixed. It's either take out the tolls or don't.

The bill is pretty darn uncomplicated. The process to getting there: I'll leave that to the government, but either you will or you won't. Passing it to make us go away isn't going to cut it, because this issue has been driven by the communities, and they will not take their foot off the gas until it gets done. I hope that it is indeed a real commitment to remove the tolls and to respect Durham region.

The last thing that I will say is I'm happy to quote, from Whitby This Week, an article entitled "Durham PCs Need to Get Behind Oshawa MPP's Private Member's Bill."

"French ... concludes, quite rightly, that the tolling of Highway 412, and also on Highway 418 ... unfairly targets Durham residents...."

"So, here's hoping the provincial Conservatives put political stripes aside and take up the cause of Jennifer French's private member's bill to kill the Highway 412 and 418 tolls. Durham residents need and deserve it."

Speaker, that's the sentiment that is across the broader Durham region. I am disappointed that my colleagues from the Durham region who are here today chose not to

get on the record. But I'm looking forward to the vote tomorrow. I hope that everyone supports it and, indeed, passes it into law.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield):** The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Ms. French has moved second reading of Bill 43, An Act to amend the Capital Investment Plan Act, 1993 and the Highway 407 East Act, 2012 with respect to toll highways.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being requested, the vote will be deferred until after question period tomorrow.

*Second reading vote deferred.*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield):** Now, pursuant to standing order 36, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

## ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

### LONG-TERM CARE

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield):** However, the member for Ottawa South has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Health on testing in long-term care. The member will have up to five minutes to debate his issue and make his point, and the minister or her parliamentary assistant will have up to five minutes to respond.

We turn now to the member from Ottawa South.

**Mr. John Fraser:** I first want to say thank you, Speaker, for being here, the table, everybody who's here for this late show. The late shows are a bit later right now, so I try to be judicious when I ask for one. But I was particularly disappointed with the answer that I got, and I'll explain why.

Since the start of this pandemic, we have all been very concerned about what's happening in Ontario's long-term-care homes. We knew that our most vulnerable were there. Sadly, in the first wave, we saw a lot of suffering in long-term care. Almost 2,000 residents died. Now, we're in the midst of the second wave of COVID-19, and since mid-September, 244 residents have died—11 residents yesterday—and there are 108 homes in outbreak.

Those are numbers, and there's an epidemiologist who says—I can't remember his name, but the quote is, "Health statistics" are "people with the tears wiped off." All these people are brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, maybe aunts and uncles, or friends, and we have to remember that they're people.

**1840**

Part of the point of my question is it's really discouraging and disheartening, not for me but for those families out there who currently have someone in long-term care or

who lost a loved one, to hear the minister say, “The majority of homes aren’t in outbreak. The majority of homes don’t have resident cases. The majority of homes have less than five resident cases.” Well, the reality is you could have said that last spring, too. Here’s the point: You can’t minimize COVID-19. We have to protect every resident. It’s not just good enough to protect most of them; it’s all of them.

One of the biggest problems and biggest risks we have in long-term care is crowding. We know that four-bed ward rooms are a risk, and the government did the right thing by not moving any new residents or residents back into four-bed ward rooms once they’ve left, but there isn’t a plan for those people who are in four-bed ward rooms in those homes across Ontario. In some places, they’re putting up Plexiglas dividers in rooms.

We built a field hospital in Burlington, so we’ve made accommodations to build temporary capacity in hospitals. I would like someone to explain to me the difference between a patient in a hospital and a resident in long-term care, why we’re not making that same effort to find places so we can get people to safety and make sure they’re in safe places. We know those rooms are dangerous. When you have an outbreak, it’s like tinder. You don’t have to be a doctor or a nurse or an epidemiologist or a public health expert to know that if there’s an outbreak in an older home with four-bed ward rooms, bad things are going to happen unless you can isolate those people.

The government has been slow on a number of things, but the thing that concerns me most right now are those patients who are currently in four-bed ward rooms across this province, and there are no plans in place to make another temporary space for them to protect them. We’ve done it in hospitals; it’s all hands on deck. We built a field hospital in Burlington and we’re building something in Ottawa that may come by the spring.

The thing is, action during this pandemic needs to be taken quickly. There needs to be a decision to say residents in long-term care deserve the same kind of treatment. We can’t minimize what’s happening in there. We have to try to protect every resident in long-term care. If we don’t do something to be able to get people out of four-bed ward rooms, especially when there’s an outbreak, then we’ve let them down.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield):** The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Long-Term Care will have up to five minutes to respond. I turn now to the member from Oakville North–Burlington.

**Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos:** I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the concerns of my colleague the MPP for Ottawa South. I believe the question he raised in the Legislature to the minister was all about testing in long-term-care homes, which is a very important priority. We have lost too many of our loved ones to COVID-19, and our hearts go out to them and their families. Nothing is more important than the health and well-being of the people of Ontario, especially our most vulnerable residents in long-term-care homes.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, our government has worked tirelessly to slow the spread of COVID and keep people safe. We have put a robust testing strategy at the centre of our plan to combat COVID and, in the past six months under this government, our testing strategy has seen an increase in our COVID-19 testing capacity from 4,000 to approximately 50,000 tests a day. That’s a 10-fold increase in capacity. With the hard work of the Premier and the Deputy Premier, the Minister of Health, our government has increased our province’s testing capacity to more than 45,000 tests a day in less than six months.

This increase in capacity was only made possible by our collaborative partnership among Ontario Health, Public Health Ontario, our hospital partners and private labs across the province working together. We took the previous government’s disorganized and decentralized lab system and created a world-class lab network that is seeing close to 80% of test results returned within two days. This comprehensive testing strategy has also seen over 5.5 million Ontarians tested to date, more than any other province in the country.

In order to build on these successes, our province introduced our comprehensive \$2.8-billion Keeping Ontarians Safe plan. This plan will see over \$1 billion invested in our province’s testing and lab systems. This will ensure any Ontarians who need a test can get one and receive their results promptly. This investment will also include hiring over 1,500 more dedicated staff, including lab technicians across the province, to complete case and contact management. These added investments will make sure that our labs have the funds needed to achieve provincial testing targets, ensuring long-term-care residents and staff receive timely test results. The sooner we can test and trace a confirmed case of COVID-19, the sooner we can isolate them and prevent the spread of the virus.

I would also like to remind the member that long-term-care homes in the province have strict protocols in place that mandate staff and residents are to be tested regularly. Furthermore, Ontario Health has made it clear that long-term-care homes and other congregate care settings have priority at provincial labs. This ensures our vulnerable care settings can receive results swiftly, allowing them to stop or limit the spread of COVID-19.

While there were a number of tests awaiting results this fall, the situation has now stabilized, and we will continue to work to ensure Ontarians are receiving their tests in a timely manner. Our government will continue to work with Ontario Health and sector partners on ramping up mobile and community testing, and having targeted testing campaigns for vulnerable populations across the province.

We know that families of residents in long-term-care homes want to see their loved ones stay healthy, and we also know that family visits are vital for mental health for residents and those they love. That’s why we must get testing right. It’s vital to ensure residents are safe and that visits can continue. We are committed to ensuring the province has the resources necessary to protect Ontarians and to combat this virus.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield):** Members, we're almost out of here. We have one more to go. I thank you for your good behaviour so far this evening.

#### WORKERS' RIGHTS

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield):** The member for Scarborough Southwest has given notice of dissatisfaction to a question that was presented to the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development. The member will have up to five minutes to state her case, and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Labour will have up to five minutes to respond.

I turn now to the member from Scarborough Southwest.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** Last week, I addressed the House about the injustice faced by Cosmetica workers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. In this House, I asked this government to support workers in workplaces like Cosmetica where workers were threatened with losing their jobs if they missed work because they were afraid of contracting the COVID-19 virus.

Mr. Speaker, the Ford government has ruled Cosmetica, a makeup factory—as I've repeated many, many times in this House—a makeup factory to be an essential business. As a result, Cosmetica has been forcing workers to continue working during the pandemic, while endangering not only these workers, but also their family and their loved ones.

1850

After taking advantage of so many vulnerable workers who, despite their worries, went to work, facing threats and risking COVID-19, Cosmetica fired 180 hard-working employees, many of whom did not receive their record of employment or any details about the severance or exit packages. Many of these workers are racialized women who have been working there for more than a decade. After the company actually hires these workers for about three to five years on a contract or temporary basis, they then give them permanent status.

After all of that, while Cosmetica gets special treatment from this government, 180 workers lost their jobs. A few weeks back, we actually heard from the member from Scarborough Centre that she herself, along with the minister of red tape reduction, visited Cosmetica. In the name of red tape reduction, this government has trampled over workers' rights and is now refusing to give them their record of employment.

Mr. Speaker, 180 workers lost their jobs. This was their livelihood. Is this what red tape is: making it easier for large businesses like Cosmetica to fire workers without giving them the necessary documentation; and the fact that workers now have to fight to get their documentation of just the record of employment?

I want to repeat: This is not an isolated event. This is not an isolated incident, and certainly not limited to Cosmetica. My office has received so many calls during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it was so difficult for workers to find safety in their workplaces because they had set up a system where inspectors would call and find out from

management whether the workplace was safe or not. Despite numerous positive tests, all workers were not asked to quarantine. One of them recently was a Tim Hortons near my office in Scarborough Southwest.

But what Cosmetica did when they had a positive COVID test recently was they told their employees that they had the member from Scarborough Centre, the local MPP, visit Cosmetica, and therefore everything should be okay.

Last week, when I asked the Minister of Labour my question to help these workers to have their record of employment, I wasn't asking for much. I just want these workers to know whether they got enough pay or not, whether their severance packages make sense, so they could actually file a complaint or figure out what they could do to fight for their rights. So last week, when I asked the minister for their record of employment, for his support, he gave the toll-free 1-800 number—shameful. Calling a help line is not enough for businesses taking advantage of the crisis and failing to protect workers. We need sweeping, preventative legislation that protects our workers in such situations like right now.

After firing 180 workers so that Cosmetica, like many factories, could actually hire employees on the cheap through agencies—because that's exactly what they're doing right now, and there are no consequences for Cosmetica and other organizations that are doing the exact same thing—and then not giving an ROE and severance information that they're legally entitled to, this minister asked that these vulnerable employees expose themselves individually, which they're afraid to do, and then ask for their ROE.

Why can't this government—a government that claims to be for the people—just ask an organization to give them their record of employment?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield):** The parliamentary assistant, the member from Burlington, will have up to five minutes to respond.

**Ms. Jane McKenna:** I'm pleased to rise this evening in response to a question posed by the NDP member from Scarborough Southwest regarding our government's commitment to supporting Ontario workers.

I'd like to begin by referencing section 6 of the current standing orders. This section sets out the rules for debate, and item (h) talks about allegations made against another member. I'm mentioning this because, in the lead-up to her question, the member for Scarborough Southwest asked the minister, "What backroom deals were made with Cosmetica after they fired 180 workers?"

Speaker, we all know that the Ministry of Labour, regardless of which party forms the government, has a critical enforcement role, a responsibility to ensure that Ontario's labour laws are being followed. That's why the Minister of Labour must always—and I repeat, always—remain neutral. Whether that company is Cosmetica or the neighbourhood corner store, all employers are held to the same standard. The opposition labour critic, the member for Sudbury, reminded the House about this when he said, "It's essential to the process that the minister and the Ministry of Labour remain neutral at all times."

The health and safety of workers in this province is our top priority. That's why on March 19, just two days after Ontario declared a state of emergency due to COVID-19, our government, with all-party support, passed Bill 186 to amend the Employment Standards Act. This change provided job-protected leave for workers who were unable to work because they are either self-isolating or caring for a loved one—including workers at Cosmetica.

The layoffs at Cosmetica are very unfortunate, but our government has stood with these workers. We acted quickly to provide support. Within hours of learning of these layoffs, the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, reached out to Cosmetica, just like we do with any layoff or closures impacting 50 or more workers.

Our rapid re-employment training service is one of many ways we are working to help workers who have lost their job. It's our mission to ensure employees are aware of the resources and supports available to help them find their next job. We also do this through our action centres, which provide one-on-one peer counselling and job search assistance. Jerry Dias, the national president of Unifor said, "The government's investment in the action centre is a vital one and will provide workers with the employment and retraining assistance they need."

Last November, I opened an action centre in Thunder Bay to help Bombardier employees. The president of Unifor Local 1075 in Thunder Bay, Dominic Pasqualino, said, "Unifor Local 1075 appreciates this opportunity to

work with the ministry to support our laid-off workers at this difficult time in their careers."

The ministry has resources in place to ensure workers have the help they need, and that's exactly what happened with Cosmetica Laboratories in Scarborough. We first reached out to Cosmetica on June 25, and by August 28 we had hosted four training sessions described as "very informative" by the workers. We stayed with these workers until we were told they did not require any further assistance.

To this day, we have not received a single complaint from these employees, so it is absolutely false for the member from Scarborough Southwest to stand in this Legislature and say that we are not supporting the workers of Cosmetica Laboratories. Our government has taken decisive, necessary and difficult choices to address—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield):** Excuse me. I would ask the member to withdraw.

**Ms. Jane McKenna:** Withdraw.

We've made these choices always with an eye to Ontarians' well-being as our top priority. Thank you for letting me speak, Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield):** Thank you, all. There being no further matter to debate, I deem the earlier motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

*The House adjourned at 1859.*





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Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Parm (PC)	Milton	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
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Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
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Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
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Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
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Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
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Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
<b>Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)</b>	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
<b>Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)</b>	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
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Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
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Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
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Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

<b>Member and Party / Député(e) et parti</b>	<b>Constituency / Circonscription</b>	<b>Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités</b>
<b>Walker, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (PC)</b>	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Associate Minister of Energy / Ministre associé de l'Énergie Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
<b>Yakubski, Hon. / L'hon. John (PC)</b>	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
<b>Yurek, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (PC)</b>	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

**Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses**

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns  
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Wayne Gates  
Lorne Coe, Rudy Cuzzetto  
Wayne Gates, Randy Hillier  
Andrea Khanjin, Jane McKenna  
Judith Monteith-Farrell, Michael Parsa  
Randy Pettapiece, Donna Skelly  
Peter Tabuns  
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /  
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Amarjot Sandhu  
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeremy Roberts  
Ian Arthur, Stan Cho  
Mitzie Hunter, Logan Kanapathi  
Sol Mamakwa, David Piccini  
Jeremy Roberts, Amarjot Sandhu  
Sandy Shaw, Dave Smith  
Vijay Thanigasalam  
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Julia Douglas

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité  
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Présidente: Goldie Ghamari  
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Mike Schreiner  
Robert Bailey, Jessica Bell  
Goldie Ghamari, Chris Glover  
Mike Harris, Daryl Kramp  
Sheref Sabawy, Amarjot Sandhu  
Mike Schreiner, Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens  
Daisy Wai  
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité  
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Président: John Vanthof  
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Taras Natyshak  
Will Bouma, Lorne Coe  
Robin Martin, Norman Miller  
Taras Natyshak, Rick Nicholls  
Billy Pang, Amanda Simard  
Marit Stiles, Nina Tangri  
John Vanthof  
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Julia Douglas

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de  
la justice**

Chair / Président: Roman Baber  
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Effie J. Triantafilopoulos  
Roman Baber, Will Bouma  
Lucille Collard, Parm Gill  
Natalia Kusendova, Suze Morrison  
Lindsey Park, Gurratan Singh  
Nina Tangri, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos  
Kevin Yarde  
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité  
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Président: Kaleed Rasheed  
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vijay Thanigasalam  
Rima Berns-McGown, Michael Coteau  
Faisal Hassan, Logan Kanapathi  
Jim McDonell, Christina Maria Mitas  
Sam Oosterhoff, Kaleed Rasheed  
Sara Singh, Donna Skelly  
Vijay Thanigasalam  
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent  
des comptes publics**

Chair / Présidente: Catherine Fife  
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas  
Deepak Anand, Jill Andrew  
Toby Barrett, Stephen Blais  
Stan Cho, Stephen Crawford  
Catherine Fife, France Gélinas  
Christine Hogarth, Daryl Kramp  
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: Deepak Anand  
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Fraser  
Deepak Anand, Toby Barrett  
Will Bouma, Stephen Crawford  
John Fraser, Laura Mae Lindo  
Gila Martow, Paul Miller  
Billy Pang, Dave Smith  
Jamie West  
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de  
la politique sociale**

Chair / Présidente: Natalia Kusendova  
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Aris Babikian  
Aris Babikian, Jeff Burch  
Amy Fee, Michael Gravelle  
Joel Harden, Mike Harris  
Christine Hogarth, Belinda C. Karahalios  
Terence Kernaghan, Natalia Kusendova  
Robin Martin  
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tanzima Khan

**Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight /  
Comité spécial de la surveillance de la gestion des situations  
d'urgence**

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp  
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Tom Rakocevic  
Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson  
John Fraser, Christine Hogarth  
Daryl Kramp, Robin Martin  
Sam Oosterhoff, Lindsey Park  
Tom Rakocevic, Sara Singh  
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos  
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell