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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 18 November 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 18 novembre 2020

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ANNUAL REPORT, AUDITOR GENERAL

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table the 2020 Annual Report of Environmental Value-for-Money Audits and the Operation of the Environmental Bill of Rights from the Office of the Auditor General.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECT, SUPPORT AND RECOVER FROM COVID-19 ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2020

LOI DE 2020 SUR LA PROTECTION, LE SOUTIEN ET LA RELANCE FACE À LA COVID-19 (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 17, 2020, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 229, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact, amend and repeal various statutes / *Projet de loi 229, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter, à modifier ou à abroger diverses lois.*

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll ask for questions to the member for Scarborough–Guildwood. The member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you, Speaker, and good morning.

Last night, I found out that COVID-19 has exploded in our city, one where the numbers have been very low. The news that we got from the public health officer and the hospital were quite dire. The hospital in Thunder Bay is the one that services an area the size of Paris and is the only lifeline that we have.

What I would like to know is, what kinds of supports for hospitals did you want to see in the budget?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I want to say thank you to the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan for the question. As I said in my comments yesterday, it was very disappointing that the budget did not have funding in place for public health units across this province, especially because the government is expecting public health units to

act faster than the government itself. So if that's the expectation, then there should have been funding in numbers that can deal with the rate of the spread of the virus.

The fact that it's multiplying quickly in Thunder Bay, in a community where previously it was not, is really very concerning. We know that the positivity rate in Ontario is approaching five, so that does mean that it's putting more and more communities at risk. So I wanted to see more funding for health, and public health specifically, in this budget.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Will Bouma: Mr. Speaker, through you to the member from Scarborough–Guildwood: If I'm not mistaken, as outlined in Ontario's 2020 budget, our government is taking steps to protect people from this deadly virus by increasing our health investments to \$15.2 billion. Will the member opposite be supporting this unprecedented investment in public health?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: The member is not accurate; the government has only invested \$100 million in public health dollars specifically, and that was a previous announcement. In the current budget, there is no new spending for public health, and I believe that that's a missed opportunity. Also, the health spending that you might be identifying does not keep up even with the rate of just normal costs, inflation-type costs. It's below 2.5%, and that's for acute care and hospital care.

I believe that the budget falls well short when it comes to investments in public health and in overall health. When you consider the fact that we are in a health crisis that is threatening the lives of people in our communities—I spoke about my community of Scarborough–Guildwood. There are neighbourhoods where the positivity rate is 11%. What are we doing to invest more in those hot spots and provide relief for places like Thunder Bay that are now experiencing outbreaks?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: I'm wondering if the member could comment on the fact that food bank use has gone up over 50% during the pandemic, and that is even including the fact that there are all these additional food resources that have come online, like Sandwich Sisters from Beaches–East York, who are providing enormous amounts. But still, traditional food bank use has gone up over 50%, yet there's nothing in the budget to deal with poverty.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank the member from Beaches–East York. It's such a critical question in terms

of what we're doing for people who are in poverty. I've certainly been asking, and I know other members of the House have been asking, about the emergency benefit that was part of wave 1. Why is that not part of wave 2 for people who are on OW and ODSP in this province? They're crying out for more supports and more resources.

I believe that it is cruel of this government to not be providing additional supports for people on disability and on income supports in this province, because we know that the cost of the pandemic has increased for everybody else, including them. So why are they now frozen and not receiving those emergency benefits? It's really a travesty that people have to go and rely on food banks, like in my community of Scarborough where the increase is even higher.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think part of a budget is also preparing for the future. The member served a long time in government, and I wonder if she would help me understand some of the rationale or the thinking during her time in government. As you know, Mr. Speaker, we inherited a massive debt and deficit, one of the largest in the world. But moreover, there had been no planning done by the previous government with respect to centralization of procurement. There had been no planning done to improve PSW wages. There had been no planning done to increase the supply of PSWs. There had been no planning done to increase home care in the province of Ontario. There had been no planning done to reform health care in the province of Ontario in the previous government.

I was part of a federal government that was transferring 6% a year for health care to the provinces. At no time over that 10-year span did the previous Liberal government ever get close to investing the 6% transfer.

So I'm wondering if the member opposite could give us a bit of an understanding why her previous government that she was a part of didn't make those decisions that would have helped us during this pandemic.

0910

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, there isn't enough time to address the government House leader's question in a substantive way, but what I can say is that your government is responsible for the current response to the pandemic. You promised an average of four hours of care for long-term care. That was supposed to be the hope. It was not in the budget. You didn't put it in the budget. There are no dollars associated with those words, and that's a disgrace. You have \$13.4 billion sitting in reserves and in unallocated funds. You could have done it, and you missed the opportunity.

What we did as a former Liberal government was that in 2018 we handed you an economy that was growing—the lowest unemployment rate in decades and the highest GDP of the OECD countries. Don't squander it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: My other question is related, but it's about homelessness. We are about to vault

into a degree of homelessness in this province that is absolutely unprecedented. There are already a thousand people on the street in Toronto more than there are beds or spaces in shelters, respite centres, drop-ins, emergency areas, and evictions are about to vault that into the stratosphere. And yet there is a piddling, token amount in the budget towards dealing with this homelessness crisis. What does the member have to say about that?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member from Beaches–East York that this government is really just ignoring the affordable housing crisis in this province. And it's not just in big urban centres in the GTA that we're seeing this problem; we're seeing it in many communities where housing affordability is just not there. There's no strategy, no funding, no investments.

To be honest, I think that this government is sitting on its hands and waiting for the federal government to do all of the work, as has been done in the COVID response, where the federal government has footed the bill for 97% of what has been funded so far in the COVID response and the provincial government has paid for 3%.

When it comes to housing and homelessness, this government is absent.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to ask a question.

Time and time again, we have heard from employers considering Ontario as a place to locate or expand their business who decided to go somewhere else because our province's electricity costs were just too high. Will the member opposite be supporting our government's comprehensive plan to reduce job-killing electricity prices?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I thank the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville. I spent the first part of my career in economic development, and really, the number one reason that companies locate in Ontario is because of the skills and talents of our people. That is the number one reason.

This government has cut almost a billion dollars from OSAP, has cut education funding. And actually, to go back to the previous question, it is not investing in the future of this province by investing in education. I think that's the number one reason companies locate here. When you inherited government from the former Liberal government, we were number one in foreign direct investments.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Lindsey Park: It's a pleasure to rise this morning to speak to Bill 229, the Protect, Support and Recover from COVID-19 Act, 2020, and specifically to speak about how this is going to help people across the province of Ontario and my constituents in Durham.

This budget, as presented by our Minister of Finance, outlines our government's investments to protect people's health and support their economic well-being through the second wave and any future waves of COVID-19. This budget builds on the rapid investment in health capacity and broad emergency financial relief, which began back in

March and continued through the first wave of the pandemic in Ontario.

This budget also begins to build the foundation for a strong economic recovery, which we know will not be a short-term project. This budget sets out a total of \$45 billion in support over three years as our government makes available every necessary resource to protect Ontarians from COVID-19, to support families, workers and employers, and to remove barriers to our economic recovery to make sure we can protect and create jobs in our community, now and into the future.

We understand that this level of government spending is neither sustainable nor desirable over the long term. But as our Minister of Finance has stated, it's necessary, as we find ourselves in the middle of a second wave and continue to battle this global pandemic.

This budget will increase our investments in health care, with \$15.2 billion in new funding. This continues our government's series of significant investments in the health care sector over the last many months, which we've all heard about on a daily basis. These are investments to increase our hospital capacity, both acute and critical care capacity, to increase our public health capacity, to increase testing and contact tracing, and to invest in PPE.

Since it seems the opposition and the independents have trouble reading the budget, I'll read directly from it, on page 31. They seem to have just not found this part in the budget, Speaker, since it comes up in almost every question. This is page 31. I'll give you all a chance to turn to it. It says, "Highlights of the \$7.5 billion in new funding include:

"Increasing average daily direct care from a nurse or personal support worker ... per long-term care resident to four hours a day over a four-year period, making Ontario the leader among Canadian provinces in protecting our seniors." I'm proud of that commitment and I'm proud of the investments our government is making.

With my time today, I want to highlight a few things in this budget that my constituents in Durham will be pleased to see. The first specific new measure in this budget I want to highlight is the Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit. In my riding of Durham, there's a growing community of seniors, and this is a tangible measure to help keep them safe as they age.

For many seniors I've met in Durham and people planning for their retirement, it is their preference to stay in their homes as they age. However, the expenses associated with adapting and renovating their homes to meet their needs as they age can be a significant expense.

Starting in the 2021 taxation year, the Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit will help with those expenses. This will be a 25% tax credit available on eligible renovations of up to \$10,000 to help seniors stay safe in their homes longer by making their homes safer. This is great news for seniors in Durham. It means a senior in Courtice or a family in Port Perry with a grandparent living in their home would receive \$2,500 back for a \$10,000 renovation to make their home safer. They can use this tax credit on their current home or use the tax credit for a new home they intend to

live in, or a new apartment or condo. If they choose to live with other seniors, perhaps to make their living arrangement more affordable, they could also use it on that new living arrangement.

I think anything that increases housing options for seniors is a good thing. There is no one silver bullet. Everyone's needs are different. Some seniors prefer to live in a retirement community like Wilmot Creek in Clarington. Others prefer to live in a community that has a long-term-care home co-located with a retirement home, like Port Perry Place and Port Perry Villa. Others choose to be innovative, like the Golden Girls of Port Perry, and renovate a home in a co-living arrangement with other seniors. Our Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has put out a guide for seniors that want to pursue this mode of housing. Still, others prefer to live in their home that they raised their children in and have so many memories in as long as they possibly can live there with the support of home care.

0920

Housing for seniors is not a one-size-fits-all proposal, nor should it be. No matter which living arrangement a senior prefers, this tax credit will help make their home more comfortable, accessible and safe as they age. This could help to make, for example, a washroom accessible in their home, or even to enable first-floor occupancy or a secondary suite for a senior. Again, our Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has put out a guide on how to build a secondary suite in your home, and he's made it a lot easier.

Eligible expenses for this tax credit will include things like grab bars and related reinforcements around a toilet, tub or shower in a washroom. They also include wheelchair ramps, stairlifts and elevators.

This investment, which operates like a refund, will help tens of thousands of seniors stay in their homes they love longer and is available to every senior, whether they pay taxes or not.

If this bill passes, this new tax credit would provide an estimated \$30 million in support that would benefit about 27,000 seniors—pardon me, people, because that can include seniors and people who live with senior relatives. Bottom line, this tax credit will enable more seniors to continue to live at home and age in place.

Other measures in this budget to support our seniors—I'll just quickly highlight, in the interest of time—include providing \$75 million in relief by doubling the guaranteed annual income support payment. That will benefit 194,000 of our lowest-income seniors in Ontario. We're also allocating \$16 million to the Ontario Community Support Program to help deliver 230,000 meals and other essentials to low-income seniors and persons with disabilities.

We're also increasing funding to the Seniors Active Living Centres Program by 22%. That's significant, Speaker. Both the Bowmanville Older Adult Association and the Oshawa Senior Community Centres have benefited from this funding in previous years, and so I'm so pleased to learn of how this increased funding will benefit seniors' centres across the province in tangible ways.

These are all measures to support the generation that has gone before us and built up our communities. These measures in budget 2020 will support our seniors now and into the future. As the member for Oakville North–Burlington said yesterday, our seniors “deserve our recognition, our respect and our thanks.”

Another investment I want to highlight in budget 2020 is one that supports our youngsters, and that is our Support for Learners initiative. We all have friends with young children who are adapting to this learning-from-home environment, just like all of us are adapting to working from home more than we were used to before—I think we all now have Zoom backgrounds set up in our houses. With this initiative, we’re supporting families with young children with another round of support payments that will add up to \$200 per child under 12 and \$250 per child or youth with special needs under the age of 21. This initiative assists with added costs associated with COVID-19, such as technology for online learning.

This means, to just provide an example, a family with three young children in north Oshawa, one of whom has special needs, would receive \$1,300 in 2020 to support costs related to educational supplies and technology. Examples of how this could be spent might include the cost of an accessible workspace or a new device to facilitate online learning. These kinds of supports will go a long way to help families in Durham.

This builds on the extensive investments our government has made in education and supports for families over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of our commitment to keep students safe, we made available \$1.3 billion to support the safe reopening of schools—the most robust and comprehensive plan in the entire country. Investments are also being made in new programs to help kids learn online and in a digital learning portal, so that parents and students can easily access the curriculum.

Our government also continues to invest heavily in our brick-and-mortar schools, with \$13 billion committed over 10 years, including \$1.4 billion this year and \$1.9 billion next year. That’s to build new schools and improve existing schools in Durham and all across Ontario. As part of this plan, we recently announced a new Catholic high school, the new Paul Dwyer, as well as a new public elementary school in north Oshawa, a growing part of my community.

Speaker, the Support for Learners initiative is a \$380-million investment our government is making, and that is \$380 million that will go directly to families. This is also part two of this initiative. During the first wave of the pandemic, you will remember that we invested \$378 million in Ontario families—direct support—with a first round of payments.

This budget is also going a long way to support businesses in my constituency through this very challenging time and into the future. As I’m sure all of us in this chamber can attest to, it has been very difficult to witness the very real effects of this pandemic on our small businesses. In my own area in Clarington, according to the last Clarington Board of Trade business development update,

since the pandemic began, approximately 15 local businesses have permanently closed, and with them nearly 60 jobs lost.

The continued state of economic uncertainty is a challenge for businesses struggling to stay open. However, the silver lining is that because of the many supports our government has put in place in partnership with other levels of government, and with the enthusiastic and loyal support of Ontarians who have heeded the call to buy local, most businesses have so far been able to keep their doors open. Incredibly, according to the same report from the Clarington Board of Trade business development update, during the same period, 13 new businesses opened in Clarington, creating approximately 42 new jobs.

I want to repeat a statistic that the Premier mentioned yesterday in the House, and that’s that Ontario has actually increased manufacturing jobs to a level that exceeds pre-pandemic levels. This is thanks to the continued leadership of our Premier, our cabinet and our world-class workers and businesses in Ontario. The recent announcement that GM is returning more than 1,400 jobs to Oshawa in Durham and bringing back truck production at the Oshawa assembly plant has been a huge encouragement to our region at this difficult time.

Speaker, local businesses have contributed in an incredible way to support our community during this pandemic, and in this budget we’re continuing to support them. I’m grateful for businesses such as Canada Rubber Group in my riding and All or Nothing Brewhouse in Oshawa, two businesses that rose to the challenge and adapted to the impacts of COVID-19 by pivoting their operations to produce, in the case of Canada Rubber, PPE, and in the case of All or Nothing Brewhouse, they pivoted from beer to hand sanitizer and distributed the supplies to local hospitals, front-line emergency workers and utility companies.

Local businesses have supported our community, and we, as members of the community and members of government, need to continue to support them. One local business I want to highlight that our government has recently supported, Speaker, and been able to help during the pandemic, is 3Beez.buzz. It’s a small bee farm that sells local natural wild honey and beeswax candles from the Enniskillen Valley. Thanks to a recent grant from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, they’ve been able to invest further in their e-commerce to increase sales on their website—something that is top of mind for business now. We all continue to read, I think every day, how the e-commerce market is continuing to grow and we need to help businesses tap into that.

0930

Along with the Ministry of Agriculture grants, we also have the Digital Main Street program that’s been introduced, a joint effort between the federal and provincial government to support other main street businesses in that way. Speaker, the additional supports and investments within this budget will certainly help many businesses keep their doors open and continue to reach their clients into the future.

We understand, as a government, that we need to attract economic and corporate investment back to Ontario, and

that means bringing competitive electricity costs back to Ontario. That's what we're doing for our industrial and commercial employers. We know that Ontario's high cost of electricity has been a competitive disadvantage when businesses consider where to expand, invest or set up shop. This budget has a plan to reduce that unnecessarily high electricity burden which, let us not forget, Speaker, was put on their backs by the previous Liberal administration, who signed unaffordable contracts with non-hydro renewable energy producers.

I want to emphasize that while our government is seeking to address that problem with this budget, we would not need to do it at all if it were not for the flawed and foolish energy policies of the previous administration. Our government continues to clean up the financial mess of the previous government and dig our province out of the grave of their bad, ideologically driven energy policies.

Just as a contextual reminder for everyone, in 2009, the Liberal government introduced the Green Energy Act, which led to high-priced contracts for electricity derived from wind, solar and bioenergy. Speaker, they signed thousands of these bad deals: 20-year contracts locking us in to paying above-market electricity rates. This has been painful for the people of Ontario, and we're working to remove that pain.

If Bill 229 passes, starting on January 1, 2021, a portion of the costs of these contracts will now be funded by the province for commercial and industrial job creators. Obviously, the savings for businesses would be significant, depending on the size of the enterprise. Medium-size and large industrial and commercial employers would save about 14% and 16% respectively, on average, on their bills, starting in 2021. And I think the main thing I want to highlight from this, in the interests of time, is this will bring us back into alignment with our competing jurisdictions. We'll finally be able to compete with some of the states to the south of us for jobs in the electricity space, and we know that this is one of the major factors—fixed costs—that they look to when deciding where to locate.

There are lots of other supports for businesses in this budget, but I'll just end with a quote from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, just one stakeholder among many that are supportive of this budget, Speaker. They endorse this measure that I just highlighted, saying, "CFIB welcomes the news that the government will cut energy costs for businesses with the global adjustment on their bills by an average of 14% to 16%. This will bring much-needed relief to many medium-sized manufacturers and high energy users who have fallen between existing program cracks and have been struggling with uncompetitive energy costs for ... years."

Speaker, we're finally bringing a competitiveness lens to our energy policy and planning in the province of Ontario. You'll see that in this budget and you'll see that into the future from our government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I just want to do a comparison. The Ontario Liberals had a Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit. When they introduced it, they had an

amount of \$70 million. And back in 2016, because the fund was unused most of that fiscal year, they actually cancelled the plan. This government's plan for making it safer for seniors to stay home has a \$30-million amount in it. So I would like to ask the member what kind of research was done, compared to \$70 million—there was no uptake—and the \$30 million that's in here now? How are they going to educate people? Did they find that there were people coming forward asking for this? Will it be used this time around?

Ms. Lindsey Park: Well, I've certainly heard of the need over and over. I got to know many of the stakeholders in this space from my work on my Golden Girls Act and the needs of seniors, and creative ways renovating homes can really make a difference.

At this point, you never do know until you see who applies what the exact final amount is. I think it's clear in the budget when you read it that this is an estimate. That's what you do when you start out these programs: You estimate about how many people are going to apply, and you provide for that in the budget. That's what a budget document does. It sets out an envelope and a best estimate at the time that it's printed. I think that's reasonable.

I know I'll be doing my part in my community to promote this tax credit. I hope everyone in this House will, because it will really be a tangible benefit to the people of Ontario and to our seniors.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Ontario's action plan, based on three pillars—protect, support and recover—is the next phase of the most comprehensive action plan in Canada to respond to the serious health and economic impacts of COVID-19. My question to the member from Durham is, can the member please share what our government is doing to protect the health and well-being of Ontarians during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Ms. Lindsey Park: I want to thank the member for that question and take the opportunity, the small amount of time I have here, to just highlight the \$15.2 billion available in support for our front-line health care heroes and to protect people from COVID-19 that we've invested. This included supporting 141 hospitals and health care facilities and 626 long-term-care homes since the start of the pandemic.

We've also been providing an additional \$527 million to ensure Ontario hospitals have the necessary resources to continue to provide care for those who need it. That means, in total, hospitals will receive \$2.5 billion more this year than they did last year. Those significant investments will go a long way to helping fight the battle against COVID-19.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you very much to the member across the way. You talked about the stability of hydro as a need for industry, and I agree with you. It's the same for you and me in our very homes.

I guess my question is a very simple one. Your government ran last election on reducing hydro rates by 12%. You're almost three years into your mandate this spring, and hydro has actually gone up since you came to office. What does that do for stability when the price is going up, when you promised it was going to go down?

Ms. Lindsey Park: As I highlighted right in my speech, we're reducing rates by 14% and 16% respectively for commercial and industrial employers through this budget. That's a reduction. That's going to make us competitive with our neighbours to the south once again.

This is one of the top things we heard of why businesses were thinking of closing up shop and leaving. This will help GM when they open up in Oshawa again to stay competitive and keep those jobs here now and into the future.

I'm proud of this work we're doing to clean up the Liberal mess they left to the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions? The member from Brantford–Brant.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you, our government truly understands that the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a significant toll on the finances of our seniors. I thought it was very nice of the member to delve deeply into that in her speech this morning. But I was wondering if she could share with the House and expand a little bit more on what our government has done to support seniors through this crisis.

Ms. Lindsey Park: It's not only our government that's been helping seniors; it's the whole community and every level of government that has come together to support our seniors during this difficult time.

Examples: They were called the Care Mongers in Durham, which was just a community-based volunteer initiative that came together to drop off essential needs—groceries, health care products, things like that—to our seniors living at home.

I highlighted the investments we've made in our long-term-care sector that we're continuing to make again. We have committed to increasing the average daily direct care from a nurse or personal support worker per long-term-care resident to four hours a day, over a four-year period. The average right now, by most estimates, is about 2.5 hours a day, so that's going to make a significant difference for our seniors in long-term care, going forward.

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I know the opposition is supportive of that. This will make Ontario the leader among Canadian provinces in protecting our seniors.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions? The member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I love the way you say that. Thank you, Speaker.

Thank you to the member from Durham. I always enjoy her remarks, and listening to the initiatives for seniors, that was interesting and exciting on what's happening in your area.

The timing of this budget is very important. We are in the second wave. We are in a crisis in this province. You

can't have a conversation without COVID being talked about. We know that there are workers who have no choice but to work. They don't have the option of Zooming and working at home and not—they're the delivery people, they're the PSWs, they are the nurses, they are the grocery clerks. All those folks—the truck drivers—they keep us comfortable, actually, and keep society going.

I want to ask the member to really consider why paid sick leave was not part of this budget. We know that to stop the spread and to actually ensure that we have a prosperous future, we need to stop this virus. So can the member comment and answer that question: Does she agree that we need paid sick leave to keep people safe?

Ms. Lindsey Park: There are many measures in this budget to keep people safe. Every day, our Ministers of Health and Long-Term Care highlight that, as does our Minister of Labour. Every workplace is a bit different in the province of Ontario in what their arrangement is. That's been one of the biggest challenges, I think, as government, is helping everyone in all these unique situations across the province of Ontario to adapt.

I know the Minister of Labour has put out clear guidelines on how to keep workplaces safe. We've made extensive investments to make sure that when people get sick, the health care system is there to support them, because we know people are going to get sick and people are going to continue to get sick. It's a reality. But we want to be there for them, to get them back to health as quickly as possible.

Investment in contact tracing and management is critical—those continued investments—as well as, we know, public health measures when they're needed and that's our only option.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Will Bouma: In the closing seconds here, I'd like to thank the member from Durham again for informing us more about what the budget hopes to do.

One of the things that we have so struggled with, and we've all seen that in the restaurants and small businesses, is that the necessary expenses of COVID for PPE and everything have been so devastating to our small businesses. I was wondering if she could expand a little bit further on what our government is doing to support Ontario's small business community.

Ms. Lindsey Park: It's perfect, because it's the part of my remarks I was about to get to if I had had more time.

I do want to highlight: We're making significant property tax reductions for small businesses. How much of a reduction is going to depend on what decisions each local municipality makes, but we've also put this offer out to municipalities to say if they reduce property taxes, we will match that in certain circumstances. This is one of the things I have heard over and over at the small business round tables that I've done over the last eight months, is property taxes are one of those fixed costs that government can help with reducing, and that's what we're doing in this budget.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Sara Singh: Good morning. It's a pleasure to rise here today and contribute to the debate.

I've been intently listening to the member from Durham, and I think she raises some interesting points about how the budget will help people in Ontario. But, Mr. Speaker, I think we need to be honest that this budget simply, especially during a pandemic, does not go far enough to help the people of Ontario who are struggling to make ends meet, small businesses that have had to close their doors, people facing homelessness or people in our education sector.

I'd like to use some of my time today to highlight how we could have actually, through this budget and through this budget bill, alleviated some of the pressures that Ontarians are facing at this very moment.

I'll start with maybe discussing our health care system, Mr. Speaker. As is no surprise to you or anyone in this House, I am definitely a health care champion in our city of Brampton, as we only have one hospital. I'll tell you a little story, Mr. Speaker. I was born in 1985—not to age myself here. Back then, we had one hospital in Brampton, Peel Memorial Hospital. It's 2020, we are on the cusp of 2021, and unfortunately, that reality is still the same for most. The world has changed in 35 years, but Brampton still only has one hospital. That is our Brampton Civic Hospital, and we have an urgent care centre that unfortunately closes at 8, so it's not even a full-service facility for folks.

But for decades now—decades—we've asked the Liberal government to help fund an additional hospital and health care resources in our community, and we got nothing. The Conservative government, PC members in those ridings, assured us that we would get another hospital and that they were committed to ensuring that, every budget that came out, they were going to advocate for the city of Brampton and ensure that we got health care dollars. But, yet again, nothing in this budget specifically helps the city of Brampton or helps deal with the surge in caseloads that we're experiencing right now.

I shared a couple of days ago the reality in Peel region, where we have essential workers who are working in our manufacturing, logistics, warehouses—many of these are racialized people—who have no choice but to go to work to ensure that people across this province continue to receive goods, continue to have food to eat. They receive whatever it is that they need because of the work that those essential workers are doing. And yet when this government has an opportunity to ensure that those essential workers are being taken care of, perhaps looking at measures that might assist them directly, by funding our hospital, let's say for example, so that they have a bed when they need one, or so that they could take a day off through paid sick days—because one of the issues that is really prevalent in our community is that many of those essential workers simply cannot take a day off. So even if they are sick, they are still going into work.

I spoke with our medical officer, Dr. Loh, a few days ago, and he stressed the importance of paid sick leave, because he understood how important that was to combatting the virus in our community. Those essential workers

who are not able to take days off are going into work sick. They're waiting in lines to get tests. It just doesn't make sense. If we can give them paid sick days, where they can go home, they can rest, they aren't spreading the virus—you had the opportunity to do something like this in this budget. It really concerns me that this government failed to do that. It's not just the medical officer in Peel and Peel regional health table that is advocating for paid sick days; others are as well.

So I want to encourage this government to think about, if not in this bill, how they are going to implement those types of measures to help us curb the spread in this province, because right now the clock is ticking. You have the opportunity to do that and you don't do it, and that concerns many of us on this side of the House.

Back to talking about investments in health care, Peel region, again, is a hot spot, and while we have received some investments, it simply isn't enough for a community that has been underfunded for decades and has never received its fair share in mental health services, in health services, in long-term-care supports. And yet, again, when you have an opportunity to help communities out that are struggling, that have been neglected, that are facing a pandemic in a way that other communities aren't, this government chose not to do that. They chose not to fund Peel public health the way that we need to, chose not to provide us the additional health care capacity that we needed. I just really wonder why—why cities like ours continue to be neglected by this government.

When we think about our education system, this bill does very little to help us address some of the real concerns that are happening right now in Peel, in Toronto, in other school boards across the province. We have 30-plus kids crammed into classrooms in some instances. Unfortunately, those schools don't have the capacity to manage those outbreaks.

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But with this budget, this government has not allocated the resources needed to the school boards to help them stop the spread of COVID-19. In Peel region, again, you see a hot spot. We know that there are outbreaks happening at elementary schools and high schools across the region. Teachers and education workers are also being impacted by this.

Speaker, why wouldn't we invest in our education system and ensure that we can have smaller classrooms, that we cap those class sizes at 15 to ensure that we can limit the spread? Why not do that right now? I understand that this isn't the Conservative way, but we're managing a pandemic right now, and so those investments are absolutely critical—critical—at this point in time. Yet when the government should be making those investments, it is choosing not to. I think many of us find that very concerning. I think parents find that concerning. Education workers find that concerning. I have students who call me and tell me how concerning this is to them.

There is the crisis in the classroom, but then we've moved to, as the member from Durham alluded to, this whole digital world right now. Many of these students are forced into online learning, and they simply do not have

access to Internet. They don't have access to computers. They don't have access to the resources they need to actually learn online. Some are waiting two, three, four weeks to get a laptop from their school board in order to access the class.

While this budget provides \$200 per student or child and \$250 for a child with special needs, that simply isn't enough to help those struggling families out. So why not increase the amount of support that you're providing so that all of those children can have access to what they need in order to continue learning from home, if they aren't physically able to be in a crammed classroom at this point in time? But this budget simply doesn't do that.

I hear every day from families with children with special needs, all types of disabilities, ranging from autism to Down syndrome and folks that are medically fragile. Speaker, these parents are struggling with how they are going to continue to provide some sense of normal for their children—it is a whole other world to have them access these online learning modules without support from their parents or a caregiver—or perhaps by purchasing additional technology that their child may need in order to continue to gain some sense of a regular curriculum.

Those teachers are also struggling with how to reach out to those students, and yet nothing in this budget specifically helps those children with special needs and exceptionalities in our classrooms who are struggling. Nothing in this budget helps address those inequities in our social systems that prevent students from having access to all the things that children have who come from families who can afford to provide those pieces of technology, access to the Internet. Nothing in this budget does that. It really, really concerns us that that's the case.

Speaker, I'm just going to take a sip of water here. You can do the same. Glad we're on the same page.

When I think of how connected our education system is to an economic recovery—I heard from small business owners who have children. One was struggling with a child who has special needs and had to stay home and the pressures that that put on that small business owner. Nothing in this budget really helps those business owners either. I want to maybe chat a little bit about that, because all of this is very connected. All of these elements of our community—our health care system, our education system, our local economies—need to be working together, and that's not how this budget was approached.

When I think of small businesses that have had to close their doors, with all due respect, I think property tax reductions are a helpful tool—one tool—but that isn't going to help a business that has already lost its life savings, for example, because they had to close their door.

The member from Durham spoke a lot about moving folks into this digital e-commerce space, and that's absolutely wonderful. We absolutely need that and I'm all for it. But I am very concerned about those businesses that have bricks and mortar operations that they need to sustain, yet there isn't the support that they need to keep those operations afloat.

I spoke to a business owner, Yow Wings. They're a small, independent business, family-owned and -operated. I know what that feels like. Those are 18-hour days for some of those folks. They've poured their entire life savings into that business. So when things go bad, it's not just a business that's struggling there, it's an entire family. That's their mortgage payment. That is their livelihood. But nothing in this budget helps with those direct impacts. Cash infusions and debt relief is what those businesses are looking like they need. They need that, and the bill simply does not help those businesses.

You could have regulated some of those pressures off those businesses. For example, insurance: You were able to provide energy reductions, but nothing was done in terms of the insurance, the rising costs that those businesses are facing. Why? That's the question to government members. Not only do I have to try to answer that as an opposition member, when asked by community members, I think the government should be answering that question.

Why wouldn't you regulate those rates for those businesses when you had the opportunity through this budget and through the budget bill? You were able to regulate other sectors of the economy, but you didn't do that for the insurance industry—again, why? I suppose that's an answer I'll never get, but I'm sure the people of Ontario will await an answer from this Conservative government on why they chose not to do that.

I know that as the housing critic, I hear every single day about the real concerns and the real pressures that people are facing. They could be small business owners or they could be a person on ODSP, Speaker. Housing is something that we're all struggling with right now, and many people are feeling the pressures very differently. While this government relied on federal supports to help folks stay afloat, they actually didn't step up to the plate to ensure that there was a rent subsidy top-up for people, that they could continue to stay in their homes and not face eviction.

I think it's very concerning that we know that right now there is a wave of evictions that are coming forward. There is a homelessness crisis that is impending, not only in the city of Toronto but in every community in this province, whether you're in the far north or whether you're down in Windsor. People are facing homelessness. They do not have a place to call home. Yet when this government has an opportunity to invest in housing in our province—nothing.

There are some transfers to municipalities to help with some pressures that they might be facing now, but when you think of a community like Peel region that's had a backlog for 14 years—imagine waiting 14 years to get into a unit to call home. A lot can happen in 14 years. When this government has the opportunity to provide real investments, to increase the supply, they choose to actually hand the keys over to developers so that they can pave through aspects of our greenbelt. But I'll circle back, because that's maybe a topic for another conversation.

Housing: We are facing a crisis in this province, in this country. This is a fundamental human right for people.

Rather than figure out how to ensure that people can find safe, affordable spaces to call home, this government throws in a tax credit—which, I'll be honest, is helpful for some. It might be helpful if you own your own home or if you have a family member who owns their own home. This tax credit might be helpful.

But the majority of seniors aren't in that situation where they own their own home. Many of them are living in a very precarious state, frankly. With rising rents, they're being forced into some untenable living situations that may not be safe for many of them. This tax credit isn't going to actually help someone who is renting a unit to renovate that unit. Maybe the government can clarify whether it will, but to me, on first read, this doesn't seem as though it's going to help those low-income seniors. It will certainly help a senior who owns their home, but it will not help a senior who is renting.

While that's important, it simply doesn't do enough to actually address the real housing crisis in this province. Rather than invest in our shelter system, rather than invest in affordable housing, rather than provide real rent subsidies to people because the cost of living is going up, this government did none of those, none of the above.

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Speaker, I spoke about paving over the greenbelt. I got some serious concerns from our regional council and other members of the public about schedule 6 and changes to the Conservation Authorities Act. Folks are really worried that this government is using this pandemic as a guise to pave over parts of our greenbelt and to hand over large sums of money to their developer friends. I think that that's a real concern. It's a real concern for many because we've seen the record of this government. When they've had a chance to reward their friends and insiders, they have.

I want to get those concerns on record because I think that for many—we care about environmental protections. We care about our local wetlands, we care about our local communities, and we want to ensure that those ecological sites stay as that. But with the changes that the government is making, those conservation authorities are losing some of the power that they have to ensure that they protect our vital wetlands and the greenbelt. Why would you do that during a pandemic? Why would you make it easier for developers to pave over the greenbelt rather than protect it? I just don't understand why that would be couched into this budget bill here.

Speaker, as I wrap up here, I think that this budget simply does not go far enough to help everyday Ontarians. The three planks of support, protect and—

Mr. Will Bouma: Recover.

Ms. Sara Singh: Recover; there we go. Thank you. I'm always appreciative of the member from Brantford and his helpfulness. We actually have a good relationship, and I enjoy his comments.

But this budget simply does not help us do that. When we think of recovery in the province of Ontario and the investments that are really needed in our education, health and housing sectors, this budget simply does not help us

to chart that path towards an economic recovery here in the province of Ontario.

I'd like to encourage the government to think more creatively about the work that needs to happen right now as we manage this pandemic. And I hope that through committee and through some of the discussions we have, some of the ideas that we also put forward as opposition members will be taken into consideration, because as opposition members, we aren't just here to oppose and criticize. Sometimes we actually propose some pretty good ideas, Speaker.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: A lot of the time.

Ms. Sara Singh: A lot of the time—thank you to the member from London–Fanshawe.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Time to Care.

Ms. Sara Singh: Time to Care—that's a really good point. Since I've got a minute and something on the clock, why not? The Time to Care Act, actually, was something that the member from London–Fanshawe was a champion of, and we're grateful to see that the government is now finally supportive of regulating what's happening in terms of a standard of care. But this budget didn't actually allocate the resources needed to ensure that that four hours of care was going to be provided.

So again, I want to urge the members across the way to listen to some of the great ideas we have. Implement them, but not in a half-measured way, and actually do the real work and make sure that we're helping Ontarians every single day.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions? I recognize the member from Scarborough Centre.

Miss Christina Maria Mitas: Thank you, Speaker. That radio voice—I love it.

The member opposite talked a lot about public health and Brampton's hospital in particular, so that allows me to be happy to remind that her our government has announced that we will be adding new beds to the Brampton Civic Hospital and that we will be addressing the second phase of development at Peel Memorial Centre. We absolutely recognize that Brampton's community is growing, and growing quickly, and we're here to support the people of Brampton and the people of Ontario more broadly.

I'll get to my question: As outlined in Ontario's 2020 budget, our government is taking steps to protect people from COVID-19 by increasing our health expenditures to \$15.2 billion. Will the member opposite be supporting this unprecedented investment in public health?

Ms. Sara Singh: I'd like to thank the member from Scarborough Centre for her question. I think that investments in health care are absolutely needed in the province of Ontario.

We appreciate some of the recent re-announcements that we had in the city around beds, but let's be real, this health care system and the city of Brampton have been so neglected that this investment really just doesn't even scratch the surface. I want to urge the member—while it might be a historic investment, it simply doesn't go far enough to keep up with inflation in our health care system. Thank you for the question.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the member from Brampton Centre for her comments and her analysis of the budget. I want to focus my question on the business supports. The Globe and Mail reported three weeks ago that potentially 30% of small businesses in this province are at risk of bankruptcy, of closing, and yet in this budget, the only measures to support businesses are a property tax cut and \$1,000 for PPE.

When I was speaking to a business owner yesterday—oh, and they also launched a website. With great fanfare and pride, they launched this website, and the website, in addition to information about those measures, also offers free advice. I was talking with a business owner yesterday, and when I told him about the measures that the government is taking, he said, “We don’t need free advice.” He said, “I’ve been a business owner for decades. I’ve run very successful businesses in this province. What we need is immediate support to make sure that 30% of businesses in this province don’t go under, because that is going to cause an economic collapse.”

My question, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the member for Brampton Centre, is, what would an NDP government do to support small businesses through this pandemic?

Ms. Sara Singh: Thank you to the member for the question. I think it’s a really important one because, as you highlight, 30% of businesses are facing closure and this bill doesn’t address some of the pressures that those businesses are facing.

NDP members, New Democrats, we actually proposed, through our Save Main Street plan, a real rent subsidy to help with those costs, direct cash support for those small businesses, because we understood that they were facing financial pressures and that deferring those costs was simply not going to be enough. So they needed those cash infusions, but they needed real debt relief, as well, and debt forgiveness. Those were some of the measures that we proposed. We also proposed insurance reductions for those businesses, because we understood that those were real costs that they were incurring that were not taken into consideration by this government.

New Democrats would have fought a lot harder. We would have invested more in saving main street and ensured that that 30% of those businesses could keep their doors open.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: I was listening very intently to the member from Brampton Centre, and I disagree with the member that Brampton has been neglected by the current government. However, I do agree that Brampton was neglected by the previous Liberal government. Our government is making some unprecedented investments in health care, which includes the city of Brampton as well.

As my friend from Scarborough Centre mentioned, Brampton William Osler hospital recently received 87 new patient beds to help alleviate the capacity pressures

and reduce wait times. The Premier was in Brampton last week and the Premier also announced the second phase of the Peel Memorial hospital, which is great news for the people of Brampton, which never happened in the last 15 years. Also, our government is making a \$15.2-billion investment in health care.

My question to the member opposite is, will she be supporting these unprecedented investments in public health?

Ms. Sara Singh: Thank you to the member from Brampton West. I know that he may disagree with our perspective here, but I think that the residents in Brampton would certainly agree that they feel neglected at the moment when it comes to our health care system, as we haven’t received any of the supports that we need. The mayor and council have actually been very clear that we need our fair share in Brampton, because we’ve been so neglected.

The member opposite points to some 87 beds that were provided—and have yet to be seen, frankly—but when you’re looking at a city that still has 0.96 beds per 1,000 residents when the provincial average is well above 2.16 per 1,000 residents, 87 beds isn’t going to even scratch the surface of the needs in our community. So I think that maybe the member may want to review what the reality of Brampton Civic Hospital looks like—in constant gridlock, in constant overcapacity—and understand that those investments simply do not go far enough.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Thank you so much to my colleague for your very thoughtful analysis of what’s going on here.

There is something I really would love you to expand on and that’s the fact that eight months in, and many reports that have expanded on how racialized BIPOC communities suffer disproportionately from COVID, from this pandemic—and we know that in this case, in order to lift the economy, we actually have to care for the most vulnerable. I wonder if you could comment on the fact that the budget does absolutely nothing to recognize the plight of racialized communities in Ontario.

Ms. Sara Singh: I would like to thank the member from Beaches–East York for that excellent question, and just thank her for her constant advocacy for racialized communities and understanding the reality and the lived experiences of those people.

It’s very true that this budget really does nothing to help those vulnerable communities, many who are essential workers and who—

Interjection.

Ms. Sara Singh: You know what? The Minister of Natural Resources is saying, “What about the Black Youth Action Plan?” Yes, that’s wonderful. But that actually doesn’t help people who are working right now in warehouses as essential workers, who have to go to work and cannot take paid sick leave because your government

failed to implement it. The Black Youth Action Plan doesn't do anything for that, Minister of Natural Resources.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please.

Ms. Sara Singh: So I'm going to just get back to the question here that was asked by the member over here from Beaches–East York: No, this government failed to invest in racialized communities when it had the opportunity to do so. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, while they may think that the Black Youth Action Plan goes far enough, that simply doesn't help racialized communities across this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions? The member from Brampton-Brant.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Brantford–Brant.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you, I appreciate that. I feel very close to the member from Brampton Centre, but I don't represent Brampton.

I find it fascinating that we have such stilted conversations here in the House, when we've been able to have dinner together before while travelling a bill and have conversations.

I always appreciate what she brings to the House, and I really appreciate the fact that she comes from a small business family. I was just wondering—because she did have some criticisms for what we're doing for small business, but when I'm visiting small businesses in my riding, they're very excited about some of the changes that we're making to property tax, to energy and those things. I was wondering if I could ask her if she has had the opportunity to talk to her family about that and see if they are supportive of some of those changes that we're making in this budget.

Ms. Sara Singh: I would like to thank the member for the question. I actually do have very lively discussions with my family about some of the measures that the government is implementing. And while I think that many are supportive of property tax relief, it simply doesn't go far enough. I think that people need to understand that. It doesn't help with the real pressures that those businesses are facing.

If I can just point out to the member as well, this property tax relief, and the sort of matching with the municipal property tax relief, that's going to put a real strain on those municipal budgets when they lose that revenue. So I would be curious to understand how this government is going to help support those municipal budgets, with direct cash investments or fiscal measures, to help them offset the cost of your program as well. But thank you for the question.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The time for debate is over.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Jessica Bell: My riding is home to a huge creative sector of artists, musicians, filmmakers, as well as music venues, theatre and performance venues. This sector, these people, they are going bankrupt, they are moving out and they are giving up.

The beloved Free Times Cafe is unable to make \$10,000 a month in rent amid public health restrictions. Sneaky Dee's, the iconic music venue, is fighting for its life amidst development pressure to build unaffordable condos. The Commons Theatre and Studio was forced to close, unable to cope with the economic impact of COVID-19. Ashley, the owner of the Round in Kensington Market, a queer art and music space, was just evicted. The locks on their door are chained and the equipment has been seized. Just last week, Bruno, the owner of the Mod Club, a music venue, was evicted after 18 years because he was unable to pay.

There are so many reasons why: development pressure, exorbitant rent, evictions, shrinking revenue and, now, the pandemic. Our creative sector, known for its resilience, is being torn apart, and this government has abandoned this community in its time of need. We risk losing what makes our riding and city so unique.

It is why I am fighting for this province to extend the eviction ban to include more businesses, to provide real rent relief, because I stand with the creative community in my riding of University–Rosedale, and they need your help.

EVENTS IN NIAGARA WEST

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Every year, people gather from across Niagara to watch the beautiful displays and artistic talent at Santa Claus parades in Niagara West. Whether it's the big city parade in a small town in Grimsby, where tens of thousands of pounds of food for local food banks are collected by the Grimsby Fire Department, or the Smithville Christmas in the Village, with the biggest little town parade around, or Fenwick's unique parade with local Shriners and others, these events are celebrated and beloved by all in the community who gather for family-friendly festivities celebrating Christmas and to give a non-perishable food item to help those less fortunate in our communities. I also always enjoy going to these events, handing out candy canes and bringing good wishes to my constituents at these family-friendly events.

However, this year, due to COVID-19, the parades won't be moving forward as usual. But whether it is encouraging people to decorate their homes with holiday cheer in Smithville and drop by the local food bank, organizing a drive-through holiday display and party in Fenwick, or a multi-location food drive and festive display called the Holiday of Hope in Grimsby, the people of Niagara West are resilient and creative.

My thanks to all the organizers of these new, innovative ways to celebrate Christmas and support our local food banks in a family-friendly and safe environment. I hope many families get the chance to attend these festive and safe events this holiday season.

SITUATION IN NAGORNO-KARABAKH

Mr. Paul Miller: While countries across the globe continue to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, Azerbaijan, along with other groups in the region, launched a full-scale war against the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh on September 27. While some blame pipelines as the reason, the Armenian people of my community believe that the purpose of the war was to forcibly remove the Armenian population from the region. Humanitarian ceasefires were constantly violated as Azerbaijan employed banned weaponry, such as cluster bombs, on civilian and military targets.

On November 9, Russia brokered a ceasefire agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan, ceding large territories to Azerbaijan and triggering the exodus of tens of thousands of Armenians from their historical homeland. This is a humanitarian crisis. How can the ethnic Armenian population stay alive under the discriminatory and oppressive Azerbaijan regime that has no regard for their human rights, history or dignity?

My Armenian constituents are concerned we are tumbling towards another Armenian genocide. The pieces are set. The board is in play.

We feel the only way to ensure the survival and the rights of our fellow Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh is (1) for this House to recognize the right to self-determination of the Armenians of Karabakh and recognize their independence, (2) for Canada to extend much-needed humanitarian aid to the displaced Armenians, and (3) for Canada to watch and react to further human rights abuses by Azerbaijan.

This is a terrible situation, and we have to react.

FRONT-LINE WORKERS

Mr. Jim McDonell: I rise today to acknowledge the efforts and commitments of thousands of front-line workers and volunteers across my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and, indeed, throughout the province of Ontario.

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While the pandemic has reached new heights, these dedicated individuals have been instrumental in the province's ability to maintain the services we depend on so greatly. Let us also not forget the incredible support they have received from employers, organizations and volunteers. This potent partnership is on display in many places, including the Winchester District Memorial Hospital.

I'm happy to share with this Legislature the recipients of the hospital's annual Commitment Awards: Dr. Maren Hamilton, RN Frida Plourde, pharmacist Ahmed Aly and

the volunteers who staff the hospital's information desk. Their collective devotion to the hospital and their community continue to ensure their friends, families and neighbours receive quality health care.

I congratulate this year's recipients and thank them for their tireless support and work that demonstrate the Ontario spirit that makes this country the best place to live, work and raise a family. The difference they make continues to shine and deserves to be celebrated.

CRIME PREVENTION

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Next week is Victims and Survivors of Crime Week, a time to raise awareness about the issues facing those who are victims and survivors of crime and their families. Those issues are numerous and life-changing. And it is a time to acknowledge the work of the community leaders and service providers who help them, like Reverend Sky Starr and Out of Bounds: Grief Support, too often with little or no support.

But for some neighbourhoods, these issues never seem to end—neighbourhoods where many families fear the simple act of having their children play out of doors. Just over a week ago, in my community, a 12-year-old boy's life was taken while walking down the street with his mother in the middle of the afternoon. May God embrace his soul. I cannot even grasp the grief his family must be feeling.

All of us must do everything we can to help them. We must do everything we can to stop the cycle of violence that is targeting our communities and loved ones.

Chronic poverty, lack of opportunities, systemic racism: These are just some of the issues that rob our young people of hope and make it so hard to see a better way forward. They must be addressed so youth can actually envision a future for themselves where their efforts are recognized, where they have a good job and financial security, and the barriers they face are broken. We must invest in our communities and invest in our youth and the programs that are helping them.

Together, we can build a future where every child knows and feels that they belong, have value and are safe.

DOMINIC DACOSTA

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: This past weekend, my son, Victor, and I had the great honour and privilege of participating in a Christmas parade featuring 180 decorated cars driving past the home of the great resident of the city of Cambridge, five-year-old Dominic Dacosta.

Dominic is a warrior. He lives with his family—his dad, Rob; his mom, Denise; his brother, Mason; and his sister, Mia—in Hespeler. Since the age of two, Dominic has been bravely battling neuroblastoma that is in stage 4. But Dominic continues to live every day with courage and a beautiful smile that he showed the cars decorated in Christmas style for the impromptu parade that started at the Hespeler Memorial Arena.

The parade was the idea of Dominic's cousin Christina Dacosta-Alessandrini and her friend Janet Geibel Pereira. With the support of the Go Gold Cambridge community, they got the word out in a social media campaign that attracted thousands. The parade participants met in the Ellis Road area of Cambridge and overflowed the parking lots of St. James' Anglican Church and Woodland Park Public School into the arena.

When Dominic isn't busy commanding vehicles on a parade route, he loves basketball, Lego Minecraft, Fortnite, Spider-Man, Pokémon, Transformers and anything to do with puppets.

So today, I salute a warrior named Dominic Dacosta, and we say from Queen's Park, we love you.

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Although Remembrance Day was last week, I believe it's never too late to pay tribute to those who have served. It's a day we remember the brave men and women who have and continue to serve our country during times of conflict and peace.

Over the years, we've seen servicemen and women play a different yet essential role on the world stage. I'm sure Canadians of all ages were grateful to see military service personnel spring into action this spring when their help was needed to help battle COVID-19.

Last week, I had the honour to attend Remembrance Day services in my riding of Etobicoke-Lakeshore. I'd like to thank Jeff Ankenmann, president of Branch 101, and Donna Sampson, president of Branch 643, for inviting me to participate in a small, yet important, ceremony. Branch 643 was formed in 2017 when Branch 3 merged with Branch 210, and now finds their home on Jutland street.

Last week, I also had the opportunity to join members of the Royal Canadian Legion as we commemorated a new home for the Legion's cenotaph in New Toronto. The cenotaph, donated by the community, has stood on Eighth Street since 1983, but given its size, it became apparent the cenotaph needed a new home. The new location at Colonel Samuel Smith Park is an ideal place for the iconic cenotaph, which has been a place of gathering for those looking to remember the brave men and women who gave their ultimate sacrifice in World War I, World War II and the Korean War.

I want to thank our councillor, Mark Grimes, his team and the dedicated city staff for their work to make this happen in our community.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. John Vanthof: A few days ago I got a call from Tom Graham. Tom runs Duncan Lake Fishing and Hunting Camp. Just for a brief description, Duncan Lake is in the Gowganda region. To get to his hunting and fishing camp, you have to go 10 miles up the lake. It is the unique Ontario-Canadian experience that people dream of all over

the world. There are many of them across northeastern Ontario. Tom is just one.

His world came crashing down when the border closed, because typically it's American tourists who want those experiences. After this budget, his world continues to crash, because a tax credit doesn't help Tom Graham and all those mom-and-pop tourist outfitters out there. Even the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund grant for PPE—it's welcomed, but it doesn't help Tom. A bigger dock for social distancing doesn't help you when you've got no income.

This is a unique part of our culture, of our heritage and, actually, of Ontario's economy, and it's being totally ignored. These people have fallen through the cracks of federal programs, and quite frankly, the provincial government knew that and has failed to act. We are going to lose the Tom Grahams and the Duncan Lake camps—camps across Gowganda. The whole of Gowganda is basically for sale. We need to act, and this government has failed to.

SCLERODERMA

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: This week, members of the Scleroderma Society of Ontario will be meeting with MPPs to discuss this autoimmune disease. Many of these advocates are patients, and I applaud them for sharing their stories of living with this disease and fighting for a cure.

Speaker, 2020 has been a tough year for many Ontarians, but those living with this disease and other illnesses have struggled even more. Because scleroderma is a rare disease, it comes with loneliness and isolation. People feel overwhelmed and distressed in the absence of information, support and an understanding peer group. The cost of this rare disease is unknown and currently there is no cure.

As members of this Legislature, we should all take the opportunity to learn more about this disease and what supports are available to our constituents living with this condition. Scleroderma—a hard word, but a harder disease. Let's do our part to raise awareness, take action and find a cure.

Thank you to the entire team at the Scleroderma Society of Ontario for your work, advocacy and dedication to this cause. You have our support.

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

The member for Timmins has a point of order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I request that we stand down our leads until the Premier arrives.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Once again, I will remind all members not to make reference to the absence of any member in the House. There are good reasons why we observe that rule normally.

I did hear the member for Timmins seeking the unanimous consent of the House to stand down the lead questions for the official opposition. Agreed? I heard a no.

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QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

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

Yesterday, another expert adviser from the government's COVID-19 public health table expressed frustration with the government's ineffective and incoherent public health measures and expressed concern that he and other experts were forced to sign gag orders, preventing them from sharing their advice and concerns with the public.

Is there any other reason the Premier slapped a gag order on expert advisers, or is it just as it appears, that he doesn't want the public to know that he was actually ignoring their advice?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, there are no such gag orders. No one is forced to sign anything on the public health measures table. We've been very frank with the people of Ontario, very transparent with the information that they've been provided. We are there every day for press conferences. Dr. Williams appears twice a week. We present the modelling table. All of the information that we have, the public has, and all of you have as well. There is no question that the people who are at the public health measures table come forward willingly. They provide their advice, and we're very grateful for that.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I have bad news for the minister and for the Premier. People know very well that this government is not being frank and transparent.

Here's the problem that that creates for families: The Premier has already been caught claiming that expert advisers backed his plans when those experts actually thought the plan that the Premier put in place was reckless and indefensible. COVID-19 is impacting the lives of everyone in this province. They have a right to the same information that the Premier sees when it comes to their health, their safety, their family's health and their family's safety, and they have a right to know when he in fact is ignoring that advice.

Will the Premier end the gag order and make all advice provided to cabinet public today?

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, we have been very transparent with the people of Ontario since this pandemic began. The Premier has said on a number of occasions that what we know, we want everyone else to know, so that people will understand why the decisions are being made that are being made.

I think it's also very important to note that the members of the public health measures table have not signed, as the

member calls them, gag orders, or nondisclosure agreements, but there is a code of compliance that when you have a group of people who are making decisions like this, they have one representative who speaks for them. That happens with both public and private companies, in addition to other communities and committees that report. It's important that one person speaks for the entire group. We hear the advice from the public health measures table and we hear that through Dr. Williams. That's the way that the system works and that's the process that we've been following throughout.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Transparency should have been the goal, but it's painfully obvious that it is not the goal of this government. They are not being transparent. The Premier insists that every decision made by the government is backed by his Chief Medical Officer of Health, but every day it gets harder and harder to believe that assertion.

The Ford government's cutbacks on public health protections as the second wave was surging, the setting of ridiculously high thresholds for the red zone, long-term-care homes that were left vulnerable yet again and the refusal to cap classroom sizes: My question is, did Dr. Williams tell the Premier that he should be doing these things, or in fact did the Premier decide to do these things and order Dr. Williams to justify them?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Dr. Williams is an independent officer. He has the ability to make his own decisions, which he has done. We have relied on the science and the clinical evidence throughout in every decision that we have made.

Not only have we relied on that with the decisions that we have made, but we've put the money behind it. We've put billions of dollars into our COVID response; \$2.8 billion, most recently. We're putting over \$1 billion into testing, tracing and isolating cases, and we're continuing to put more money into it because, as the Premier said, the most important issue here is the health and well-being of the people of Ontario. That is our number one priority. It always has been and always will be.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier, but I think the minister and this government have to realize that that certainly is not what it looks like to the families of the 11 people who died in long-term care yesterday.

The Ford government's failure to act is having a devastating impact on long-term care again. After the pandemic's first wave, front-line staff and home operators pleaded with this government to aggressively recruit staff to meet the demands of the second wave. Yet, while other provinces, in fact, aggressively recruited staff, engaged in really quite robust campaigns to get more people on staff, the Ford government says that their staffing plan won't even be ready this year. Honestly, Speaker, it's tragic, and it's a tragedy that could have been avoided.

Will the Premier make public today any advice from Dr. Williams or any members of the health table who support the decision not to staff up in long-term care?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Long-Term Care to respond.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: First of all, my concerns and my condolences go out to everyone who has been impacted by this, but your characterization of what has been going on in long-term care in terms of the staffing is fabrication. I'm going to be absolutely clear—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member to withdraw the unparliamentary comment and ask the member to make her comments through the Chair.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: I withdraw.

We have been taking decisive action from the very beginning, using every resource possible, putting our policies in place and putting dollars behind it. Initially, the \$243 million to shore up our staffing and our IPAC support for the homes, that was done immediately, swiftly and decisively. The process of staffing planning was ongoing, not only for the crisis that was left behind by the previous government and supported by you—as well as the \$540 million that we announced in October to make sure our homes had dollars for IPAC, staffing and the ward rooms that were completely neglected under the previous government. No significant redevelopment was ever done.

We have been at this. We will continue to do everything possible. We are committed to the safety and well-being of residents and staff in long-term care, and we will continue.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, perhaps the minister is unaware, but in today's Huffington Post, staff at a for-profit facility in Scarborough ravaged by COVID-19 say that they are chronically short-staffed and forced to go back and forth between the COVID-positive and COVID-negative floors because there are so few of these staff in the home.

In July, the government's own expert panel on staffing urgently—urgently—recommended a minimum standard of four hours of daily hands-on care for every resident in long-term care. Yet, the government refused to act for months and months and months while COVID returned to long-term-care homes.

So will the Premier make public today any advice from Dr. Williams or any members of the health tables that supported that decision?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. The decisions that are being made in long-term care to support our homes have been ongoing in an unprecedented, global situation to understand everything that can be done, not only learning from the previous wave, wave 1, but learning from other countries. It is continuous. It is involving public health, Ontario Health, our integration with our hospitals, making sure that the evidence from our public health tables and our science tables is current and accurate and as best as

anyone can bring, to understand what's happening in long-term care and the measures we can take.

We know that the previous neglect of many, many years in terms of the staffing crisis and in terms of the ward rooms played a role. Our government is committed, and has been since the very beginning, to make sure that we address the long-standing issues so badly neglected.

Every measure is being taken. The dollars are behind those measures. We will continue to support our staff and our residents in long-term care. They are the priority. We will continue.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Families are watching, Speaker, as the second wave of this pandemic once again exposes a broken long-term-care system. This government has known for a couple of years now, as did the previous government, that that system was absolutely broken. There are dozens and dozens and dozens of reports that talk about what needs to be done. They haven't done it.

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The virus exposed the long-term-care system that protects the profits of for-profit, private companies. That's what it does. But it leaves residents vulnerable, alone and dying in long-term care.

For months, the Premier has promised an iron ring of protection around long-term care, but it's clear that he's not only failed to protect seniors in long-term care, he's ignored experts who warned for months that the second wave of this pandemic was going to be devastating for long-term care. When will the government start being transparent with the people of Ontario and act with urgency that the crisis in long-term care demands?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Premier to reply.

Hon. Doug Ford: I sit back and listen to the Leader of the Opposition and the Liberals criticize about long-term care when, for 15 years, they ignored long-term care. They had an opportunity to increase long-term care to four hours a day of care for patients. They totally, totally ignored it. They watched the long-term-care system, for 15 years, crumble underneath their feet.

As we're going to lead the way, we're going to blaze a new trail with four hours of care for long-term-care residents.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Doug Ford: On top of that, we're going to hire tens of thousands of PSWs, RPNs and RNs—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition, come to order.

Hon. Doug Ford: Yes, the Leader of the Opposition should have done it for 15 years, and totally ignored the people. We're investing in \$1.7 billion in rapid builds to update the long-term-care system that, again, was ignored for 15 years under the previous government and the Leader of the Opposition, as they ended up supporting the Liberals. We're also investing \$540 million in investment to protect—

Interjections.

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

The official opposition will come to order. The member for Timmins, come to order. The Leader of the Opposition, come to order.

The next question.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning. This question is for the Premier.

For months now, students, families and education workers have been on a roller coaster as the government introduced a piecemeal plan that ignored expert advice on class sizes. Schools have been forced to collapse smaller classes into bigger ones, while this government hoards \$9.3 billion in unspent COVID relief money that should have been used to keep them safe and keep those class sizes small. Now, just when families might be finally getting into some kind of routine, the Premier and the Minister of Education are causing all this uncertainty once again, musing in the press about an early closure or an extended break.

Will the Premier please tell us and all the anxious families watching if he's ready to shut down schools instead of capping class sizes at 15?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: According to the Chief Medical Officer of Health and leading medical experts across this country, schools in this province are safe: 99.96% of students don't have COVID; 99.86% have never had COVID; 99.7% of staff never have had COVID; and 86% do not have a case at all.

Our plan in this province is keeping our kids safe, and we should be proud of our public health officials, our doctors, our teachers and our parents, who have worked so hard to ensure we lead the nation in virtually every way.

We are proud of our work. We're proud of that plan. Yes, we're working with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, as was asked by the Leader of the Opposition days ago. We are cognizant of community transmission rising. We have a duty to work with the chief medical officer to scale up our plan, to make sure it responds to the risk and to keep our kids safe in 2020 and beyond. That is exactly what we're doing.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Mr. Speaker, it's like playing whack-a-mole, trying to keep a direct track of what direction this government is going in.

The minister wants to talk percentages, but I'll tell you what parents are telling me. They're saying, "Our kids are not data points." Parents are interested in the 100 new cases a day that are taking place in our schools, like the families at Begley public school in Windsor, who are the latest to face an outbreak. The local public health unit has closed the school, and parents are now spending the day trying to get their kids tested, as are staff. They're praying they weren't exposed.

Families are stuck between a plan that doesn't do enough to keep their kids safe and the threat of a full closure or a delayed return, and it's a false choice. It should never have come to this. If the Chief Medical Officer of Health recommends that schools stay open, as the minister has said, why won't the government cap class sizes so we can keep them that way?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It is quite obvious, according to leading medical experts across this province, that our schools remain safe places for kids. The transmission is not happening within school, but fundamentally entering from the community into our schools. The data points, I think, need to inspire confidence in the population, that 99.96% of students do not have COVID, the fact that of 4,800 schools there are three closed in the province. It only underscores that something special has happened in this province by the leadership of our front-line staff and our public health.

Mr. Speaker, let me add that in Quebec, when you compare our plan to the next largest jurisdiction to this province, 21% of all cases in Quebec come from schools; in Ontario, it's 7%. They have a million fewer students. We are doing something incredible in this province, not because of the government but because of our teachers, because of our public health leaders, and yes, we will continue, as the Premier has made clear, to build up our plan and make sure that it leads the nation and keeps every student and every staff safe in Ontario.

ENERGY RATES

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Over the years, I have heard countless individuals talking about businesses considering Ontario as a place to invest and create jobs. Unfortunately, for the longest time, they would end up going somewhere else due to the high commercial and industrial electricity prices. The source of the problem was high-cost contracts for electricity from wind, solar and bioenergy entered into by the previous government, for electricity Ontario doesn't need at a price employers could not afford.

Back in 2017, Jocelyn Bamford of Automatic Coating Ltd. said, "In Toronto, I'm paying 19 cents a kilowatt hour and with electricity being our third-largest expense.... When you look at the bottom line, it's very difficult to compete."

According to the Fraser Institute, Ontario's soaring electricity costs led to nearly 75,000 manufacturing job losses since the end of the 2008 recession. While this was a major issue before COVID-19, it will be an even more significant obstacle as the entire world focuses on recovering from the pandemic.

Premier, what has the government done to help provide much-needed financial relief and stability for businesses regarding hydro costs?

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank the outstanding member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore who is doing an incredible job. The member is 100% correct. I heard the

same message from businesses considering Ontario as a place to open up.

But under the previous government, under the NDP, prices increased 118% from 2008 to 2019. I know the Leader of the Opposition thinks it's funny that we increased prices of electricity for businesses, but I'll tell you, the businesses don't think it's funny.

We're fixing the mess that we inherited from the previous governments. We're removing the costs which will help industrial and commercial employers save about 14% to 16%, respectively, on average electricity bills. Ontario will go from the least-competitive electricity prices to prices that are more competitive than the US average which we're competing against day in and day out. We're finally—finally, after 15 years—fixing the electricity rates in this province—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. There's a supplementary question.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: My supplemental question is back to the Premier. It's time to get those jobs back to Ontario. Premier, along with the members of this government, we are proud of the measures that we have taken since coming to office to help address this crisis.

We repealed the Green Energy Act in order to stop the abuses. We wound down unneeded energy contracts, saving ratepayers of this province \$790 million. Thanks to our new policy, this will provide even more savings and supports for many of my constituents and constituents from across Ontario. One of the examples is an automotive parts manufacturer in my riding that could save \$31,800 per month, or nearly \$382,000 annually. That's a lot of money.

As a result of our comprehensive plan, Ontario will go from being one of the least-competitive jurisdictions for the cost of electricity to the most competitive—better than the US average and most Great Lakes states we compete with for manufacturing and commercial jobs.

Can the Premier please share with us what the reaction has been to our proposed hydro support from businesses and—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. The Premier to reply, again.

Hon. Doug Ford: I remember what the member from Essex had to say back in 2017, stating—this is his quote: “Imagine ... if we thought about using hydro as a strategic investment to incentivize economic development in our communities ... wouldn't that be ... great...?”

Our member from Oshawa—or “the” member, not our member; it will be our member in 2022—warned in 2015, “Manufacturing and auto sector jobs will disappear with the rising costs of electricity.” Well, haven't we turned that around. We have all the auto manufacturers here absolutely booming right now.

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I want to close by quoting Flavio Volpe, president of the Automotive Parts Manufacturer's Association. Here is what he had to say: “This would save some of our members half a million dollars a year. But it's not just the savings for our members. It's about attracting new businesses here—”

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

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, my question is to the Premier.

The report this morning from Ontario's Auditor General on this government's lack of action on the environment is scathing. The report shows that this government and this Premier are failing to follow their own environmental laws. They're avoiding transparency, they're missing their own targets to reduce emissions, and they're failing to protect the environment. Clean water, clean air for Ontarians are at risk.

The Auditor General doesn't mince any words. She said, “It is concerning for us to report on the environment ministry's non-compliance...”

Who does this government believe will benefit from the destruction of the environment?

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

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks to the member opposite for that question.

I read the Auditor General's report this morning. I thank her very much for her work for all Ontarians as she continues throughout her years of service here to produce these reports.

Maybe the member opposite was skimming through the pages or reading some blogs. But if you actually read the report, the Auditor General does state that there were no non-compliance issues with regard to the EBR. We met the timelines for posting on the EBR.

With respect to water, Ontario has the highest water regulations in the entire country, and of the half a million tests done through residents throughout the entire province, 99.9% of those tests met the standards set by the province of Ontario.

We're proud of our action on water in this province, and we continue to work through our agencies like OCWA to ensure that municipalities are able to run their water systems appropriately. I want to thank OCWA for getting up into Neskantaga—

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Again to the Premier: No minister who has read that report can be proud of the work they're doing—none.

The report says there simply aren't enough staff in the environment ministry to do the work necessary to protect the environment for Ontarians. After the previous government took little to no action, this government has cut so much that work simply isn't being done. The report is clear: The government doesn't even know if it's protecting endangered species. They can't take care of park planning. And protected lands that are supposed to be in place to preserve our pristine natural beauty are being ripped apart for a quick buck.

It's no surprise that the government that wavers on climate change, as to whether or not it's really happening,

is not committed to the protection of the environment, but that's no excuse.

Why is the government failing Ontarians when it needs to be protecting our air, our water and our climate?

Interjections.

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

The Minister of the Environment to reply.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks again for that question. There's so much to unpack from that statement. Where do we start?

Mr. Speaker, we have an environment plan that we brought forward in 2018 to protect our land, air and water. We have made important initiatives going forward. We've moved to emissions testing on heavy-duty vehicles. We have our EPS, emissions performance standards, approved by the federal government. We'll be moving forward so that Ontario has an Ontario plan to reduce the emissions in our industrial sector while remaining competitive.

The budget that's proposed in this Legislature—if the member opposite supports it, \$20 million will be going to work with organizations like Nature Conservancy of Canada to protect and preserve more land. Not since the days of Premier Mike Harris has land been protected throughout this province—that we will be protecting. In Prince Edward county, we announced a month ago that we're looking at a new conservation reserve.

The government previous, supported by the NDP, did nothing with regard to protecting land throughout this province. We're doing it. We're only two years in. Just watch us go—

Interjections.

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

FLU IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Premier. Premier, on October 15, about a month ago, after reports of flu vaccine shortages, the minister stood up in this House and did a number of media interviews and said that there were no shortages in pharmacies across Ontario.

At 8:30 this morning, there is not a single Shoppers Drug Mart in Orléans that has flu shot availability. Rexall's website reads: "Unfortunately, flu appointments have been cancelled due to a province-wide supply issue." This morning, there is at least a one-week wait for a flu vaccination appointment with Ottawa Public Health.

We're now six or seven weeks into the flu campaign. Can the Speaker explain why his flu campaign, the centerpiece of the COVID-19 response plan, had no prioritization for seniors, and why people with serious heart disease and diabetes are still waiting to get their flu shot?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Speaker can't explain, but perhaps the Minister of Health can.

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, this has been the largest flu campaign in Ontario's history. It was one of the central tenets of our fall preparedness plan, and I thank the people of Ontario for coming forward to protect their own health, the health of their families and their co-workers and friends.

This is really important that we've spent over \$70 million. We ordered over five million flu doses. Generally speaking, at this time of the year, there have been about 500,000 flu shots administered through pharmacies; this year, over 1.4 million doses.

We are continuing to roll out this plan. We have had conversations with both the federal minister, Minister Hajdu—I've spoken with her about obtaining more vaccines from the federal reserve—as well as with private manufacturers. I can advise that, as of yesterday, we have received a shipment of another 132,000 doses from Sanofi.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: I appreciate that, but the question was about prioritizing people with heart conditions and diabetes.

There hasn't been much good news coming out of the provincial government lately, but there is finally good news about a COVID-19 vaccine. Thankfully, the federal Liberal government has taken a leadership role in procuring millions and millions of doses of vaccine for Canadians, more than we'll ever need.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. The member for Orléans has the floor. He has every right to ask his question without interruption. The House will come to order.

Restart the clock. Member for Orléans, I apologize for the interruption.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Throughout the process, the federal Liberal government has been transparent about its strategy to procure the COVID-19 vaccine. On the other hand, here in Ontario, the people of Ontario and this Legislature still don't know how the province is going to distribute the COVID-19 vaccine to Ontarians and what the priority is going to be.

So can the Premier or the Minister of Health confirm how many doses of COVID-19 we expect here in Ontario, what the plan will be and what the prioritization will be to get those into the arms of Ontarians?

Hon. Christine Elliott: First of all, with respect to the flu vaccine, we did prioritize people in long-term-care homes, people in hospitals, people living in congregate settings, because we know that they are our most vulnerable and they need to be protected. Similarly, we will do the same with respect to the COVID vaccine when it becomes available.

We are expecting that we will receive shipments from both Pfizer and Moderna. There are significant issues with respect to the Pfizer vaccine in particular; it needs to be stored at minus 75 degrees Celsius, and Moderna at minus 20.

The doses for Canada: We expect to receive four million doses between January and March of the Pfizer vaccine and two million for Moderna, of which we anticipate that we will receive 1,600,000 of Pfizer and 800,000 of Moderna. People do have to receive two doses 21 days apart. This is a major logistical challenge, but we have an entire group within the Ministry of Health right

now that are planning for that. As soon as we receive those shipments from the federal government—

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

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Toby Barrett: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. As we know, last week's budget announced billions of dollars to various industries and businesses. In the early days of COVID-19, the province identified essential workplaces that needed to remain open. Among those were the mills, the processing facilities of Ontario's forestry industry.

While we stayed home, Ontario's forestry industry and the men and women who work in that industry kept on working to make sure that we had the materials that we need, like personal protective equipment, for example, to keep us safe.

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With that being said, Speaker, many businesses experienced added costs that came with keeping their facilities open. Through you to the minister, Speaker: What is the government doing to ensure that our forestry sector is getting the support it needs to keep workplaces safe throughout this pandemic?

Hon. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the member from Haldimand–Norfolk for his great question. This government sees the forest industry as a priority industry. In fact, we were the first to declare it an essential industry when the pandemic hit, so we were helping companies with some of the added costs associated with keeping their places clean and safe.

We worked with the federal government to secure \$5.3 million through the forest sector safety measures fund announced in last week's budget. This fund will ensure funding will go to eligible participants that operate small to medium-sized forestry companies in Ontario that have incurred at least \$1,000 in eligible costs like PPE, additional cleaning and other related costs, between April 1, 2020, and February 1, 2021.

Speaker, the health and well-being of Ontarians is the number one priority of this government. That's why we're giving support to address these added costs while keeping our forestry workers safe while they remain on the job that provides much needed products for everyone in Ontario.

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: I thank the minister for that response. I think it's fantastic to see this government supporting Ontario's forestry sector with these critical funds. Our forestry sector is a key part of Ontario's economy. It is essential and is keeping our province functioning during this global pandemic.

I see it first-hand in southern Ontario, across my riding in Haldimand–Norfolk. I think of Townsend Lumber, and Arnold Hanson and Sons Logging. Porter Lumber has operated for years just down the road from my farm. Companies like this contribute to our economy. They provide

good-paying jobs, certainly, to people in my riding and communities right across the province.

Speaker, can the minister tell this House just how important this sector is to the livelihoods of the people of Ontario and to our economy?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thanks to the member for that supplemental question. It's always a pleasure to speak in this House about the importance of the forestry sector here in the province of Ontario. It was one of the foundational bedrock industries in the opening of this province.

The vital role that the forestry sector plays has been especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. The industry has a huge role to play in providing essential forest products for hygiene, medical supplies, food packing and shipping materials. This sector is critical to the provincial economy, especially in Indigenous, northern and rural communities. I come from one of those communities, so I understand, absolutely, just how important it is. It generates over \$18 billion in revenue and supports approximately 147,000 direct and indirect jobs across the province, from Toronto to Timmins.

Speaker, this sector is critical to getting through this pandemic. They haven't stopped working throughout this pandemic. Our government won't stop working to make sure that they have supports that they need.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is to the Premier. Last week, using his power under section 22 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act, the Niagara chief medical officer implemented a regulation that restricted restaurants to only allowing six guests from the same household to a table. The following Monday, this Conservative government implemented a regulation further reducing that to a maximum of four people.

The Premier knows that Niagara is a tourist destination. We depend on our restaurants and bar industry. In fact, 13% of all jobs in Niagara are tied directly to the sector, which doesn't include thousands of spin-off jobs. These businesses cannot survive without financial help. The Premier holds the power in his hands.

Will the Premier stand up today and tell the restaurant and bar owners of Niagara that he hears their cries for help, and immediately announce emergency funding to ensure they can weather the storm of these mandatory public health restrictions?

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

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: I appreciate the member opposite's question. Obviously, Canada's number one tourism destination is Niagara Falls. That's why this government has invested so much money to the Niagara Parks Commission, a \$25-million loan early in the pandemic. I visited his riding. We were able to open up early a Metrolinx round trip. And we've just announced that this government is allowing \$300 million to businesses in hot zones like Niagara Falls and like my own city of Ottawa.

I'm pleased that the member opposite is actually raising an issue on tourism. He had 30 minutes yesterday in

estimates—not one peep did he mention to me about any concerns that he had with respect to Niagara Falls. In fact, I had to call the mayor of Niagara Falls last night to let him know that this government, this party, this Premier stand for the people of Niagara Falls.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question was to the Premier, not the minister, but I'm sure she'll hear some questions today.

Again to the Premier: Restaurants and bars are reaching out to elected officials for their help. I'm echoing their voices in this House to the Premier directly. When we heard about the regulations from the region, myself and my fellow NDP MPPs in Niagara immediately wrote to the Premier asking for emergency financial help for these businesses. They don't want to close; they want to be open, serving guests and tourists. But if they're going to close, then the Premier has an obligation to make sure they don't close permanently and drown in debt.

I want the minister to hear this, because she'll hear about it today: We are waiting five days for a response from the Premier—five days too many.

Speaker, will the Premier answer that letter right now, look into the camera and tell the restaurants and bars of Niagara that help is on the way, and tell them that he'll be using his powers today to help them survive—

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

The minister to reply.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, yesterday the members opposite had an opportunity for 30 minutes to talk about tourism. They refused to utter the word “tourism.” The member opposite comes from the number one tourism destination in the entire country and, for the first time since this pandemic hit, has now just raised—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The minister of Niagara Falls will come to order. I apologize to the Minister of Heritage.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Okay.

I'll give you a couple of extra seconds. Minister of Heritage to reply.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks very much, Speaker. Now that he's been appointed minister, maybe I could ask him a couple of questions. Why did it take you so long to finally start raising these issues on the floor of this House—after eight months?

This government is absolutely committed to working with Restaurants Canada and the Ontario Restaurant Hotel and Motel Association to make sure that we are able to proceed, after COVID-19, with many of these institutions within our province. We will be continuing to engage in hyper-local marketing through the Destination Ontario agency, which is responsible to me, to support this critical infrastructure across the province, including restaurants.

Again, I want to reiterate that the Minister of Finance recently announced \$300 million to support businesses just like these.

Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Ma question s'adresse au premier ministre. The Premier says that the buck stops with him. He says that he's sparing no expenses. He said that he would build an iron ring around long-term-care homes. He says that he'll follow medical advice. My question is very simple: Why hasn't he?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: He has. The Premier has indicated since the very beginning that the health and well-being of the people of Ontario have been and will be our most important priority. He has been listening to the science and the clinical evidence. He's been following the advice that's been given by Dr. Williams, by the public health measures table, by Public Health Ontario and all of the people in behind that, because there are dozens of physicians who are supplying advice and recommendations through those bodies.

That is what we are making our decisions based on, and that is what we will continue to decide upon, because those are the most important issues and those are the people that are on the ground that know what's actually happening out there. We always said that we would listen to them, and we always will do that.

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

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Encore au premier ministre : Daily, the Minister of Health tweets out the new and rising number of COVID-19 cases in Ontario, yet never included in those communications is the number of deaths related to COVID-19. Instead, it is left up to reporters to ensure that information is shared on that important platform.

My question is again very simple: Why is the minister not communicating this vital information in her daily reports?

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Hon. Christine Elliott: This information is provided daily on our COVID website, all of the information that people want to know about: the number of cases, the incidence rates and, sadly, the number of deaths. That is not something that I believe is tweetable. I have respect for the people who have passed away and respect for their families. That is information that people can obtain, but I don't think it's a matter that we should be tweeting about.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. Deepak Anand: My question is to the President of the Treasury Board.

In my riding of Mississauga–Malton, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that Ontario's programs and front-line services need to be more convenient, reliable and accessible. Recently, the province announced a bold plan, Ontario Onwards: Ontario's COVID-19 Action Plan for a People-Focused Government, to make government work more effectively for the people of Ontario. This is welcome news. Simpler, better and faster services are always important, more so during this pandemic. I'm very excited to be part of a team that makes government services more

digitally accessible, reduces red tape and simplifies policies for all Ontarians.

Through you, Mr. Speaker: Could the minister please tell the House and all Ontarians about these exciting and critical advancements in our public services?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I'd like to thank the member for Mississauga–Malton for that excellent question.

With more and more people accessing digital services, we can't afford to be an offline government in an online world. The government is listening to Ontarians and exploring how programs and services can be improved. We've worked hard to create a better experience for the people of Ontario. While this work preceded the pandemic, COVID-19 meant we had to accelerate and innovate our approach to moving Ontario onwards.

In Ontario's 2020 budget, our government launched the \$500-million Ontario Onwards Acceleration Fund. The fund will reinvest in public services and will accelerate transformation across government. We are modernizing the entire government. We are moving Ontario onwards.

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, Minister. It is great to hear how the government of Ontario is improving the way stakeholders interact with the government. I know the people and the businesses in my riding will be thrilled to hear that the government is privatizing programs and services that will impact their day-to-day life. I'm sure the acceleration fund will encourage and accelerate transformation across government by supporting innovative ideas and providing opportunities to pilot these new technologies. To the thinkers and to the innovators from Mississauga–Malton, I'm here to say that we are looking forward to your calls, we are excited to help and we are excited to serve.

Through you, Mr. Speaker: Can the president of the Treasury Board tell the House how the people of Ontario will get help from this acceleration fund?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Again, I'd like to thank the member for this important question.

The world has changed and the government must change with it. The new Ontario Onwards Acceleration Fund will help the implementation of projects that will make a difference in how people and businesses experience services in Ontario. One of the planned signature projects is a digital identity wallet. This will allow people to safely and securely keep digital versions of physical IDs on their devices. A small business owner can register for licences and permits and open accounts online. Ontario farmers could choose to renew a farm vehicle online.

We are expanding the range of programs and services available online, simplifying the government's role in people's lives and their businesses and putting the people at the centre of everything we do.

COLLEGE STANDARDS AND ACCREDITATION

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: My question is for the Premier.

My private member's bill, Bill 83, a Day of Remembrance and Action on Islamophobia, passed second reading unanimously in April 2019. Many government MPPs, including the now Minister of Education and the government whip, spoke wholeheartedly in favour of that bill. But now the Premier is planning to give a notorious Islamophobe the right to grant university degrees and write Islamophobic curricula that will warp the world view of every student exposed to it. The massacres of Muslims in mosques in both Quebec City and Christchurch, New Zealand, were influenced by Islamophobic mischaracterization of Islam and Muslims.

Schedule 2 of Bill 213 amounts to an attack on Muslim communities across Ontario. Will the Premier delete it from the bill?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of College and Universities to respond.

Hon. Ross Romano: Further to the Premier's comments yesterday, let me add this: There is absolutely no place for Islamophobia, or homophobia for that matter, in this province. Where there is an absolute place in this province, and there always will be in this country, is upholding the rule of law, upholding the charter of human rights and freedoms that require equality, that it require all forms of equality be maintained under the principles of fundamental justice, procedural fairness. I'm not sure what the members opposite don't understand.

Mr. Speaker, through you, it seems to me they either just want to play politics, they want to mislead the public, or—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the minister to withdraw his unparliamentary comment.

Hon. Ross Romano: Happy to withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

I must say, I really don't know what it is that they're after at the end of the day. They understand clearly that there is equality. They must appreciate that fairness is important. I trust they do actually appreciate—

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

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: No, it's not about procedural fairness. The bill actually seeks to subvert the usual arm's-length process and procedural fairness. If the Premier cares about procedural fairness, he will remove schedule 2 from the bill.

Charles McVety is also notoriously homophobic and transphobic. The baseless vitriol he has spewed towards queer people is likely to appear in the curriculum he will develop for these university degrees he wants to give.

I am the proud mother of a gloriously wonderful trans daughter. I couldn't be prouder of her. I am also terrified of the consequences of transphobic attitudes and the pain and violence to which they sometimes lead. I know that other parents, friends and families of trans Ontarians feel the same way.

This is Trans Awareness Week. On this week of all weeks, how can the Premier tell trans Ontarians, their families and loved ones that he is legislating more transphobia into the province? Will the Premier delete schedule—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

Minister of Colleges and Universities to respond.

Hon. Ross Romano: There it was, right at the beginning of the—I guess it was an answer. That was it; that’s the critical point. The opposition, both the Liberals and the NDP, continually ask us to interfere with the rules. They continually ask us to interfere with procedural fairness. They continually ask us to somehow restrict the rules. There is no basis to interfere with the process. The process is set for a reason, because it is transparent.

I heard the Leader of the Opposition say in her first question of the day—she commented on transparency. She talked about why we wouldn’t want transparency. This is the most transparent thing that could exist. This is the most procedurally fair process that can exist. The school applies directly to an independent body with no ministerial involvement whatsoever, and we’ve put it in legislation so that it can be openly debated in a transparent and accountable way. There is no clearer way, Mr. Speaker.

PROVINCIAL ELECTION

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: My question is for the Attorney General. Two days ago, Elections Canada sent a communication stating that they do not use Dominion Voting Systems for federal general elections, adding that they use paper ballots, counted by hand, in front of scrutineers. But the 2018 Ontario election saw Dominion voting machines used in 50% of polling locations. Prior to the 2018 election, the Ontario PC Party wrote to Elections Ontario with concerns regarding whether the machines were protected from hacking and about the certification process.

Can the minister tell us whether these concerns have been alleviated and if he knows whether Elections Ontario plans to replace counting ballots by hand with Dominion machines in all polling locations for the 2022 election?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant and member for Durham to reply.

Ms. Lindsey Park: We’re proud of the robust, independent election system we have in the province of Ontario. We would not interfere with that process as the government in power. I encourage the member opposite to continue to draw any concerns she has to Elections Ontario, an independent body, so that they can properly address them.

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

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Machines in elections, not just from Dominion, have been reported in the Canadian media as having issues with “glitches.” The 2014 election in New Brunswick saw results stop for 90 minutes due to a computer program malfunctioning. In 2018, the online voting system used in 51 of the 194 Ontario municipalities experienced problems that delayed voting. In 2020, for their leadership, the Conservative Party of Canada used machines that ended up chewing up thousands of

ballots that had to be recreated in order to be fed into the Dominion Voting machines.

My question: If voting machines that replace people to count and scrutinize sometimes experience glitches that make voters uncomfortable, do the benefits in using machines really outweigh the costs?

Ms. Lindsey Park: Any allegations of fraud in an elections process, we take very seriously, and I know Elections Ontario takes it very seriously. They are an independent body. It’s appropriate that any concerns you have be drawn to Elections Ontario. That’s the proper process.

FLU IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Joel Harden: My question is for the Premier. I’m going to keep it brief in the interest of getting my friend from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek also on the agenda today.

As the province’s seniors critic, I am very well aware that seniors need flu vaccines in this moment. As of November 12, there are no flu vaccines in our city. We currently do not have supply to meet even half of Ontario seniors. We would like an explanation from this government about why it so massively under-ordered, during a pandemic, high-dose flu vaccines for seniors.

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member very much for the question. In fact, we did order over one million doses more this year than last year. We have had a very, very successful flu campaign, as I indicated earlier. I am very happy that the people of Ontario are taking this seriously, to do whatever they can to take care of their own health and the health of their children, their families and their friends.

We did prioritize our flu vaccines when they first came in to our seniors in long-term-care homes, in retirement homes and other places of congregate living, people in hospitals and so on. We ordered more of the high-dose flu vaccines this year than last year, but because it’s been so successful, we are ordering more. As I indicated earlier, we are just receiving another 142,000 doses through Sanofi. We’re looking at other global manufacturers, and we have requested further flu vaccines from the federal government, from their available reserve.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: There are 4.6 million seniors in Ontario. We normally want a utilization rate of 70%. Half that dose, Minister, does not get us there.

A practitioner in our riding, Dr. Alykhan Abdulla, has a thousand seniors in his practice. Guess how many high-dose vaccines he has for them, Speaker? Thirty. What is Dr. Abdulla supposed to do, hold a raffle for the 30 high-dose vaccines those 1,000 seniors need?

Minister, you need to do much better. We need to double, quintuple, sextuple the amount of orders. People need these vaccines. What can you tell seniors today about getting these flu vaccine now?

Hon. Christine Elliott: What I can tell you is that these flu vaccines have to be ordered almost a year before they are required. We anticipated an increase in dosages this year from last year long before COVID-19 ever came along, so we ordered over five million doses; we've received five million doses.

We know that people want to receive more and we are working around the clock to find more through the federal government's vaccine pandemic warehouse, but also we've received 142,000 doses from Sanofi and we are working with other manufacturers to get more doses in as soon as possible, because we know that more people want to receive them. We are doing our best to receive them. We are searching literally around the world to get them. We will get them in, as we've seen with the recent delivery by Sanofi.

CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES

M^{me} Lucille Collard: My question is to the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. The Conservation Authorities Act gives municipal councils the power to appoint all members of the conservation authority for the watershed in which they are located. In Bill 229, however, the government requires members appointed by the municipal councils to be elected representatives. In other words, city councillors will be forced to nominate themselves to the conservation authority. If the councillors wanted to appoint themselves to conservation authorities, they could have done so already, and they probably have good reasons not to do so.

Why does this government believe it is necessary to once again interfere in the affairs of municipalities and force municipal councillors to appoint themselves to conservation authorities, something they obviously have no desire to do?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks very much for that question from the member opposite. Last year, we began a consultation process with regard to conservation authorities. I met personally with almost every conservation authority in Ontario here in Toronto. If I wasn't there, my PA was there, or some of my staff. Following that, we crossed the province, having broad consultations with so many different stakeholders. We had tables where landowners were sitting beside conservation authorities, beside municipal councillors. We had four of them across the province. Over 500 people, approximately, attended almost every event. And we took in a lot of online submissions. One of the main issues that came forward was accountability and transparency with regard to conservation authorities.

One of these moves we're doing is to ensure that those elected members of council will sit on the conservation authority to ensure there's fiscal responsibility but also responsibility for the environment within their municipalities. Public members can still participate in conservation authorities. We hope they set up a—

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Bill 229 also modifies the Conservation Authorities Act to give the minister greater power to overrule permanent decisions made by conservation authorities in Ontario, diminishing their power to protect Ontario's watersheds and wetlands.

Again, I recognize the importance of working with municipalities and developers to help move development forward. However, the environment cannot take a back seat to the economy. The two must go hand in hand.

Conservation authorities were created with the explicit task of conserving, restoring, developing and managing the natural resources in Ontario's watersheds, and they've been doing that very effectively. However, in this House yesterday, to a question asked by the member for Guelph, the government said that the proposed changes to the Conservation Authorities Act would protect the environment better by centralizing power in the hands of the government.

Can the minister please explain how bypassing and overriding those tasked with managing our watersheds in a sustainable manner could possibly help them achieve their purpose?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. The government House leader will withdraw his unparliamentary remark.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): You have to stand up and clearly state—

Hon. Paul Calandra: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thank you for that question. I'll just correct the member. What was missing in the conservation authorities was any amount of appeal in the process—their word and that was the end of the road. They could go to the land tribunal, but that took time. So we're instituting an appeal mechanism with regard to LPAT so that it can get a second view. Consistency was what was missing throughout the province of Ontario. Some conservation authorities were going beyond the rules and regulations of the province and instituting their own rules, which wasn't correct. So what we've allowed also—and the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, on provincially significant land, can in fact issue a permit. But he has to follow the same rules of section 28 that conservation authorities have to follow, and our scientists here at the Legislature will be looking at that.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is asking if we will remove the protections that were in place to ensure that their leader got a free pass to build a pool, to avoid the rules of the conservation authority. We're not going to let that happen. We're going to end those—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. The House will come to order.

The next question.

SPORTS AND RECREATION FUNDING

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is for the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries.

As the critic for the official opposition in sports and tourism, it's my job to hold the government to account. If I can't receive a proper response from the minister, the government is doing a disservice to the people of Ontario.

Since February, prior to the March lockdown, I've been working with various provincial sports organizations that are looking for answers. Over the past nine months, I've sent many official letters to the minister addressing the concerns of the sports community and have not received one single response. I brought some of these letters along with me today—lots of them—and I have a detailed copy of a report which I submitted to the minister in April. I haven't heard a word. A large—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member can't use props. Place your question.

Mr. Paul Miller: Why has the minister and her office refused to respond to any of my inquiries? Has she been asked not to respond?

The House leader stands up every day in this House and says, "We want to co-operate with you." I don't think so.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: I'm going to be brief so the member opposite can have his supplemental. He doesn't get a lot of chances over there, and I really respect the member opposite. I'll respond to his questions today. We'll chat after question period. I'll ask my correspondence unit why there's been a delay.

We've been working extremely hard in sport to make sure that we can get children back into play. We've been flowing lots of money, over \$28 million, to high-performance and amateur athletes. I'm looking forward to estimates today, where I hope that the word "sports" is actually uttered by the official opposition.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: Interesting answer—not. Stakeholders in the tourism industry have also asked for my assistance in getting a response from the minister. Most recently, Michael Wood from Ottawa Special Events spoke with me, along with 25 other political representatives at all levels of government, about the serious problems facing the tourism industry. If federal leaders like Minister Catherine McKenna and Minister Mona Fortier are able to set aside time to speak with people like Michael, why has the minister in charge of his industry not been able to offer the same level of support and open communication in her own city?

This portfolio represents billions in revenue and hundreds of thousands of Ontario jobs. Should there not be some accountability in how it is being managed? At this point, it feels like I'm just rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic.

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

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks very much for the question. The member opposite, if he has been following the portfolio, would recognize that I had not one, not two, not three, but 12 telephone town halls across the province.

I spent 11 weeks on tour across Ontario, safely travelling and exploring and experiencing places, just like his hometown of Hamilton, when I was there to announce money for the Hamilton art gallery.

Speaker, I've also appeared before the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs not once but twice, and yesterday I spent an hour in estimates—and I'll spend some more time—where the members opposite were not able to utter the words "tourism" or "sport," which was very disconcerting, Speaker.

So I've been more than accessible. I've had a telephone town hall with the Premier, with my sectors, with the finance minister. I've had the Associate Minister of Small Business actually attend a consultation with me in my own community. I don't think there has been a member of this assembly who's consulted—

Mr. Paul Miller: Baloney. Baloney.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod:—more widely and broadly across this province during this pandemic than myself and my—

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

The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek will withdraw his unparliamentary remark.

Mr. Paul Miller: Okay. I withdraw the baloney part.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): He will stand in his place and withdraw without qualification.

Mr. Paul Miller: I withdraw, Speaker.

SIGN-LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION

Hon. Paul Calandra: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, if you seek it, I'm sure you'll find unanimous consent for a sign-language interpreter to be present on the floor of the chamber today to interpret statements by the ministry and responses.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent for a sign-language interpreter to be present on the floor of the chamber today to interpret statements by the ministry and responses. Agreed? Agreed.

DEFERRED VOTES

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)

Deferred vote on the motion for 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 Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next we have a deferred vote on the motion for 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.

The bells will ring for 30 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes. I'll ask the Clerks to prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1134 to 1204.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote has been held on the motion for 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.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 54; the nays are 2.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 101(i), the bill is referred to the Committee of the Whole House, unless—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Speaker, I'd like to refer it to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Is the majority in favour of this bill being referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs? Agreed? Agreed. The bill is referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

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

The House recessed from 1205 to 1500.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ACCESSIBILITY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ACCESSIBILITÉ POUR LES PERSONNES HANDICAPÉES

Hon. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: I'm honoured to rise in the Legislature today to recognize the events of National Disability Employment Awareness Month. This important month took place in October. Each year, it helps to raise awareness about the benefits of accessible workplaces. It also sheds light on how inclusive workplaces benefit us all.

Our government is committed to raising awareness about accessibility year-round. When businesses are accessible and inclusive, employees can reach their full potential, and businesses gain access to deep talent pools and new customers. This is particularly important now, as we continue to fight against COVID-19.

We know that COVID-19 has hit our disability community very hard. That is why we have continued to push forward with the Advancing Accessibility in Ontario framework. We know that when we help provide people with disabilities with employment opportunities, we can help alleviate pressure on this group in our society.

The reality is that many people with disabilities are able to work and want to work but can't find meaningful employment. At the same time, there are businesses all across our province that are looking for talented people to join their companies. They are responding to the challenges of the pandemic, too—and helping them access new customers—and additional talent pools can set them on track to not only weather the existing pandemic but also help them achieve long-term success.

Government must be a leader in this space. We cannot work alone, though, if we are going to achieve meaningful change. Government can be, and our government is, a catalyst for positive change, along with a multitude of partners across our province. We don't just talk the talk during National Disability Employment Awareness Month; we are taking concrete action all year round.

I was honoured to be joined last month at a virtual round table by my colleague and friend the Honourable Prabmeet Sarkaria, our Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction, as we heard from small business owners and entrepreneurs across our province. They shared how their businesses were positively impacted by the new team members they had brought on who had disabilities, and how having a diverse, inclusive work environment has helped them battle the pandemic.

They also shared how this government's work to reduce red tape has helped them to create a climate where more people with disabilities can access employment opportunities. This is a government that believes that when you create the right environment and till the soil with innovation, amazing things will grow.

Employing people with a disability is not limited to just small businesses. Through our Employers' Partnership Table, we have also heard from numerous large businesses across our province, both in the corporate and municipal sectors, that choose to build diverse workforces. They do this, in part, through the employment of people with disabilities. Creating a diverse workforce stimulates new ways of thinking about issues faced by both the organization and the customers. We highlighted a number of these employers early in October, helping to share their stories through our social media channels. Sharing these best practices helps all of us as we fight against COVID-19. When we learn from the lessons of others, we all become stronger.

Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 is a horrible enemy. It has caused numerous challenges across our province and the world. We've all been affected by this virus in some way. As businesses and organizations leverage digital and remote technologies, it has also opened opportunities to engage across more of our society. More people are able to connect, in new ways, than ever before. This provides additional opportunities for businesses to tap into the deep talent pool that is found in the disability community.

I was privileged to meet virtually, on behalf of our Minister Monte McNaughton, with the Disability Channel, which offers targeted training for people with disabilities who want to enter the workforce. This kind of support is critical for those looking to re-enter the workforce. I heard amazing stories of how people's lives have been transformed because they were equipped with the skills they needed and then connected to the employers who needed help.

We further see this in Project SEARCH, introduced to our province by the Ontario Disability Employment Network. This program offers a school-to-work transition program, providing life- and jobs-skills training for youth with developmental disabilities. Hosted by Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital and Toronto Rehab, it has helped high school students gain confidence as they transition from high school to the workplace.

We know that when we provide targeted training developed in conjunction with those who need talented employees, we can build a stronger and more resilient province. This is key to not only surviving the COVID-19 pandemic, but to setting us on the path to emerging stronger and more united afterwards.

The Premier has said, and I agree, that the best social program is a good job. We believe that all those who are willing to work should be able to find a good job.

1510

Creating employment opportunities for people with disabilities does not end when the calendar turns from October to November. It is part of our all-of-government approach to advancing accessibility in Ontario. We are committed to helping improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities. It's both good social policy and good economic policy.

Mr. Speaker, creating an inclusive and accessible province is an ongoing journey, made by many partners all across the province. We're working together towards making Ontario more accessible and inclusive each and every day. We all have a part to play in advancing accessibility and inclusion in the workforce.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses?

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you, Minister.

It's an honour to rise today, on this day which acknowledges the importance of employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

I also want to thank my friends in government for empowering this conversation with my friend, who is interpreting it in real time here in American Sign Language. I want to actually salute the government for doing it for its daily press briefings, as well. This is a step forward, and I hope one day in this building we will have a member of provincial Parliament who will employ our friend here full-time, because that's the direction we should be going in the province.

I want to agree and disagree with aspects of what my friend just said. I want to agree that every single person with a disability whom I've met wants to contribute to our society—and I don't think that's a matter of debate across the political lines; they do. I want to talk particularly about

some innovators in Ontario who are doing great work for people with disabilities in creating employment opportunities. But I feel the need to begin, on this day which acknowledges how important it is for people with disabilities to have employment opportunities, by cautioning us against embracing a "productivist" mindset. It sounds like an academic word, doesn't it? There's a reason I use that word. I use that word because in this province and in this world, I would hope, we do not give someone inherent value and worth based upon what they do in an employment context. People have inherent value and worth because all of us have skills and gifts to bring to our communities. That's what I think.

I have been contacted by many people with disabilities who are suffering right now, in this moment, under COVID-19. The minister is absolutely right. We know from Statistics Canada that, at the moment, 36% of people with disabilities have reported temporary or permanent job loss. I'm thinking, in particular, of my friend John Redins back home, who normally sells the 50/50 tickets for the Ottawa 67's and the Redblacks. You know John, right, Mike? John is out of work right now. Sitting at home in his apartment, he doesn't want to feel like he's any less worthwhile as a human being because he's not in a paid employment context. John Redins is worthwhile as a human being because he ran for my friend Mike's political party several times, but also because he's a community builder.

We have organizations in Ottawa that wrap their arms around community builders. In fact, I defy—and I'm sure it's the same in everybody else's town and city—any large event organizer in this province to not name a consistent amount of folks who are drawing upon the Ontario Disability Support Program or Ontario Works, who are active in making those big events that we used to have before COVID-19 happened. People with disabilities are integral to making those events happen. And we need to think—this is what I've said to my friend MPP MacLeod, the minister responsible—about how we continue to employ people like John now, under this COVID-19 moment. Because we can't have those big gatherings, can we? So let's just be careful of the productivist trap.

Let's also celebrate the innovators. I want to talk about one back home. I want to talk about the Causeway Work Centre. The Causeway Work Centre helps find people with disabilities paid employment. They've had enormous success at their employers' table—similar to what the minister has provincially, but locally in our city—in getting people with mental health challenges, physical health challenges and mobility challenges paid employment.

I want to talk about one employment counselor, David, who is supporting a gentleman euphemistically named Stephen. That's not his real name, but for the purposes of confidentiality, let's call him Stephen. Stephen grew up with a disability. He had a very hard time reading in school, and he was labelled a problem child. He acted out and found himself in troublesome behaviours, he found himself in trouble with the law, and he found himself incarcerated. Sadly, this is a pattern we have seen in this

province. Academics call it the school-to-prison pipeline. It doesn't only address racialized and Indigenous people in our province; it addresses a lot of people with disabilities who have not been accommodated. We haven't done enough for them. But guess what the Causeway did for Stephen? The Causeway went out of its way to develop a relationship with an Ottawa trucking company that gave Stephen a chance, and now Stephen, even under COVID-19, is gainfully employed. Stephen is pulling down an income. Stephen is a spokesperson for people with mental health challenges who have disabilities.

With appropriate supports—and that's an important qualifier—you can remake your life. We just celebrated Remembrance Day. That is what our grandmothers and grandfathers fought for. That's what I took the legacy of last Wednesday to mean.

So on this day, when my friend rises to talk about all the great work we continue to want to do for people with disabilities, let us not forget to avoid the productivity trap. We're all valuable, regardless of how much we work in a paid employment context. Let's continue to fund the innovators. Let's get money into their hands. Let's make sure every single caucus of this Legislature makes that happen.

Mr. John Fraser: I never thought I would see myself standing over here during these four years, but even more than that, I never thought I'd see the member from Ottawa Centre standing over here. It's an honour and a privilege to have stood where he stood—and where I'm standing right now, especially with the interpreter here. I want to thank him very much for being here and thank the government, as well, for what they have been doing at their daily press conferences. We need to do more. We need to remember this once the pandemic is over. We have to keep building on this.

Monsieur le Président, octobre était le Mois national de la sensibilisation à l'emploi des personnes handicapées.

October was National Disability Employment Awareness Month. It was established to increase awareness of the positive outcomes of hiring persons with disabilities in Canada. This important nationwide campaign highlights the positive contributions that employees with disabilities make to Canadian workplaces.

Ontario a toujours eu une main-d'oeuvre dynamique et diversifiée qui a besoin des compétences et de l'expertise de tout le monde. C'est la raison pour laquelle nous devons nous assurer qu'il n'y a pas d'obstacles à la participation pour les Ontariens et Ontariennes. Ce n'est pas seulement la chose correcte à faire; c'est la chose intelligente à faire.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario has always had a vibrant, diverse workforce that relies on the skills and expertise of everyone. That's why we need to fully ensure that there are no barriers for people to fully participate in Ontario's workplace. That's just not the right thing to do; it's the smart thing to do, because full participation in our workforce is good for our economy.

Ontario has moved forward with progressive and inclusive hiring standards that eliminate barriers for potential candidates. Although we've made progress, it's

clear there is still more work to be done. I want to thank all those organizations and businesses, large and small, that have worked hard to eliminate barriers.

J'encourage toutes les organisations et entreprises de l'Ontario à reconnaître les capacités et à continuer d'examiner leurs pratiques afin que nous puissions éliminer plus d'obstacles.

I encourage all organizations and businesses in Ontario to recognize capabilities over disabilities, and to continue to examine their practices so that we can continue to eliminate barriers. Open, transparent and inclusive hiring practices need to be the baseline for every business and workplace in Ontario.

1520

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I do want to share my colleague's appreciation to the government and the minister for providing an interpreter here today and at the daily press briefings. How often do you have all the opposition parties complimenting the minister and the government at the same time? So to all my friends in the disability community, I just want to say, look at how you've brought all the parties together today, on national disability employment awareness day.

Some 22% of Canadians identify themselves as somebody with a disability. If we don't embrace, incorporate and make sure all those Canadians have an accessible opportunity to enter the workforce in whatever meaningful way that matters to them, we're losing out on a huge segment of our population.

I want to talk a little bit about my own personal experience. Many of you know I ran a business for many years. We had an adult with developmental disabilities who worked in our business every day. As a small company with 10 employees, that represented 10% of our labour force. It wouldn't have happened if there wasn't a Community Living employment support centre next door to our office that sent somebody into our workplace to provide support for the individual who worked in our office.

The reason I say that is, I know that our AODA deadline is 2025, and I hope all parties embrace that deadline and ensure that all parts of our society and all workplaces meet those AODA standards so that everyone has an accessible opportunity to enter the workforce.

PETITIONS

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Paul Miller: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Financial Services Regulatory Authority of Ontario legislative mandate is to provide regulatory services that protect the public interest and enhance public confidence in the sectors it regulates; and

“Whereas the Financial Services Regulatory Authority of Ontario is responsible for good administration of

pension plans and to protect and safeguard the pension benefits and rights of pension plan beneficiaries;

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

“To enshrine the Financial Services Regulatory Authority of Ontario with the abilities to:

“(1) Block or place conditions on company takeovers, bankruptcy and insolvency process deemed to put pensions at risk;

“(2) Ensure that any pension plan is funded at 100% prior to paying any secured creditors;

“(3) Ensure payment to workers’ any termination, severance pay and health benefits owing prior to any secured creditors;

“(4) Ensure prevention of companies from stopping the payment of any retirement benefits during any proceedings under bankruptcy and insolvency process;

“(5) To issue punitive fines on company directors and executives in cases of clear wrongdoing and to claw back directors’ and executives’ bonuses after a company pension plan collapses.”

I totally agree with this.

Speaker, this is just a small sample of what’s in the petition—there are hundreds of petitions on the OFL website.

COMMUNITY PLANNING

Mr. Aris Babikian: I would like to thank the 220 residents of Scarborough–Agincourt who took the time to participate in this civic mission and civic duty. The petition reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Green Bud Inc. has applied to the AGCO to obtain a licence to open a cannabis retail store at 63 Silver Star Boulevard, unit C6;

“Whereas the store mentioned above is located in close proximity to:

“—Yahu Community Association of Canada (dance programs for youth ages five to 12) 63 Silver Star Boulevard, units E2 and E3;

“—Music of May (music lessons for youth ages five to 12) 63 Silver Star Boulevard, unit D3;

“—Toronto Chinese Christian Short Term Mission Training Centre, 63 Silver Star Boulevard, unit D6;

“—Scarborough Chinese Alliance Church (youth and seniors programs) 139 Silver Star Boulevard;

“—Scarborough Community Alliance Church (youth and seniors programs) 135 Silver Star Boulevard;

“—Scarborough Chinese Baptist Church (youth and seniors programs) 3223 Kennedy Road;

“—Sylvan Learning Centre (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3320 Midland Avenue, units 201-203;

“—Brainchild Education Centre (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3320 Midland Avenue, units 205 and 218;

“—Light and Love Home in Toronto (seniors program) 3320 Midland Avenue, units 215-216 and 223-225;

“—Scholars 101 Education Centre (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3320 Midland Avenue, unit 120;

“—Positive Tutorial School (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3300 Midland Avenue, unit 211;

“—Iron Tutor (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3300 Midland Avenue, suites 208 and 218;

“—Tamarack Day Care Centre, 3315 Midland Avenue;

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

“To disallow the opening of Green Bud Inc. at 63 Silver Star Boulevard, unit C6, due to the potential health and safety risk it poses to youth, children, tenants, and seniors. Furthermore, this location is not in the interest of the public.”

I support this petition and affix my signature to it.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank the Ontario undergrad student association, particularly Malek Abou-Rabia from Laurentian, who I had a meeting with on Tuesday. The petition is called “Increase Grants Not Loans, Access for All, Protect Student Rights.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas students in Ontario pay some of the highest tuition fees in the country and carry the heaviest debt loads, even with the recently announced 10% reduction; and

“Whereas many students will now be forced to take on more loans rather than previously available non-repayable grants; and

“Whereas the Ontario government has failed to take action on the chronic underfunding of colleges and universities; and

“Whereas students must have an autonomous voice that is independent of administration and government to advocate on our behalf; and

“Whereas the proposed ‘Student Choice Initiative’ undermines students’ ability to take collective action;

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

“—provide more grants, not loans;

“—eliminate tuition fees for all students;

“—increase public funding for public education;

“—protect students’ independent voices; and

“—defend the right to organize.”

I agree with this petition. I’ll affix my signature.

DOCUMENTS GOUVERNEMENTAUX

M^{me} France Gélinas: J’aimerais remercier M^{me} Aline Rochon de Chelmsford dans mon comté pour les pétitions qui s’appellent les « Accents en français sur les cartes santé ».

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

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

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

Ils demandent à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario « pour qu'elle s'assure que les accents de la langue française soient inclus sur » toutes les cartes émises « par le gouvernement de l'Ontario », et ce, « avant le 31 décembre 2020. »

J'appuie cette pétition. Je vais la signer et la donner à la table des greffiers.

1530

SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS

M. Michael Mantha: « À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Attendu que la décision du gouvernement de dissoudre le Commissariat aux services en français et d'annuler le projet de la création de l'Université de l'Ontario français met les Franco-Ontarien(ne)s en péril; et

« Attendu que les Franco-Ontarien(ne)s qui, jour après jour, doivent se battre pour maintenir leurs droits d'avoir accès à des services et l'éducation dans la langue officielle qui est la leur; et

« Attendu que les Franco-Ontarien(ne)s occupent une place importante en Ontario, et méritent d'avoir leurs droits linguistiques constitutionnels respectés, protégés et défendus;

« Nous, soussignés, pétitionnons l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario de :

« Rétablir le Commissariat aux services en français et remettre sur les rails le projet pour une université francophone. »

Je suis complètement d'accord avec cette pétition, j'y affixe mon nom et puis la présente à la page pour la table des greffiers.

CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition that's very important to people in London. It's called "Support Conservation Authorities.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's 36 conservation authorities have developed a deep understanding of local ecosystems and have implemented a range of non-mandatory programs to best protect them; and

"Whereas these non-mandatory programs include water quality monitoring and improvement, tree planting and woodlot management, curriculum-based environmental education, trail development and outdoor recreation, support for local environmental initiatives and more; and

"Whereas it is unnecessary and prohibitive to require conservation authorities to secure MOUs with every municipality in their watershed in order to continue non-mandatory programs; and

"Whereas we are deeply concerned that stopping non-mandatory programs will adversely affect the health of our environment;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the continued delivery of the full range of programs and services that have been developed by conservation authorities, including programs and services that are not mandated by the province."

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

FRONT-LINE WORKERS

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I would like to thank Brooke Spoons in my riding, who sent in this petition entitled, "Stop the PSW Shortage in Home Care.

"Whereas there has been a shortage of personal support workers (PSWs) in home care for many years, creating a crisis situation;

"Whereas PSWs in home care are overworked, underpaid, and underappreciated, leading to a staffing shortage which harms both PSWs and their clients;

"Whereas the PSW profession has been undervalued by the government and should become a viable profession once again;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to give all PSWs in Ontario a significant pay increase which recognizes the value of their work, give PSWs longer shifts, and create more opportunities for full-time advancement."

I could not agree with this more, will sign my signature and send it to the Clerks.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

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

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

"Whereas optometrists now subsidize the delivery of OHIP-covered eye care by \$173 million a year; and

"Whereas COVID-19 forced optometrists to close their doors, resulting in a 75%-plus drop in revenue; and

"Whereas optometrists will see patient volumes reduced between 40% and 60%, resulting in more than two million comprehensive eye exams being wiped out over the next 12 months; and

"Whereas communities across Ontario are in danger of losing access to optometric care;

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

"To instruct the Ontario government to immediately establish a timetable and a process for renewed negotiations concerning optometry fees."

I will affix my signature and provide it to the Clerk.

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Tanya McCuffrey from Hanmer in my riding for these petitions.

“Improving Broadband in Northern Ontario.

“Whereas people and businesses in northern Ontario need reliable and affordable broadband Internet now to work, learn and connect with friends and family; and

“Whereas too many people can only access unreliable Internet and cellular or don’t have any connectivity at all especially in northern Ontario; and

“Whereas the current provincial Broadband and Cellular Action Plan has failed to provide northern communities with the same opportunities for economic growth, recovery and participation;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To call on the Ford government to immediately provide a plan with dates and actions to be taken for every area of northern Ontario to have access to reliable and affordable broadband Internet.”

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mr. Michael Mantha: On behalf of the township of Bruce Mines, I have a petition.

“Fix the Northern Health Travel Grant ...

“Whereas the Northern Health Travel Grant is supposed to even the playing field so all Ontarians can get the medical care they need, but it is failing too many northern families;

“Whereas successive Conservative and Liberal governments have let northerners down by failing to make health care accessible in the north;

“Whereas not all costs are covered, and reimbursement amounts are small compared to the actual costs, northern families are forced to pay out of pocket to access health care, which is a barrier for seniors and low-income working families;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fix the Northern Health Travel Grant so we can ensure more people get the care they need, when they need it.”

I agree with this petition, put my signature to it and present it to the Clerks’ table.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Mr. Jamie West: I’m proud to read this petition. The signatures are collected by Cathy Orlando from Sudbury. It’s timely, with the budget, because all this is missing from the budget.

“Don’t Take Away Social and Economic Rights for Women and Marginalized People.

“Whereas Bill 47 erased many of the legislative gains achieved through Bill 148, the fairer labour laws and

working conditions that had a particularly positive impact on women and marginalized people;

“Whereas statistics show that women, particularly women of colour, are most likely to be employed in precarious work, and the Bill 47 amendments to the Employment Standards Act, 2000 and Labour Relations Act, 1995 create conditions that lead to a growth in precarious employment while also eliminating protections for millions of Ontario workers;

“Whereas Bill 66 further erodes women’s and marginalized people’s social and economic rights; and

“Whereas the Ford government continues to remove, cancel or freeze funding for other supports, programs and regulations that would increase women’s equality in the workforce and beyond;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to, at the very least:

“—reinstate paid sick days, the scheduled increase to a \$15 minimum wage, legislation to increase pay transparency, regulations that support equal pay for equal work, and all other worker protections gained under the Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act;

“—reverse changes to daycare regulations that allow more children per caregiver;

“—reverse the retroactive cuts to funding for the Ontario College of Midwives;

“—reinstate funding increases to sexual assault centres;

“—restore the round table on violence against women; and

“—restore the child and youth advocate commissioner’s office.”

I agree with this petition. I will affix my signature and provide it to the Clerk.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: In accordance with standing order 7(e), I wish to inform the House that there will be no night sitting this evening.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you for informing the House.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECT, SUPPORT AND RECOVER
FROM COVID-19 ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2020

LOI DE 2020 SUR LA PROTECTION,
LE SOUTIEN ET LA RELANCE
FACE À LA COVID-19
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 18, 2020, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 229, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact, amend and repeal various statutes / Projet de loi

229, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter, à modifier ou à abroger diverses lois.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I rise today to speak on Bill 229, the budget bill. Since my time is limited I'm only going to focus on two of the 44 schedules in Bill 229.

We need a budget focused on protecting and supporting Ontarians through this pandemic, especially our loved ones in long-term care and our children in schools. We need a budget that is setting us up for a strong economic recovery. Instead, Bill 229 continues the government's trend of using omnibus bills and the pandemic as cover for gutting environmental protections—laws and regulations that protect our communities, our properties, our businesses and our quality of life.

1540

Speaker, I want to be clear: This bill and this budget are not fiscally responsible—not because of the record budget deficit. I think most people expect the government to run a budget deficit while we are combatting the biggest public health emergency and economic crisis of our lifetime, especially when interest rates are so low. The reason this budget is fiscally irresponsible is that schedule 6 of Bill 229 guts the science-based decisions that conservation authorities make to protect us from flooding, which exposes people, businesses and public infrastructure to significant financial risk.

I want to be clear that a focus on protecting our remaining wetlands, green space and farmland is good fiscal policy. The non-partisan, science-based decisions that conservation authorities make protect us from reckless development projects that pose significant risk to people and property. At a time when scientists are forecasting a tripling of flood costs in Canada by 2030, and insurance companies are warning us that some homes and businesses may not even be insurable, the move to undermine the good work of conservation authorities will cost us billions.

Speaker, I want to ask the government: Has the government even done a cost-benefit analysis of the move to gut conservation authorities, and if so, can they please make it public?

I want to remind the members opposite that the mandate for conservation authorities was strengthened in 1954, after Hurricane Hazel claimed 81 lives, destroyed nearly 2,000 homes and did \$1.3 billion of damage to property in this province.

We know that the cost of extreme weather events is going up, but according to a 2016 federal government report on the cost of weather damage and disaster assistance, the cost is actually going up slower in Ontario compared to other provinces. The report specifically cited the valuable work of Ontario's unique conservation authorities in reducing the cost of damage associated with flooding in Ontario.

Conservation authorities do valuable work at bargain basement prices. In 2015, the Grand River Conservation Authority charged each watershed resident only \$2.81 for flood control, watershed management, monitoring and planning. That is cheap insurance by any measure,

especially when the average cost of repairing a basement from flood damage is \$43,000. But sadly, the government is throwing out the approval process that has saved Ontarians money and prevented damage to homes, businesses and communities. Given the escalating risk we face, the government should be strengthening conservation authorities, not weakening them.

One of the lessons that COVID-19 has taught us is that we must follow science to avoid catastrophic consequences. So why is the government replacing the science-based decision-making process that conservation authorities engage in with a political process that puts more power in the hands of the minister to override science? It makes no sense, unless the government is trading in science and reducing risk for people and businesses to cave into the pro-sprawl development agenda of a small handful of irresponsible developers.

This budget goes further to roll back more environmental protection. Schedule 8 will permanently exempt the forest industry from compliance with the Endangered Species Act. We need to protect species at risk and their habitats at a time when species are becoming extinct at a faster rate than at any time in human history. Rather than rising to this important challenge and seeking to set out a future-oriented framework for sustainable forestry management and commercial logging and focusing on higher-margin, value-added production, the budget will set the stage for further biodiversity loss and species decline.

Ontario has a great reputation for sustainable forest management, and I don't want the government's actions to undermine that good reputation. That's why I urge the members opposite to remove schedule 6 and schedule 8 from Bill 229.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you to the member for Guelph for that debate.

Would you elaborate a bit more on how damaging schedule 6 is? The pushback from this is growing by the day, and it's coming from all across Ontario. It's coming from my riding and your riding, but also from the ridings of the members opposite. I know they have to be hearing that same story. So would you elaborate on where you think the resistance to that schedule is coming from?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question.

I think the reason the resistance is growing is because people are recognizing the threats to lives and livelihoods because of undermining the conservation authorities. I've already cited one report, but there are numerous reports that have shown the value that conservation authorities provide in protecting people and property, and they do it at a very low cost. Why the government would throw out that science-based process to maybe satisfy a small number of developers who want to put developments in the wrong place makes no sense when we're talking about protecting people from flooding and other threats due to extreme weather events.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Will Bouma: I have a question for the member from Guelph.

I just had a meeting last week with someone who's trying to preserve the look of downtown Paris, but as you probably know, the entire downtown of Paris is on a flood plain and all of those buildings are slowly falling down. He's trying to build something there that looks exactly the same, but the only way that he can make the project viable is to be able to replace the eight apartments that are there above that with a little bit higher intensity that flows with the provincial policy. However, the GRCA is blocking that by using a 33-year-old policy, completely not in line with provincial policy, that is stopping him from being able to preserve downtown Paris and being able to build a viable project there. I was wondering how you would respond to that.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Well, I would assume that the GRCA—my experience dealing with the GRCA in my own riding has been very positive—are using a science-based process, that they are working with hydrologists and other experts to make the determination around the decision that they have made. If they're not, then the person in question should appeal their decision to the ministry.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank the member from Guelph for talking about schedule 6.

I was listening to Markus Schwabe this morning on Morning North. He was interviewing Carl Jorgensen, the general manager of Conservation Sudbury. I'm going to read parts of the interview—I wrote them down. Basically, he said, "Now the applicant can appeal to the ministry or the LPAT, which adds layers of complexity and certainly costs and delays, going from 30 days to up to 200 days." When asked why this is happening, he said, "We don't know. We haven't seen the consultation records, so we don't know where this drive to change is coming from." Basically, what he asked for was to detach schedule 6 from the budget bill that we're discussing today.

I just wonder if the member for the Green Party would agree with the assessments made by Mr. Jorgensen.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I would wholly agree with removing schedule 6 from the bill, absolutely.

What I find a bit ironic and surprising is that the appeal process to LPAT actually increases the amount of red tape in this bill, because the appeal process could take up to 200 days. One of the concerns I've heard is not only from environmental groups who are saying this makes absolutely no sense, on "Let's protect our property and people from flooding"—but I've also heard from others who are saying that it actually will increase red tape because of the delay and how long it takes to go through the LPAT appeals process.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): In my opinion, there isn't enough time for another question.

Further debate?

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Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: I rise today to speak to the merits of the 2020 Ontario budget, Ontario's Action Plan: Protect, Support, Recover.

First and foremost, I want to thank Ontario's front-line and essential-service workers for continuing to perform exceptionally through the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

Applause.

Interjection: Hear, hear.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Yes, they deserve it. Absolutely.

I am sure I don't need to remind anyone here today that the COVID-19 crisis has become a defining moment in the history of our province. We have spent most of this year facing and overcoming a tremendous number of challenges that have affected every corner of our province.

I'm proud to stand in this House to speak about the excellent work that we have undertaken to assist our front-line and essential-service workers in carrying out their duties to keep the province running smoothly.

The people of this great province expect us to work for them, and that is exactly what we are doing with the 2020 Ontario budget. Throughout the pandemic, our government has taken action to assist the good people of Ontario.

I want to congratulate the Minister of Finance and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance for working together collaboratively and listening to the people of this province and coming out with this budget, especially during this pandemic—a budget which is full of expenditures. I think this shows our government's commitment to the people of this province—that we have your back.

This month, as we all know, we introduced the 2020 Ontario budget., Ontario's action plan includes more resources to strengthen front-line health care support and support people and employers and lay the groundwork for Ontario's recovery.

Whenever I get the opportunity to go out and meet with stakeholders, businesses, individuals, the most important question that everyone has on their minds is, "How are we going to recover from this pandemic, and what is the government's plan?"

I think this budget speaks not only about "protect" and "support," but also about how we're going to "recover" from this pandemic—basically, a road map to show the people of this province once again that this government is here listening to you and we are going to do everything possible to come out of this crisis stronger than ever before.

That's why Ontario's action plan sets out a total of \$45 billion in support over three years to make available the necessary health resources to protect, support and recover. The budget is all about the numbers, so let's talk about the numbers right now—90% support and protect and 10% recover.

Deficit projection: We are projecting a deficit of \$38.5 billion for 2020-21, which is unchanged from the forecast at the time of the 2020-21 first quarter finances and reflects the urgency of COVID-19. Over the medium term,

the forecast is steadily declining: \$33.1 billion in 2021-22, and then \$28.2 billion in 2022-23—balance the 2021 budget by March 31, 2021.

We have been working diligently to get the province back on track. In fact, since June, employment has risen by 838,000 net jobs, and as of September, employment reached 95.8% of February 2020 levels.

These are uncertain times. While Ontario's real GDP is projected to decline by 6.5% in 2020, there is hope on the horizon, with a projected rise by 4.9% in 2021, with additional projections of a 3.5% increase in 2022 and another 2% in 2023.

Mr. Speaker, the 2020 Ontario budget is laid out in three stages or pillars, which strategically outline how the proposed funding will be distributed over the next three years. The first pillar seeks to protect. It outlines an investment of \$15.2 billion, including \$7.5 billion of new funding for COVID-19 response.

We can talk about the health care sector. As we all know, this sector is doing an incredible job during this crisis, and we should recognize the incredible work. Our government is proposing \$4 billion in 2021-22 and a further \$2.8 billion in 2022-23 in direct support to protect health care and continue the fight against COVID-19. Our health care system and long-term-care system will benefit greatly from our proposed infusion of additional funding to support more hospital beds, address the surgical backlog, and purchase additional flu vaccine for the upcoming flu season. We are in the flu season right now, and we talk about this on a daily basis.

Mr. Speaker, because I represent the great riding of Mississauga East–Cooksville, I want to talk a little bit about Mississauga, as well. This budget is protecting front-line health care, supporting people and employers, and laying the foundation for an economic recovery across the province, including Mississauga, by accelerating the construction of two new, modern long-term-care homes, with 640 new long-term-care beds at Sheridan Park by 2021, and adding up to 141 new hospital beds in the Trillium Health Partners network, including up to 99 at the Mississauga Hospital—my colleague from Mississauga–Lakeshore and I always have this conversation as to whose riding this hospital is in; sometimes he wins and sometimes I win—supporting the city of Mississauga and the region of Peel with \$74 million for urgent local priorities and \$34 million for our local infrastructure.

Across all of Ontario, we are investing \$1.4 billion to expand testing and case contact management—our largest flu campaign, with a purchase of 5.1 million doses, at a cost of \$70 million. We are including \$60 million for infection prevention and control across hospitals and long-term-care homes; \$540 million in protection for residents, caregivers and staff in long-term-care homes from surges; and \$405 million to enhance screening, staffing support and PPE.

Mr. Speaker, to address the surgical backlog, we are allocating \$283.7 million to enable 60,000 surgeries. We are providing an additional \$116.5 million to add up to 766 hospital beds. This is on top of the 139 critical beds and 1,349 hospital beds already announced previously.

I know this budget is full of numbers and years, but I think it is very important for us to talk about numbers, because it all comes down to how much investment this government is making, especially during this COVID-19 crisis.

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We are also directly supporting hospitals with \$572 million to address the additional cost of managing COVID-19. This funding will assist our testing assessment centres, labs, and provide equipment and PPE, in the continuing fight against COVID-19. They will receive \$18 billion in capital grants over 10 years to build new and expanded hospital infrastructure.

Our long-term-care system will receive \$500 million to enable necessary renovations and measures to improve prevention and control, and allow the purchase of PPE. This is very important, especially in Mississauga, and particularly in my riding of Mississauga East–Cooksville. I always say my riding is very much a seniors' riding, and I'm always trying my very best to fight for our seniors every day, making sure that they get support.

We are supporting our long-term-care system with an increase in daily, direct care of long-term-care residents to four hours a day. This measure includes recruiting and training tens of thousands of new staff.

The second pillar is all about support—the support that we are providing to the people of this province. We are investing \$2.4 billion in new funding for people and jobs, which brings our total funding for people and job creators to \$13.5 billion.

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken about how we are supporting and protecting our staff and seniors in long-term care, but let's talk about our kids. As a proud father of four, with one more on the way in February, I'm especially concerned about how the COVID-19 crisis will affect our province's children right now and in the future—

Interjections.

Mr. Kaled Rasheed: Yes. Hopefully, if everything goes well in February, I'm going to be a father of five kids.

When we talk about children—Ontario is providing \$380 million to parents through another round of payments, following the \$378 million of funding we already provided in March. Ontario families can expect a one-time payment of \$200 per child up to 12 years old and \$250 per child and youth with special needs up to 21 years old through the Support for Learners initiative. During the first round, I heard from a lot of residents of Mississauga East–Cooksville. There was very positive feedback on this initial investment that we did back in the springtime. Families were really happy that they were getting some sort of support from the government, which helped them buy, for example, artwork and new technology gadgets—as we know that during the springtime our kids were learning from home. So this \$200 and \$250 was a great help, and I think the people of this province really appreciated the support.

I want to thank the Minister of Education for coming out with this great plan and making sure that we have the backs of our parents in this province.

The most important thing is what we are doing for our schools. We are making \$1.3 billion in resources available to school boards, including an additional \$381 million from the federal government's Safe Return to Class Fund. We are expanding our education infrastructure with \$13 billion in capital grants over 10 years to build new schools and renew existing schools through Access Ontario, to ensure that students have safe and modern environments to learn and grow. As we hear on a daily basis—knock on wood—hopefully, we'll continue to see positive results coming out of schools, especially during this pandemic.

My own children are going to school and we always talk about safety and making sure that they understand that we are in very unprecedented times right now, making sure that they are wearing their masks and washing their hands continuously—just trying to be vigilant and do their best, not just for themselves but also for their friends in school.

Mr. Speaker, I saw you smiling when I talked about the seniors in my riding because you said that you have a lot of seniors in your riding as well—

Interjection: He's one of them.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: No, you're not a senior; I don't think you're a senior. You're a young man, or as you call it, a "young-hearted guy."

One piece of feedback that I had received, Mr. Speaker—and I'm very happy that the Minister of Finance, during our conversations, discussed this—was some sort of a tax credit for seniors, because I had mentioned to him previously that there are seniors who prefer to stay at home during these times. If we can provide them some sort of help in terms of, maybe, renovating something in their home to make it easier and more accessible, that would be great.

Now we know that in this budget we see that there is a tax credit that provides a 25% credit on eligible renovations, up to \$10,000 in expenses per household, which means roughly about \$2,500 per renovation. This is eligible for families with seniors who live with them, and basically it begins in the 2021 tax year. I think this is going to be a great help, especially for the residents of Mississauga East–Cooksville. I know when they reached out to me during this pandemic, they said, "We would like to have things done in our house from an accessibility perspective—renovating a washroom or making a ramp for a wheelchair," so I think this will be a great help.

We are also providing \$3.1 million in additional funding for a total of \$17.2 million for the Seniors Active Living Centres Program. I think this is a great program. I have close to five or six seniors' organizations in my riding. A lot of them are from different groups, but they all have the same request: "Can you please, especially during this unprecedented time, get some support from the provincial government when it comes to having some funding" so they can continue their program online?

Isolation is a huge issue among seniors, and they want to be out there, if not meeting with people, then at least having group Zoom chats—just a daily interaction using technology. So I think these programs, this grant, is

definitely going to help these groups come up with some new programs that are going help our seniors in this province. Many of these organizations have, Mr. Speaker, pivoted to work in a virtual setting to help combat social isolation while improving the in-person programming, and making sure that it's done with full social distancing and PPE measures. I really cannot thank the minister and the parliamentary assistant enough for making sure that we have the backs of our seniors.

With that, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to add some of my comments to this debate.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Just before we go into questions and responses, I wanted to remind the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville, your comment about seniors—I was going to ask you to withdraw, but then I realized that I resemble that comment, so we'll just let it go.

Now it's time for questions and comments. I recognize the member from Sudbury.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you, my young Speaker.

Thank you also to the member opposite for his comments during the debate. One of the lines that stood out to me was about the government working to help front-line workers. I want to remind the member that this Conservative government passed legislation that effectively eliminated the CBA for these front-line workers. That meant that during the summer they didn't have vacations, they were working short, and they began to burn out more and more, and now we're heading into a second wave.

On October 1, the Premier announced temporary raises for PSWs. Today is November 18; it's one month and 18 days later. My question is: If you're looking after front-line workers, why are CUPE members in Sudbury waiting for a month and 18 days before hearing anything about these raises?

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to the member opposite for his question. Mr. Speaker, what we have done from day one—the Premier has stood here in the chamber and at the podium and has shown his full support to our front-line health care workers. I actually just introduced a private member's bill where we talk about a whole week dedicated to our front-line and essential service workers, because we understand that these are the individuals who are out there on the front line fighting so that we can be safe. We will continue to invest in our front-line health care workers, because, honestly, I think they are our real heroes, and we cannot thank them enough for the great work they have done for the people of this province—and they continue to do so.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: First, I want to thank my friend from Mississauga East–Cooksville for his remarks. He highlighted some very important and unprecedented announcements that our government is making in health care. Since our Minister of Finance announced our action

plan, I'm hearing some very positive feedback from my community of Brampton West.

This plan is the most comprehensive action plan in Canada to respond to the serious impacts on health and the economic impacts of COVID-19. My question to the member is, can the member share what our government is doing to protect the health and well-being of Ontarians during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: For a second, I thought you were going to talk about the announcement I made about me becoming a father for the fifth time.

Thank you so much to the member. I know that we are part of the Peel region and we always have this conversation about our government's investment in the health care system. As I said earlier in my remarks, our government is committed to investing in our health care system because this is something very important. But also, we are investing roughly \$15.2 billion in our health care system to provide support to our front-line workers. This also includes 141 hospitals and health care facilities and 626 long-term-care homes since the beginning of this pandemic. We will continue to invest money in our health care system, and also provide an additional \$572 million to ensure Ontario hospitals have the necessary resources to continue to provide care for those who need it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I listened to the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville very intently in regard to his presentation and the words that he offered. I did find within the context of the budget that there was a sentence there where the government did adopt one of our colleagues' private members' bills, Time to Care. However, the commitment was to four hours of hands-on care by 2025. That care is needed now within our long-term-care homes.

Quebec has hired and placed and trained 10,000 PSWs. BC has hired, trained and placed 7,000 PSWs within their long-term-care homes. Can the member please direct me to the page where Ontario's aggressive recruitment plan that is needed in our long-term-care homes is found in this budget?

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: I'm very proud to say that our government now has a separate ministry for long-term-care homes. This shows how serious our government is when it comes to long-term-care homes, and we will continue to invest money in our long-term-care homes.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk to the member opposite's private member's bill about the four hours, I remember receiving a phone call from one of my constituents who was explaining to me how his father is in a long-term-care home and his ask was, "Can you make sure we can have at least the minimum four hours of care for my father?" I'm very proud that our government continues to support that private member's bill, but we also have a robust plan for our long-term-care centres.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I just want to thank the member for his speech today. We have a lot of young families, and I know you were talking about being a new father—well, for the fifth time—in February this year. So congratulations from me, of course.

I would like to know what is in this bill. How does it help out families and parents and children? Can you expand a little bit about what we see in the budget?

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Since the Minister of Education is here, I want to commend him and thank him for listening to parents out there. I remember having this conversation with him when this program was introduced for \$200 per child for families. I heard from so many families who were really happy. They were saying, "Now at least we can go out and buy a workbook for our kids, maybe educational DVDs or programs." Because children at that time were staying at home and education was taking place from home, so they found this amount of \$200 per child—even though it was a one-time thing, at least it was an amount that parents could use towards their children's education or any other things that they needed to buy for their kids.

I thank the Minister of Education again for continuing to listen to parents and reintroducing this program. I honestly cannot thank him enough for his continued ongoing support of the parents in this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Jamie West: I just want to follow up on the response to the member from Algoma–Manitoulin. The member opposite talked about the strong investment the government has in long-term care.

In March, the fiscal plan had a forecast of \$4.63 billion for long-term care. That was the month the Premier said they're putting an iron ring around long-term care. We've had more than 2,000 deaths in long-term care and the budget is \$10 million short of that prediction of \$4.63 billion for long-term care. I'm just wondering how the dollar value matches the commitment to long-term care the member was speaking about.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Honestly, the loss of life in long-term-care homes here in our province and around the world is, I think, one of the darkest chapters of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We will make Ontario the leader among Canadian provinces in terms of the quality of care our loved ones will receive. Our government is investing \$1.75 billion to build more beds and upgrade existing ones, which is part of an investment that will create 30,000 new beds, Mr. Speaker—30,000.

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Since the beginning of this pandemic, we have made close to \$800 million available to protect our loved ones in long-term care, and I'm very, very proud to say that we will continue to invest money in long-term-care homes to make sure that our seniors have the best life possible.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It's now time for further debate.

Mme France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to add a few words about the budget. The first one I wanted to talk

about is something that made the news in Sudbury this morning. It has to do with homelessness.

When the Premier stood in front of the camera, he promised, “No one will be kicked out of their home or their rental apartments based on not being able to pay the rent—it’s just not going to happen, we won’t allow it to happen.” Yet the Salvation Army started their kettle drive, like they do every year, and they said, “People listing homelessness as their reason for visits” to the Salvation Army has doubled since the pandemic started.

Double the number of homeless people: I want to remind everyone that it was minus 18 last night in Nickel Belt and that today it will rise to minus 12. We have hundreds of people homeless and 35 spots in our shelter. Everybody else sleeps outside. That doesn’t seem like a promise that nobody will lose their home through the pandemic. How come we don’t see any money in the budget to make sure that those hundreds of people who slept in minus-18-degree weather in my riding last night have a place to go?

It went on to say, “As the nights get colder and the city’s homeless population only seems to grow bigger”—we have a local man, Darren Ransom, who is building tiny, weeny little shelters so that at least the snow will fall on a little bit of a shelter rather than fall on your head while you sleep outside.

Interjection: Good man.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Yes, absolutely, a good man. But the government has a role to play to protect the most vulnerable people, and that means making sure that we have enough shelter, making sure that nobody gets kicked out of their home and their apartment, and making sure that there is rent geared to income and there’s a place to house everyone. The NDP believes that housing is a human right. So when you have those values, you put it in the budget—but not this government.

We have a pandemic within the pandemic. Everybody knows about COVID-19. Through COVID-19, the number of people who suffer from mental health and addiction has exploded. We’ve always had high demands for mental health and addiction services, but now it is going through the roof.

I would like to quote from Addictions and Mental Health Ontario, which says, “The annual investment of \$176 million for mental health and addiction care falls well short of what is needed. The government is behind target on the implementation of key foundational elements of their” 10-year plan.

It gets even worse when you talk about children’s mental health. The children’s mental health association said, “Children’s Mental Health Ontario (CMHO) is disappointed by today’s government of Ontario budget which ignores the crisis identified by mental health care providers that Ontario children, youth and families are facing due to COVID-19 and the pre-pandemic wait of 28,000 kids of up to 2.5 years which is now growing rapidly. With no new funding announced today, there will be no improvement in the levels of mental health service which is not meeting demand, leaving too many children

behind. CMHO has identified and advised the Ministry of Health that there is a need for an increase of \$150 million to reduce” that two-and-a-half-year-long wait-list for children needing mental health services.

Think about it. You’re seven years old and you’re put on a wait-list of two and a half years. How could that be, Speaker?

How come we did not see this \$150-million increase in the budget for children’s mental health? The government has a commitment of \$3.8 billion over 10 years, but so far, not one penny has come from the province. They get the half that comes from the federal government and they spend it. That’s the \$178 million a year, but not one penny is matched by the government. I take it in year 9 the \$1.9 billion from the provincial government will be spent? It is needed now. It is needed now so that little kids are not put on a 2.5-year-long wait-list to gain access to mental health services.

Lots of things go wrong for those children, for their families. I guarantee you the families will break up. Mom and Dad won’t live together anymore because the strain and the stress that it puts on those families is untenable.

We could prevent all of this by doing the investment. Ontario has the money. You already have a commitment of \$1.9 billion over 10 years. Don’t only take the share from the federal government—put your share in now, not in year 10, and then those kids will suffer no more.

Something that I have to address, because I come from Nickel Belt: I have 24 beautiful conservation reserves in and around Nickel Belt—and then we have schedule 40 and we have schedule 6. Schedule 6 talks about conservation authorities, and when we talk about Indigenous people, there is no provision to enable or require Indigenous representation on conservation authority boards.

The Chiefs of Ontario recently criticized the Ford government for ignoring treaty and Aboriginal rights when approving controversial ministerial zoning orders, allowing the destruction of a provincially significant wetland in lower Duffins Creek in Durham region, located in the traditional territory and treaty lands of the Williams and pre-Confederation Treaties. The chiefs said, “The increased use of” ministerial zoning orders “by this government is a disturbing abuse of power, especially when applied to override environmental protections.”

It goes on, Speaker.

“Bill 229 is the most recent in a disturbing trend of using omnibus budget measures bills to make substantial changes to environmental laws, thereby sidestepping the public’s right to comment under the Environmental Bill of Rights.”

It goes on and on.

Conservation Ontario, which represents Ontario’s 36 conservation areas, says the changes “trigger red flags.”

“There are a number of changes that could actually create more red tape and delay permit application approvals and I’m not sure that’s what the province intended to do....

“One of our main goals throughout this review has been to maintain the conservation authorities’ watershed-based approach to protecting people from natural hazards and ensuring the conservation of Ontario’s natural resources.”

All of this goes out the window with the changes to schedule 6 as well as schedule 40. Why? What does that have to do with the budget? Why, in everything that this Conservative government does when they talk about the environment, is it always slid into some kind of an omnibus bill so that we don’t have a chance to talk about it? We’re talking about a budget. Why did you put those amendments to an environment law in a budget? It has nothing to do with the budget. It has to do with the fact that developers want to gain access to those lands. They want to be able to pay so that they can pave over existing lands that are protected. That happens throughout Ontario. You should be ashamed of what you’re doing.

The biggest hole in this budget, without a doubt, is in long-term care. I have been an MPP since 2007. I still remember, in 2003, when the Conservative government of Mike Harris cancelled the standard of care in long-term care. It was at 2.25 at the time—it was nothing great—but because we had a minimum standard of care, all 626 long-term-care homes had to report on their standard of care every three months. I would FOI those reports every three months so that we could see how the different homes were doing—which are the ones that are improving their standard of care? Which are the ones that are not?

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None of this is available anymore, because when the Liberals were there in 2007, they changed the Long-Term Care Homes Act. There was no standard of care. Mike Harris took it away, the Liberals continued without it for 15 years, and we end up where we are now. We end up where there are a few good homes but there are many, many homes with a very poor standard of care.

I encourage everybody here and everybody who’s listening to go read the Armed Forces report as to what it looked like in our long-term-care homes. Of the people who have died of COVID-19, two thirds of them were residents of long-term care. Of the people who have contracted COVID-19—10% of the residents of our long-term-care homes contracted COVID-19. Think about it. If that were a community, that would be 1.4 million Ontarians contracting COVID-19. Why is this okay in our long-term-care homes? It is not.

We know how to fix this, and the Premier even says it—he repeats it: “We will have four hours of hands-on care.” Hallelujah. This is something that I have brought many private members’ bills to do. My colleague from London—Fanshawe is now pushing this. We all agree, but not one cent is in this budget to bring us to four hours of hands-on care.

Rumour has it that we’re at 2.7 hours of hands-on care. So let’s all do the math: 1.3 hours more, times 78,000 residents, times 365 days of the year, times, let’s say, 20 bucks an hour. That’s 900 million bucks. If, God forbid, we were to pay them 24 bucks an hour, it would be \$1.1 billion to bring us to four hours of hands-on care. How much money did we see in the budget? Zero. How could

this be? We’ve all seen it—the level of care in our long-term-care homes is not acceptable; it has to improve. We know how to improve it. We’ll improve it by making PSW jobs good jobs. We’ll improve it by bringing in four hours of hands-on care. Ontario knows how to do this. Ontario says that they are going to do this, but they don’t move.

I read the budget in the car while the member from Sudbury was driving. He drives me to Queen’s Park, and I drive him crazy. This is the deal that we have.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I know, I know.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It used to be the member from Algoma–Manitoulin. I now have a new driver.

When I saw this in the budget, I had a hard time containing myself—not a single penny to help long-term care.

How do we improve care? We make sure that we have continuity of care. How do you get continuity of care? You bring continuity of caregivers. How do you get continuity of caregivers? You make PSW jobs good jobs. You make sure 70% of those jobs are full-time jobs. You give them the living wage. I talk about 24 bucks an hour—it is well worth it. You give them benefits—a few sick days, maybe, because we all get sick; you could dream of a pension plan. And you give them a workload that a human being can handle—and that means four hours of hands-on care.

We’ve seen this in other provinces. When Quebec faced the same drastic first wave as we did, when they lost a lot of their residents in long-term care, they acted. They recruited over 10,000 people to work in long-term care. They paid them for the months it took to train them to be PSWs. They guaranteed them a full-time job with benefits, with union protection. Right now, as we speak, there are 10,000 new PSWs throughout the province of Quebec to make sure that the second wave is not as deadly as the first.

What did Ontario do? Not one penny in the budget and a promise of a staffing plan to come—I don’t know; I’m hoping soon. But I know that there will be no money to fund this.

Our long-term-care system is broken. The majority of our 78,000 beds are owned by private, for-profit operators. They amaze me at how good they are at making a profit. You have to realize that it doesn’t matter how old your home is, that you have a ward of four people per room—they will always be full. It’s not free to live in a long-term-care home. Everybody has to pay. You want a private room? It’s \$2,701 a month. You want a semi-private room? It’s \$2,280 a month. If you have the ward, which in the older for-profit homes means four people in a room—I don’t know, 20 feet by 18—it’s \$1,891 a month. All of this goes straight to profit, because they are allowed to make a profit on the rent that you pay.

Tell me, who would pay \$2,701 a month for rent? The private rooms will be maybe 18 feet by 20, 200 square feet at the maximum, and they pay \$2,701 a month.

But they’re not happy to just make a profit on the rent that they collect. They have seen that if you have part-time workers, you don’t have to pay them statutory holidays or anything like this, so you make more money. If you have agency part-time workers, you make even more money. But they don’t stop there. They set up their own agency.

They hire their staff from the agency that they set up and own. Ask the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly about that one. She will have a good story to tell you that I don't have time to say, which is too bad.

So they make money on the rent, they make money because they subcontract agency staff to themselves—temporary staff—and that's not enough. Some of them also subcontract to themselves pharmacy services, because most of the—read the report from the Auditor General on the use of drugs in our long-term-care homes. Many of them—I forget the stats—40% of them receive more than 20 meds a day. Anyway, there is a lot of money being spent on medication in a long-term-care home. They're not happy to see all that money go by, so they set up their own pharmacy service and they buy the drugs from their own pharmacy service that they own. The creativity to make money has no end. None of that effort, time and energy is put into making sure that we provide good-quality care. There is one motive to a private, for-profit long-term-care home: It's to make money. Quality of care comes, I guess, as priority 99, someplace down the road, but it certainly is not number one.

I want to talk about hospitals. Yesterday, I brought forward that, right here, right now, down the road at SickKids, we have over 4,750 kids on a wait-list for urgent surgery. A third of those kids have already missed their development windows. When you look at kids born with scoliosis, with cleft palates, with hip dysplasia, with a number of things that the kids will need surgery for—you usually schedule that surgery in their development window just at the right time, so that you make sure that as they learn to walk, as they learn to talk, as those surgeries are done, as the rehab is done, that child has the best opportunity to live a normal life. For a third of those kids, we have missed that window. Yet, when SickKids submitted a plan to ask to work on the backlog of surgeries—and that's for all of the children's hospitals; Ottawa is the same, McMaster is the same—the funding did not come. Those kids will live with the consequences of their delayed surgery for the rest of their lives. Was it really worth saving a couple of million dollars? You are sitting on billions of dollars, unspent, for COVID-19. Why couldn't you find a few bucks to help those sick kids? Who does that? You know that children are going to live with the consequences of your decisions for the rest of their lives—some of them severely handicapped for the rest of their lives—and you're sitting on billions of dollars, and you refuse to fund your hospitals, I don't get it at all. I'm disappointed with this budget.

1640

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It's now time for questions.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you to the member opposite for your remarks.

I just want to point out one thing first: We have invested a lot of money into long-term care. Protection is one of the first pillars of what we have in our 2020 budget—not only to have extra investment into hospitals, but also long-term care. In fact, before we presented our budget, we had already announced extra investment into long-term care.

Also, with PSWs—we extended the number of hours to four hours.

But I rise to respond to the contention you made earlier about the broadband that your constituents really want to have, especially up in northern Ontario. Our government has seen this need. In fact, we have made plans, even way before COVID-19. But COVID-19 makes it so clear for us that this is necessary—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Back to the member from Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: The first question: Yes, you invested \$1.7 billion to build new homes, but you did not invest any money to staff those homes. There's no point in having more long-term-care beds if you don't have people to staff them. There's no money in the budget for new staff. There's no money in the budget to bring us to four hours of hands-on care. It is not there.

When you talk about broadband—I did not have time to talk about it, but I thank you for the question.

The system that the government has put in place is a system driven by the private sector, so I asked all of the private sector who are interested in broadband if any of them are putting in new towers. I have one putting one tower just south of my riding that will cover a little neighbourhood. Nobody else is coming to Nickel Belt, because there's no money to be made in Nickel Belt. They're not interested in the program that the government has put forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's always a privilege being in the House, especially when the topic is health care, and especially when the member from Nickel Belt explains the reality that she hears from the perspective that she has as our critic.

What I do want to tell her is that last week we had our constituency week, and going through my riding, I heard from many PSWs who have burnt out, who are tired, who are hurt, who are injured, who are frustrated, who are struggling with their consciences and have removed themselves from long-term-care homes because they are not getting the respect, they are not getting the attention, they are not being heard. The standards of care are not there anymore—the quality of care that they are struggling with providing because they are forced to follow a manual of 0.25 this, 0.5 this and 0.5 that.

If we don't make the investments into our PSWs across this province, what will happen?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you for the question.

It is already happening. We see that the level of care in our long-term-care homes is not there. The Armed Forces showed us that we had people who died of dehydration, who died of starvation.

I had people coming to show me that during the months of confinement—her husband had lost 60 pounds, almost a pound a day, because no one was there to feed him. I have horrifying pictures of people covered in bedsores. Those bedsores are infected because their own feces were mixed in—and now you have horrific pictures.

This is what long-term care is about: It's to provide them with their activities of daily living. When there is no staff there, the conditions are what you read in the report and the pictures that you see, and it will continue.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions? I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for permitting me to reply to the member opposite. I thank her for her thoughts.

I just want to correct the record. It was noted in the context of staffing what the government has done during COVID, during this fiscal year, during this calendar year to support them. There's \$243 million in emergency funding to stabilize staffing. There was an additional \$17 million to preserve front-line staff to incent them to stay with their long-term care. There was a commitment for the first time to increase wages for our front-line workers, for the 147,000 workers who deliver publicly funded personal care services within our long-term care, a commitment made by our Premier, by the Minister of Health—something that has not been done in some time.

In addition, \$540 million was set aside to ensure infection prevention in our long-term-care centres to prepare for the second wave. This is a significant one-time infusion of investment happening on the heels of the budget, leading up to that budget. The budget makes clear that those investments—and I believe that those type of supports in place are going to make a difference. I think it is important for all member of the House to acknowledge that \$500 million, \$243 million specifically for staffing and stabilization, will make a big difference. I hope the member opposite would agree.

M^{me} France Gélinas: The money that he was talking about is one-time, so when you are a PSW—they go into work because they love what they do. They love their residents; they want to help. But then they get there—and I cannot think of one home that doesn't work short-staffed. You're supposed to be looking after 10, but you end up looking after 15 people because you always work short-staffed on every shift.

To get an extra \$3 an hour is something that is absolutely welcome, but it's only until March. So when you have an opportunity to go to a job someplace else that will give you full-time work, that will pay the same, they go, because the job that they have now does not allow them to make ends meet, is not full time, and the \$3 is only guaranteed till the end of March.

I want to add to this that it has not started to flow. Not a day goes by that we don't have a pile of PSWs who call and say, "We don't"—I was talking to Extencicare Falconbridge and they still haven't got the money for their \$3-an-hour pay, so they haven't been able to pay their PSWs.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Nickel Belt for her conversation about the debate on the budget. The thing that frustrates me is that again and again we keep hearing the government's commitment to long-term care—the Conservative commitment to long-term

care. As the member from Nickel Belt knows, because we've been working on this, St. Joe's long-term care in Sudbury has been trying to get N95 masks since June of this year. In July, they contacted our office; in August, we worked with the ministry to get try them; in September, the minister said that they had N95 masks even though they had none.

In September, the member from Nickel Belt asked the question in question period and the minister said that there's no problem getting the masks. We've been working on this ever since. Today is November 18, 2020. I spoke with the director; they still don't have N95 masks if there's an outbreak—zero, zero available.

My question to the member: If the government is so committed to long-term care, why is it that St. Joe's in Sudbury can't get an N95 mask after asking from June until November?

M^{me} France Gélinas: This is a very good question. St. Joseph's long-term-care home in Sudbury is a really good long-term-care home. It is run by the Sisters of St. Joseph. Unfortunately, they were one of the homes that had an outbreak and they lost a resident. They learned from this and they are doing everything they can to make sure that COVID never comes into their home again and that they protect all of their residents. That means having the PPE ready so that if ever one of their staff or one of their residents tests positive, they will be ready. That means having N95s on hand.

The executive director, Jo-Anne Palkovits, has been trying since June to get access to N95s. Believe me, she has turned everything upside down to try to buy N95s so that they would be ready, so that she can protect everyone. She could not find any.

1650

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Mr. Will Bouma: I wanted to start by apologizing to the member from Sudbury and the member from Algoma-Manitoulin, because I can understand that anything that we've done to get the member from Nickel Belt fired up, you have to put up with on your long drives with her.

But I wanted to pick her brain, because I so appreciate what she brings to the table, advocating for health care as well as she does. I'm very excited, personally, about the investment in community paramedicine. I was wondering if she could comment on that.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I didn't have time to talk about home care. Our home care system is broken. People want to stay in their home. To stay in your home, you need home care, and there is not one penny in the budget to home health care.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: One might be inclined to think the government's recent budget was copied from one of the prior NDP or Liberal Ontario governments from the past. Of course, it's not, because unlike those budgets, this PC government is spending far more than any other government in the history of Ontario, and that is excluding spending relief related to COVID. This year's deficit is projected to be north of \$30 billion.

Some might believe that this spending is temporary, but as this budget shows, the government is planning on continuing this record spending for at least two more years and they provide no plan to get back to a balanced budget. A track to balance was a specific promise made by this government in its campaign—one of the reasons I decided to run under that party banner—and they have broken that promise, and it has nothing to do with COVID.

Even prior to COVID, this government was spending more on an annual basis than the prior government and publicly disclosed that they were not planning on getting back to balance in its four-year mandate—promise made, promise broken.

What would have been prudent from this government is a plan to get business back up and running as soon as possible, a plan to reduce these historic spending levels that they call temporary, swiftly and within its four-year mandate—three years is not swift—and to provide a plan that would boost Ontario's economic growth post-COVID, not simply to exit the recession by going back to the historically low levels of economic growth that we have seen in Ontario for years prior to COVID. That is not a plan to have a stronger economy; that is a plan to reach the status quo.

The government said that Ontario would be open for business. In fact, this government is showing Ontario is rapidly closed for business, with no plan to reopen or grow the economy any time soon. This is important not only for economic numbers, but because I fear that, in the near future, at these levels of spending, where we are projecting to be spending, on an annual basis, over \$10 billion just to manage our debt, this will impact Ontario's ability to continue providing services in health care and education. As our debt load grows and our deficit stays historically high, there will come a time when we can't afford to even maintain current health care and education levels, never mind improve them. Health care wait times will increase, not decrease, class sizes will grow, and more people will have to turn to other options because the province will simply not have any money to maintain public services, never mind improve.

In addition, I'd like to point out that two and a half years into this government's mandate, after promising to "put money in peoples' pockets," this budget provides no personal tax relief—none. There are a couple of boutique credits—the reintroduction of Liberal government programs for seniors renovating their homes, but only for those who can pay thousands in renovations. There are subsidies for those who can afford vacations, lucky as they may be, at a time when the poor are losing their jobs and future job prospects are grim. There is government spending on tourism, culture and sport, which I find a tad contradictory at this time. If our efforts are to be geared towards protecting the vulnerable during COVID, why are we spending millions on non-essential community projects? If non-essential businesses can't open, then surely it is logical to ask, why is non-essential government spending increasing?

Finally, I point to this government's failed electricity plan. The government is planning to subsidize electricity

rates, but only for industrial and commercial users. For residential users—many who are living in energy poverty as a result of failed green energy initiatives that this government has continued to grow—there is no relief. So the working class are being taxed to provide subsidies on electricity for industrial and commercial users who, in turn, are facing sky-high electricity bills created by failed government programs. Let's be clear: That isn't tax relief. That is a shift of the burden of electricity rates from industry to taxpayers, now and in the future.

In September, the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers reported that last year Ontario produced a surplus of energy—enough to power 1.2 million homes in one year. So we are subsidizing high electricity rates to generate power we do not use. This same report projected the surplus will increase for this year, and what has this government done? Instead of reducing the construction of further surplus, they are continuing to add more sky-high priced electricity onto the grid that we don't need and continuing with the construction of a wind turbine project in North Stormont.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the people of Ontario voted and gave a mandate to a government to implement conservative budgets, to get Ontario's fiscal house in order, to get electricity rates down, to provide personal tax relief, and two-and-a-half years later, they got a government that is spending more recklessly than any other government in the history of this great province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It's time for questions and comments.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I really commend the opposition member who spoke about the deficit in the budget when we know that we are coming on an agenda for a conservative budget, but I would like to say that I'm so proud to be part of a government which puts the lives and the safety of people over money. Since March, we spent \$1.1 billion only on PPE—just masks, sanitizers, face shields. So \$1.1 billion of that \$38-billion deficit you are talking about is just for PPE. Put on top of that the COVID testing centres, which we created for early diagnosis of COVID.

My question for you: Would you stand and say that the government should not spend that money, be on the conservative side and put people's safety in jeopardy?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the member for Mississauga—Erin Mills for his question. Yes, in my notes I did say that you are spending more money in the budget excluding spending relief related to COVID. We're talking about the budget overall. The promises we made—and I'm saying "we" because I did run initially under the PC banner—were to get the budget under control, to reduce spending, and what we are seeing in this budget is astronomical spending outside of the relief related to COVID-19.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: What I'd ask the member from Cambridge is, the budget bill is titled Protect, Support and Recover from COVID-19 Act. What we know is that we

have adults with developmental disabilities who are spending years currently, right now, in hospital in psychiatric intensive care units because there is no supportive housing, and for those who have been promised group home placements, this government has just recently told them, "There is no money. You'll stay in the psychiatric intensive care units."

We do not see an increase for people on ODSP or OW—living on \$733 or \$1,169 a month respectively, although they gave a meagre \$100 to \$200 top-up. These individuals had to beg for it, and one third of those people had no idea the money was available to them.

In long-term care—there's actually a cut in this budget to long-term care compared to the spending that was announced by this government for 2021 back in March. We don't see any money for the four hours of hands-on care.

I'm wondering if the member from Cambridge could tell me who she thinks this government is actually protecting, supporting and recovering from COVID-19 as they pass Bill 218 to protect the long-term-care sector from being sued?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the member for Windsor West. I can tell you who they're not supporting, and that's the people who want to get back to work. We need to get people back to work. We need personal tax relief. We need to cut excess electricity generation to boost economic growth and reduce hydro rates. Those are the things that we need.

Related to the COVID spending, we need to see more money in that COVID bucket protecting the most vulnerable.

1700

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Will Bouma: I see that the clock is winding down very quickly. What I appreciate about the member from Cambridge is her commitment to principle. I'm just wondering if she could expand further on the idea that—I think we both share the principles of taking care of people. I hesitate to say that we should be trimming down the budget at this time when people still need support so badly. I was wondering if she could comment on that further.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member for Cambridge for a final response.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the member for Brantford—Brant for your kind words.

It's been two and a half years. You need to get to balance; you need to provide tax relief. We are not seeing any type of tax relief for the people of Ontario. Like I mentioned, this is the largest deficit we have ever seen, north of \$30 billion. Unfortunately, it's not even temporary spending. This is going to be continued record spending for at least the next two years.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Unfortunately, there isn't enough time for another question, so we are going to revert to further debate.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: It's a real pleasure and an honour indeed to rise today to speak on Bill 229, our

budget bill, a critical piece of legislation that lays out our path forward in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, which of course is the biggest challenge, I would say, facing Ontarians today.

I would like to start off right off the bat by commending the Minister of Finance and the member for Willowdale for their incredibly hard work on this budget process. I know that it has been a tremendous amount of work putting together this budget, balancing different considerations and trying to figure out how we can most effectively spend this money in order to protect, support and help lay down the foundation for our recovery. I think they have done a stupendous job with this budget today.

I need to thank both of these hard-working individuals because they came to Ottawa as part of our budget process, our pre-budget process. They held consultations, they heard directly from stakeholders and individuals across the city, and I know that the people of Ottawa appreciated that opportunity to share their views.

I'm also pleased to have been able to play a small role in the development of this budget through my position as Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. Of course, over the summer, our finance committee in Ontario undertook one of the most ambitious studies ever taken in this Legislature: hundreds of hours and dozens and dozens of stakeholders who had an opportunity to present on what supports they needed from their Ontario government to help them survive through the pandemic and emerge out the other end. I think there is a ton in this budget that responds to those consultations, and so it's very heart-warming to see that connection between what we're hearing from Ontarians and what is in the budget today.

Budgets are, of course, a critical piece of the government's agenda. Over the course of my early career, I had the chance to work on five federal budgets through my work for the late federal finance minister Jim Flaherty and his successor, Joe Oliver. I wanted to start my remarks today by talking about a bit of a lesson that I learned from Minister Flaherty, and that's that, oftentimes, true leadership involves an ability to pivot and react to situations.

I recall an opportunity that I had early in my career. I was sitting down with Minister Flaherty, and the minister had been asked at the time to write a tribute to the Irish finance minister Brian Lenihan, who had unfortunately passed away. Mr. Lenihan had been the Irish finance minister during the economic crisis of 2008. As I sat with Minister Flaherty and we worked on this tribute that he was writing for this great Irish statesman, the theme that Jim Flaherty took in writing that was to talk about how Minister Lenihan had shown leadership in being able to pivot. He had had a plan when he got elected, as all of us do, to help support, in his case, the Irish economy. But of course, with the onset of the 2008 recession, he had to pivot. He had to change course. He had to table some of his plans in order to put the best interests of his citizens first and be able to respond to that growing crisis.

That was the theme that Minister Flaherty took in writing this tribute. I think today it's fair to say that when

we look back at Minister Flaherty's legacy, he also did that.

At the onset of the economic recession of 2008, Minister Flaherty and the federal Conservative government paid off \$37 billion of the federal debt. When the 2008 recession hit, that leadership allowed us to pivot and to respond to that recession and make sure that we were able to get our economy up and running, spur economic activity and recovery. It allowed that government to take actions like the home renovation tax credit and lowering small business taxes. It was a responsible pivot, and I commend and remember that lesson from Jim Flaherty as something that I think is important for all of us to remember in decision-making and legislating roles.

Similarly, I think this budget demonstrates that our provincial government has also been able to pivot at the onset of the pandemic. In our first year of office, of course, we started some of our important work to get our provincial finances in order—cutting our deficit down, increasing transparency, putting aside a responsible contingency fund, and setting us on a more sustainable path. This allowed us to react quickly at the beginning of the pandemic. We've been able to make significant investments in health care and long-term care in order to best protect our critical services that Ontarians rely on, particularly at this time. We've also been able to make investments to support our businesses that are struggling during these extraordinary times.

Let's now talk about this budget, which saw our government pivot to support some of our most vulnerable and all of the people of Ontario in getting through this pandemic. The budget is broken down into three different themes: protecting the things that matter most, our health care services; supporting individuals, families and businesses who are struggling during these extraordinary times; and laying the foundation for our economic recovery, which will be so critical—because we know that together, thanks to the Ontario spirit that's being shown by each and every one of our Ontarians across the province, we will emerge out of this, and by laying a foundation for recovery, we're going to make sure that we get the Ontario economy and the Ontario people back on a sustainable and strong footing.

Under that first basket of "protect," which the Minister of Finance has indicated is the most important pillar of this budget—it's important to start by talking about some of these critical investments in health care. In total, our government has made \$15.2 billion available to support our front-line health care heroes and protect people from COVID-19. This includes supporting 141 hospitals and health care facilities across the province and the 626 long-term-care homes across our province. We are also providing an additional \$572 million to ensure that Ontario hospitals have the necessary resources to continue providing care for those who need it. That means, in total, hospitals will receive \$2.5 billion more than they did last year. That's money that is going to be put to good use by those hospitals—ensuring that folks get the care they deserve.

Since March, working with our hospital partners, we have added an additional 3,100 hospital beds to ensure our communities are ready for any scenario.

I was really proud; last week, I had the opportunity to stand with the Premier, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Long-Term Care and the Minister of Health at an announcement at Ottawa Civic Hospital. We announced an additional 254 beds for hospitals across Ottawa, including in my riding, where we have the wonderful team at the Queensway Carleton Hospital who have been doing a phenomenal job. I thank all of the workers at all of our hospitals across Ottawa, but of course particularly in my community, at the Queensway Carleton Hospital, for all the work they've been doing over the past eight months.

1710

Ontario has built the most robust testing network in the country, which includes 161 assessment centres and mobile and pharmacy testing locations. We are leading the country in testing, with over 5.3 million tests completed since March.

Since March, we have also purchased \$1.1 billion in personal protective equipment to protect our front-line heroes so that they can do their essential work safely. That means 300 million masks, 900 million gloves, 50 million gowns and six million face shields.

We've also seen how our government has worked with some of our incredibly innovative companies across the province to be able to develop some of that PPE quickly.

I was at an announcement with Minister Fedeli, at the end of the summer, in our neighbouring community of Almonte, which is just on the outskirts of Ottawa. Almonte, of course, is famous for being the home of Mr. Naismith, the founder of basketball. We were there at the Dairy Distillery, which of course traditionally has produced vodka made from a dairy by-product. At the onset of the pandemic, they pivoted to be able to start developing hand sanitizer, which was in great demand at hospitals across Ottawa. Through additional support from our government, they expanded their operation and now they are providing a ton of hand sanitizer to our hospitals in Ottawa—and that's thanks to investments that our government made.

In September, we introduced our \$2.8-billion plan for the second wave, which included \$1.4 billion more for testing and contact tracing, \$70 million for the largest flu shot campaign in Canada's history, and \$284 million to clear the backlog that COVID-19 has created in our hospitals, ensuring that 60,000 surgeries will now go ahead.

When we talk about contact tracing, I would be remiss if I didn't do a plea to anybody watching at home: If you haven't yet had the opportunity, please download our COVID-19 contact tracing app. It is an incredibly valuable tool that will help ensure that all of us are safe, that we're able to track and isolate potential cases of COVID-19. It's safe. It's responsible. It's the right thing to do.

Pivoting to long-term care, another piece under the pillar of "protect"—our government is investing \$1.75 billion more to build more beds and upgrade existing ones,

which is part of an investment that will create 30,000 new beds. We know how critically important this is. I've had the chance to liaise with many of the long-term-care residences in my riding, some of which have been the hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Thanks to these investments and others that we are making in long-term care, I know that we will be able to build a stronger long-term-care system in Ontario—something that has been long, long required.

We are moving forward, for example, with the campus of care model, a pilot that will see modern long-term-care beds built in months, not years. That's the sort of innovative solution that our government is moving forward on.

We have also made the incredibly important commitment, a first in Canada, to move to an average of four hours of direct care per day for our loved ones living in long-term care.

Those are the sorts of things that we're doing under the "protect" pillar.

Now let's pivot to the "support" pillar, which is the second of our three pillars in this budget, and an equally important pillar to making sure that we're supporting our individuals, our families and our businesses.

Let's start with seniors, a group that of course needs those additional supports now more than ever, because some of those challenges that we are all talking about—seniors' isolation, being able to stay in their homes longer—are challenges that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Thanks to some of the initiatives announced in this budget, we are taking action on those issues.

The one that I am most excited about—because it is something that we heard time and time again during our finance committee consultation hearings, and on which I have heard such a tremendous amount of positive feedback from in my community—is the new Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit, which will help seniors stay in their home longer by providing a 25% refundable tax credit to folks who are making renovation projects and upgrades to make their homes more accessible. This is something that's also going to help another group that I talk about quite often in this chamber, and that's caregivers, because this credit will also be available for folks who have seniors living in their home. For some of those folks whose grandparents have moved into their homes and who want to make upgrades, to perhaps put bars in place in different places, or perhaps to upgrade their washroom facilities, or perhaps to put in a stairlift—whatever it might be, this tax credit is now going to be available for those caregivers. It's such an incredibly important investment and something that I think will be quite timely, because not only does it support our seniors and our caregivers, but it also provides a boost to some of our small businesses working in the renovation sector. Again, this was something we heard about time and time again through our consultations.

Pivoting away from seniors to parents and students—I'm pleased that this budget reconfirmed our commitment to our schools. We are seeing \$1.3 billion made available

to support the safe reopening of schools—the most robust and comprehensive plan in the country. I'm proud of the work that our Minister of Education has done in this regard to ensure that our students are getting the support and safety measures in place that they need.

This also includes an investment of \$1.9 billion next year to build new schools and improve existing schools in Ontario.

I know my colleague the member for Carleton has highlighted several times her excitement about the community of Riverside South in Ottawa now getting a new school.

And I was proud, two weeks ago, to be able to announce funding for a refurbishment of a school that had been closed under the former government—it has now been refurbished and retooled as a new public French school in our riding of Ottawa West–Nepean, which is a wonderful investment that's going to make sure that students—

Interjections.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Thank you.

It's going to make sure that students in the west end of Ottawa who are looking for a francophone education have a place to go. It makes valuable use of that space that had been closed down previously.

On top of this, parents will once again receive a payment of \$200 per child 12 and under and \$250 per child 21 and under with special needs. This \$380-million investment in families builds on the \$378 million provided to parents during the first wave of COVID-19.

I could go on and on under the "support" pillar, but before we end, I think it's important that I talk about the third pillar, the "recover" pillar. This is the pillar that discusses the measures that are being put in place to ensure that we can build a wonderful place for Ontarians to start and grow a business, or to continue growing their business today.

It includes investments through this budget in employment services—\$181 million in employment services. I commend our Minister of Colleges and Universities for his work on this important file.

It also includes measures to provide valuable hydro relief. We are removing certain costs from electricity bills that will save industrial and commercial employers 14% and 16%, respectively. Those are tremendous savings for those businesses. That's going to make Ontario a more appealing place to think about settling down, starting a business, growing that business—so critically important for our recovery.

We are also making changes to the employer health tax exemption. Now is not the time for anybody, anywhere, to impose or increase new or higher taxes on jobs, so we are proposing to make this exemption permanent. That means an additional 30,000 Ontario employers will no longer pay this tax. That, again, is a fantastic step for Ontario businesses.

1720

The last thing I'll mention in the "recover" section—and while this doesn't necessarily cover my riding, as a more urban riding in Ottawa, I know it is so critically important across the province—is our government's

investment in broadband. We are making additional investments of over \$680 million over the next four years for the next phase of our plan—including doubling our commitment to the Improving Connectivity for Ontario program—and that brings our total commitment to rural broadband to \$1 billion.

Over the course of our finance committee hearings, the issue of rural broadband came up time and time again. Whether it was small businesses that needed access to that rural broadband to be able to grow their business, or folks in our education sector who needed support delivering virtual classes, or folks in our health care sector who wanted to be able to pivot to virtual health care services, or folks at the ministry I'm proud to serve, as parliamentary assistant for children, community and social services, where so many of those services have had to pivot online—through expansion in broadband, we're going to be able to touch the lives of many, many thousands more Ontarians.

This budget is a responsible pivot. Our government took the necessary action. We've got three strong pillars—to protect, to support, and to lay the foundation for recovery. I'm proud to stand here today and support this incredibly important piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'm going to repeat my previous question because it's well worth repeating.

The bill is called the Protect, Support and Recover from COVID-19 Act, which is the budget bill brought forward by this government.

As I pointed out, we have people such as Jean-Marc, who's 26 years old and in the Ottawa Civic Hospital—he has a developmental disability. He has been there for a while. There is nowhere for him to go because this government has said, "We are not going to give you the funding to go to a group home." He is one who's lucky enough to have a group home to go to. Many are waiting well over 20 years.

ODSP and OW recipients are living off \$733 or \$1,169 a month—well below the poverty line. This government decided they only needed a \$100 or a \$200 top-up, which they have now cut for these people on ODSP. A third of those people didn't even know they could get that benefit.

When you're looking at long-term care, this government passed Bill 218, which gives complete carte blanche—no responsibility to long-term-care homes for the negligence that has been going on.

So I'm wondering what exactly they have done to support the people in this province. Who are they supporting?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciate the question from the member for Windsor West. I know she knows that this is an area close to my heart.

I'm aware, of course, of the case of the individual in Ottawa. It would be inappropriate for me, as a parliamentary assistant at that ministry, to comment on an individual case. But what I can say is this: This particular budget has made significant investments in the developmental services sector. I meet on a monthly basis with representatives in the developmental services sector

in Ottawa, and they are over the moon at the annualized stabilization funding included in this budget. They're over the moon that, for the first time in over a decade, they are seeing an increase in their budget. We have provided \$361 million more for the developmental services sector in this budget.

I'm incredibly proud of the work we are doing to launch our consultations that are going to reform and improve this sector after years of neglect.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm on to retraining and skilled trades. I'm excited about the \$180.5 million in the Ontario budget that has been devoted to job seekers affected by the pandemic. They're retraining. Why am I excited? We have Durham College in my riding, which has the skilled trades centre that does magnificent work.

I'd like the member to speak about the effect of that investment and what it means to job seekers here in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): You're going to have to wait for that response.

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

Government House leader?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think we have exhausted this for this evening, so we can adjourn the debate.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Orders of the day.

Hon. Paul Calandra: If you seek it, I'm sure you will find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to see the clock at 6 o'clock. Agreed? Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

PROTECTING ONTARIANS
BY ENHANCING GAS STATION SAFETY
TO PREVENT GAS AND DASH ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 VISANT À PROTÉGER
LES ONTARIENS ET ONTARIENNES
EN RENFORÇANT LA SÉCURITÉ
DANS LES STATIONS-SERVICE
POUR EMPÊCHER LE VOL D'ESSENCE
À LA POMPE

Mr. Anand moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill 231, An Act to amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act to provide safety measures in respect of workers at gas stations / Projet de loi 231, Loi modifiant

la Loi sur la santé et la sécurité au travail afin d'établir des mesures de sécurité à l'égard des travailleurs des stations-service.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I now turn it back to Mr. Anand. You have 12 minutes.

Mr. Deepak Anand: It's always a pleasure to rise in this House and speak on things that matter most to our residents. Today, I'm introducing Bill 231, An Act to amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act to provide safety measures in respect of workers at gas stations.

While I'm thankful for the support and the encouragement that so many stakeholders have provided, I am saddened by the dire circumstances that necessitate this bill. Neither have we forgotten the senseless killing of Hashem Atifeh Rad in 2011, who was struck and killed in Mississauga by a 22-year-old motorist; nor have we forgotten Jayesh Prajapati, who lost his life in 2012 to a motorist fleeing a gas station in Toronto.

Many times, vehicles used in such incidents are stolen cars, or have fake licence plates to evade cameras and the law. Lives are in danger in all these gas-and-dashes, and it also affects the mental and physical health of everyone witnessing such a tragedy.

I can't imagine the grief endured by the family. The grief of losing a father, a husband or a son over a tank of gas is intolerable, it is traumatic, and no one—I repeat, no one—had to die this way.

Data shows that in 2019, there were over 37,000 gas-and-dashes in Ontario. That equates to 104 drive-offs every day. As per Michele Holmes from the Toronto Police Service, "It should be noted that depending on how the occurrences were inputted, not all theft-of-gas occurrences may be captured." In other words, the actual number of drive-offs might be higher than quoted, exposing many more people to the risk of injury and death.

I often ask myself, why do gas station attendants have to go through this trauma? In 2008, British Columbia acted swiftly. Grant's Law mandated fuel prepayment after the killing of Grant De Patie by a 16-year-old driver in a gas-and-dash. Alberta followed suit in 2018 after the death of Ki Yun Jo in 2017 and the death of Surinder Pal Singh in 2015; they implemented prepayment. Since the implementation, gas-and-dash cases in both these provinces have been eliminated. Evidently, this is a 100% preventable crime.

I have met over 30 different stakeholders, from police agencies to municipalities to gas station owners. I got the feedback that this is a crime committed by both older and now, increasingly, by younger offenders, who have learned that they can get away with stealing gas.

1730

Mr. Speaker, this is not the first time the bill has been introduced. A similar bill, Jayesh's Law, was introduced in this chamber in 2012 and 2013.

Looking at the last seven years, unfortunately the issue is worse today than it was in 2013. Since then, drive-offs have surged. In fact, some police services across the

province have reported over double the incidents since 2013.

What is this bill doing? Bill 231 amends the Occupational Health and Safety Act to require employers at gas stations to have customers prepay before filling gas. We're hoping to change the mindset of drivers to pay before fuelling. This is pretty consistent with anything that you buy—any other product, whether it's bought in person or online.

Talking about the data, almost 87% of the pumps in Ontario already have the ability for prepayment. Manual pumps that cannot support prepayment or cannot be controlled by the attendants will be grandfathered.

We want to ensure Bill 231 will not impose any additional costs to the gas station owners. And to the consumers, payment methods will remain the status quo, giving customers and the drivers the same choice of continuing to use cash, credit or debit—whatever they want.

During consultations with the stakeholders, I heard loud and clear that the acceptance of this change may be different at different demographics. That's why we are proposing a phased implementation. Ontarians will not have to wake up knowing that the transition happened overnight. There will be an advocacy campaign to engage within the community.

COVID-19 has already resulted in long waits outside, adding discomfort, whether it is a hot summer or a cold winter. Prepayment will reduce the lineups inside the gas station, outside the gas station, keeping people's and employees' well-being.

It is absolutely astonishing when you consider the number of cases: Toronto in 2018 and 2019, 2,300 cases; York region, 2,000 cases a year; Peel region, 5,000 cases in the last five years; London, 2,300 cases; Niagara, over 1,200 cases; Barrie, 700 cases; South Simcoe, over 550 cases; Durham, over 4,500 cases in six years. Every single year, data shows that this is not a rural or an urban phenomenon: The phenomenon exists across Ontario. And it is no surprise why police organizations are advocating for it. Bill 231 will free up thousands of police hours that can be spent on community safety. I'll give you an example. In the past five years, Hamilton police spent 5,000 hours on just 3,800 gas and dashes. This bill will help redirect those hours for community safety and engagement.

The industry also confirms these gas-and-dash incidents. Ms. Jessica Friesen, CEO of independent women-owned gas station Gales Gas company, has confirmed a surge in gas and dash across her 14 stores. The Ontario Convenience Stores Association, representing 7,000 convenience stores in the province, found that gas and dash has increased by 63%. In 2019, there were reports of over 4,200 gas and dashes in just 362 gas stations. And the data goes on. Even the Canada Safety Council strongly supports this prepayment model.

During consultations, a gas station owner told me, "I want my customers to realize the small act of prepaying

for fuel not only keeps me safe; I can also” promise it will “keep them out of possible harm’s way.”

Rajan Khanna, the owner of an independent station retailer in Scarborough has told us about the thousands of dollars he loses every year due to gas and dash. He voiced that stores may instead see an increase in sales once attendants no longer have to worry about constantly watching pumps to ensure that no one is driving off. Data from BC and Alberta also shows that over a short period of time, there is minimal to no impact on in-store sales.

In closing, Bill 231 will protect our safety and well-being. It will enhance safety every time we fill the gas. It will reduce the fear, stress and anxiety employees have when they are working around the clock to pay their rent and feed their families. The bill will not impose any additional cost on the operators, and the consumers will have the flexibility to pay, the same way they’re doing it now. The implementation will be phased, and thus, we will learn along the way.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take a pause. I want to share a personal secret: What I most love about my job is that it teaches me every day the value of teamwork and the value of giving back to the community. It teaches me the meaning of the famous quote by Ratan Tata: “If you want to walk fast, walk alone. But if you want to walk far, walk together.” I thank everyone who has walked with me through the journey of Bill 231.

I want to start by thanking the Solicitor General and the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development for their outstanding support on the proposed bill. I want to thank all the members of my caucus for their feedback and their timely constructive criticism that has helped me shape the way the bill is today. Thank you to all my staff and, of course, my wife, Aruna, for all your support. A special shout-out to my OLIP intern, Gurkamal Dhahan, and my staffer Preeti Prabhu for your tireless work on this bill we would not have achieved were you not working so hard on this.

I also want to thank our stakeholders and all those who shared their concern for the safety of Ontarians. I want to thank Gales gas company, the Ontario Convenience Stores Association, the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, our partners from BC and Alberta, the city of London, the Rural Ontario Municipal Association, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and everyone else who contributed. Thank you so much.

The intention of this bill is the safety and well-being of our people. Together, let’s bring a change that will protect not only our Ontarians, but also those who are visiting our great province. I am looking forward to the support of all my colleagues on both sides of the chamber on this bill. Again, I want to say this: I am open to your advice; I am open to your suggestions on how, with Bill 231, we can improve the lives of Ontarians together.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Before I start, and I don’t know if this is something that I should do, but a member of CUPE

died this afternoon from COVID-19. I’d like to have a moment of silence if we could.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I’ve been advised that there is no opportunity for unanimous consent during a private member’s bill. However, member, you may take a moment out of the time allotted to you for debate to recognize and pay your condolences to the individual.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to rise today to discuss Bill 231, the Protecting Ontarians by Enhancing Gas Station Safety to Prevent Gas and Dash Act. I read over the bill and there are some concerns that I have. I know there are some concerns businesses have that I hope the member will address. I know some of the business owners expressed questions; chiefly, “Will there be funding to upgrade the new pumps? What happens to those gas stations that are grandfathered in?” One even asked, “Unlike your carbon tax sticker, if you print these instructions on a sticker, will they actually stick?” Hopefully, you’ll be able to answer that today for these businesses so they know what the expectations are.

There is something more concerning I would like to raise. As a member of the opposition, I know workers’ health and safety. I’ve advocated for health and safety for 40 years. So when I see a bill that can actually protect workers, I don’t see any harm in supporting these efforts. But my question to the members in the opposition right now is this: Why this bill, and why now? If you’re truly committed to protecting workers’ health and safety, why have you not said anything as your government delays critical health and safety legislation in the House right now?

1740

Mr. Speaker, this bill is limited to just workers at gas stations. Why is there no more in here that can pass today to provide all workers in the province with better health and safety measures? For example, before the House today are Bills 124, 195 and 197. All these are government bills that could easily provide expanded coverage for workers’ health and safety in a major way. Instead, they’re attacking collective agreements. Each of the bills could provide PPE for front-line workers and PSWs, permanent wage increases for our front-line heroes, and the ability to receive pay to stay home if a worker has symptoms of COVID-19. It’s called sick pay; some of you guys might not understand. Why is the member not pushing harder for these workers? Why just these small pieces of legislation for a group of workers?

Mr. Speaker, before this House today, I personally have Bills 191 and 119, both of which are just waiting for the Conservative government and their members opposite to act. If they want to stand up in this House and pretend to speak on behalf of workers’ health and safety, why are they not calling these bills for third reading?

Bill 191 would provide presumptive coverage for front-line health care workers. Out there right now, we have workers who are essential workers, who are on the front lines of COVID-19, who are having to fight the WSIB for benefits for COVID-related illnesses. Imagine that. This

Premier said, “If you’re sick, don’t go to work.” These workers are trying to do just that, yet the WSIB is making them fight tooth and nail, and in some cases rejecting that application.

Mr. Speaker, if the WSIB wants to support these front-line workers, they should make coverage presumptive; put the duty on them to prove workers didn’t catch COVID in the workplace. If I’m honest, when I look at the bill and this attempt by the Conservatives to try and pretend they care about workers’ health and safety, it’s a tough bill to swallow, based on your record. You have to forgive me if I don’t believe you.

Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite was truly advocating for health and safety, then he would immediately support Bill 119, my bill to end the WSIB practice of deeming. For those at home, deeming is when the WSIB says a worker is working a job that doesn’t exist, and slashes their benefits. The Conservatives know it’s happening. They could end it today by calling Bill 119, and yet they don’t.

Mr. Speaker, things like that are the reason that workers know this government couldn’t care less about them. So when I look at the bill, I’m willing to work with the government on anything that truly protects workers, but I hope no one is fooled by what this is. This is an attempt—and I’m saying it to all my colleagues; I’m not hiding from this—that they’re a party that cares about workers. It’s an attempt to gloss over the fact that front-line workers are getting sick in record numbers, that they need PPE and better protection, and the fact that the government is doing nothing. This bill does nothing to advocate for the unspent billions of dollars for COVID relief that could be protecting front-line health and safety workers.

Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, I would simply say we can do better. We can do more to keep workers safe, and we can do it together. Why are we stopping with these measures? Reach out to us. Work with us. Together, we can truly protect workers in the province of Ontario, especially during the pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for listening intently.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I’m delighted to stand before this House to speak on Bill 231, Protecting Ontarians by Enhancing Gas Station Safety to Prevent Gas and Dash Act, introduced by my fine colleague from Mississauga–Malton. This bill will amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act in two ways: It will require customers to prepay before pumping gas, and it will provide appropriate health and safety training to employees of gas stations.

Our government has been clear during our time here that we are here to create jobs, but of paramount concern is the need to protect the health and safety of employees. Incidents of gas and dash impact the gas station operator’s bottom line, but these incidents are also about the health and safety of others who are law-abiding customers who could be caught up in these occurrences.

In my riding, the city of Cornwall recently suffered double-digit fuel thefts, with an annual total of 51 cases.

Some areas of the province have seen gas-and-dash incidences head up into the high triple digits. This amounts to thousands of dollars of stolen gasoline, lost revenue and, in some cases, loss of wages for employees on duty.

We, as a government, feel not just the financial strain for those affected, but worry about the innocent bystander who could be caught up in a very dangerous way in such a scene.

I want to praise my colleague for the effort he has put into bringing forth this measure of safety and predictability for owners, employees and customers. He has secured support and approval from across the province, from chiefs of police, the Rural Ontario Municipal Association and Husky Energy, just to name a few.

We must always be vigilant in how legislation affects the bottom line, and I’m pleased to stand here and say that we, as a government, have always considered reducing red tape and reducing the cost of the doing business in Ontario as priorities. Should this bill pass, older styles of pumps without prepay technology will be grandfathered in. It is only when the owner upgrades his facilities that these new changes will impact their operation.

I trust that my colleagues on the other side will support this bill by the MPP from Mississauga–Malton. If passed, Bill 231 will bring consistency and protection for owners and operators, as well as for each of us who are hitting the open roads with friends and family for work or vacation.

I’m pleased to lend my support to this great piece of legislation today, and look forward to moving it forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Jamie West: I’d like to congratulate the member from Mississauga–Malton for his private member’s bill, Protecting Ontarians by Enhancing Gas Station Safety to Prevent Gas and Dash Act. It’s always a good time to talk about safety. The bill is going to amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

I found it weird that it was going to amend section 26. Section 26 is “Additional duties of employers.” It’s traditionally where you’d have employers’ reasons to keep records and things like that, and training records. But that’s beside the point.

Basically, the bill requires the employers, the gas station owners, to have their outlets provide exclusively prepaid pumps, requires the customers to prepay prior to receiving gas, and it would have some standards for training employees on how to operate the gas stations under those standards.

It’s very similar to a bill from 2012 from MPP Mike Colle, who was the MPP for Eglinton–Lawrence. He had a gas-and-dash bill that was very similar. A gas station attendant—probably the same incident—was dragged and killed by someone fleeing payment of gas, the second one that had happened in two years. He named his bill after Jayesh Prajapati—and I apologize if I mispronounced it. Jayesh was 44 years old, and he was killed chasing an SUV that fled with \$112 worth of gas.

There’s similar legislation—and the member from Mississauga–Malton mentioned this. In British Columbia

they have Grant's Law. In 2008, British Columbia instituted Grant's Law after Grant De Patie was dragged seven kilometres while trying to stop a gas and dash. He was 24 years old. He was killed in that incident, trying to stop someone from stealing \$12 worth of gas.

Similarly in Calgary, the following year, a gas station attendant was run over by a stolen Ford F-350 truck. She was dragged 15 metres. That woman was 35 years old and was killed trying to stop someone from fleeing with \$113 worth of gas.

There are a few similarities in the bills, and a few differences, but it is similar. The main one is mandatory prepayment systems at gas stations. That's what happened in BC, and that's what the member is proposing here.

The differences—there are four or five of them. There are no fines or penalties if you don't pay. There's no licence suspensions for convicted gas thieves. There's no penalties for gas station owners who force attendants to pay for stolen gas, which is prohibited by law. There's no change to the Employment Standards Act to include stricter definitions, and I'm going to get to that. There's no change to the Highway Traffic Act to suspend licences of people who steal gasoline.

At the time, with Colle's bill, there was support for stiffer penalties from the Conservative Party, but they were opposed to the prepayment system. Our party, as well, had concerns about prepayment, and the Liberal Party said basically they were looking into it. It's weird because MPP Colle had served 23 years in the Legislature, but it wasn't picked up by the Liberal Party.

1750

The Employment Standards Act, and it's important to talk about this, says it's illegal to steal gas—but it's vague, and you have to really understand how the act works. It starts in section 13, where it says the employer can't withhold wages, but then you have to go down to subsection 13(5), where it says it "does not apply if"—and then you have to scroll down to subclause (b)(ii): "(b) the employee's wages were withheld, deducted or required to be returned, ...

"(ii) because the employer had a cash shortage, lost property or had property stolen and a person other than the employee had access to the cash or property."

So it becomes confusing for someone to understand, and the proposal, really, in the other bill, which I liked—where is the page I had it on? Sorry, I'll get to it. Basically, it would very clearly state that you cannot force your employee to pay for stolen gasoline.

The reason I bring this up—and the member opposite talked about this, Speaker. He talked about the number of people. I think in Durham region he said there were 4,500. We know that these are happening again and again and again. When I think of Grant who was killed for \$12 worth of gasoline, and Jayesh who was killed for \$112, and the woman from Calgary who was killed for \$113, I don't believe it's because they were really dedicated employees just trying to protect the money for their employer. I believe the problem was that the employer was deducting the wages from them when it was stolen. To me, that's the part that's missing out of this bill: clear guidance to the

employee and to the employer, and accountability to the employer that you can't do this to your employees. You can't do this and put them in a position where they're willing to risk their life for \$13 worth of gas, and that's what's missing. We'll support the bill, but that is what's missing.

It's interesting that section 26 is where we would put it in the bill, because section 25 is the most famous section of the Occupational Health and Safety Act. Section 25(2)(h), as everybody knows, is that the employer has a duty to take every responsibility in the protection of the worker. If we're not doing that, workers will get killed, like these workers were.

I have 35 seconds on the clock. The member from Niagara Falls said a CUPE member was killed by COVID. I'm going to use the last 30 seconds for a moment of silence—so those can join me if they want—for this member or any other member who has suffered from occupational disease or died in the workplace. Thank you, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Further debate?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 231, amending the Occupational Health and Safety Act to provide safety measures in respect of workers at gas stations. I want to thank the member for Mississauga–Malton for bringing the concerns raised in this bill to the attention of this House. This bill seeks to change the mindset of drivers to pay before filling up at gas stations, thus ensuring the elimination of someone driving off, and reducing the possibility of injury to bystanders and themselves.

Gas and dash is a growing concern. According to data from the Ontario Convenience Stores Association, who are very supportive of this bill, in 2018-19, 362 gas stations reported 4,222 drive-offs, and the following year saw a 63% increase. In Toronto alone, the Toronto Police Service has reported 1,670 cases of gas-and-dash theft already this year.

This crime results in a significant loss of revenue for small business owners, many of whom are already hurting due to the global pandemic. Theft of gas does not just affect business owners but also the employees. There have been cases where dedicated employees, as we've heard already tonight, have been severely injured or died trying to prevent such thefts.

No employee should be hurt or injured because of a gas-and-dash robbery. No family should suffer the loss of a loved one just because someone was selfish enough to drive away with a tankful of stolen gas. The safety of all Ontarians is a priority, and this bill, if passed, would have far-reaching benefits, the most important being a safer workplace for gas station employees.

As parliamentary assistant to the Solicitor General, responsible for community safety, I strongly believe that gas-and-dash thefts are a 100% preventable crime and that this bill, if passed, will reduce the burden on police services across Ontario, as they continue to allocate resources to these preventable crimes, allowing them to respond to other community priorities.

We can also learn from other provinces, like BC and Alberta, who have already implemented a mandatory pre-payment system, which has eliminated gas and dash. Since most gas retail outlets are already equipped with pre-payment technology, this should not cause hardship for owners. Manual gas pumps without pre-payment facilities will be grandfathered, so they will not have to invest in the technological upgrades.

Consumers are already using mobile apps and debit and credit cards with tap technology, making it convenient for the consumers to pre-pay for gas. I personally can't remember the last time I actually went and paid cash for my gas.

I appreciate the great work from my colleague from Mississauga–Malton, and I appreciate you bringing this to our attention today. I'd like to note that this bill is also supported by the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, as it allows the police to attend to other matters, and will also ensure the safety of employees. I am pleased to support this private member's bill today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Aris Babikian: It is my honour to stand here to support my colleague from Mississauga–Malton's Bill 231. Bill 231 is something to prevent further tragedies to families. Imagine the devastation that families go through when their loved ones have been victims to such senseless crimes. Parents lost their children; children became orphans; a wife lost her husband; it goes on and on. Such senseless crimes devastate families.

This is a preventive measure by my colleague from Mississauga–Malton so that we can provide children the safety and the family care from both parents to grow up and become ideal citizens.

There is nothing cynical about this bill, as was assumed in this House. This is something that we are doing to prevent senseless killing. Any measure, any bill that prevents even one single tragedy is worth looking at. It is worth studying and enacting it. It is our job here to prevent tragedy. It is our job here to protect our citizens. We should put our political differences aside and look at this bill from that angle. It is our job, it is our duty to prevent this.

As many other members also stated, there is such huge support for this bill that it is worth approving it. It is worth enacting it to prevent any more tragedies happening again.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: It is absolutely an honour to stand here this evening and support this private member's bill. I want to thank the member for Mississauga–Malton, my neighbouring riding, for bringing the concerns raised in this bill to the attention of the House. I am in full support of this bill, of course.

The issue of gas and dash affects all communities across Ontario, including in my riding of Mississauga East–Cooksville. Here, Mr. Speaker, I would like to share some of my own personal experiences when we talk about gas-and-dash. I had an opportunity to speak with the

member as well when he was working on this bill, and I said that it is extremely important.

1800

During my university days, I used to work at one of the gas stations in my riding of Mississauga East–Cooksville. I remember that it would be an evening shift and I had just come back from university—especially on a Friday and Saturday, because those were the two days I used to work. I remember in the evening time when individuals would come with either a fake licence plate or there was never a licence plate installed in the car, or it would have a plastic garbage bag, even, wrapped around a licence plate. They would usually come at the rush hour time and would fill up \$70, \$80 or \$90 worth of gas, and by the time you would see them, my colleague the gas attendant, the customer service representative—by the time he or she would notice, we would run out of the store, not even paying attention, not even looking left or right, because we knew that this was about \$100 worth of gas, of damage to a small business income. Sometimes we would definitely face issues where suddenly a car would come and it was a dangerous situation.

I think the reason why my colleague has brought this bill is absolutely from safety, but also it's just that if you want to fill up gas, just pay first and then fill up gas. It basically protects the customer service representatives who are working at the gas stations, and also just to make sure that we do not come across any further tragedies in the future.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I now return to the member from Mississauga–Malton. You have two minutes for your final comments.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Mr. Speaker, before I start, I'd like to thank the member from Sudbury for acknowledging and having a moment of silence for the lost family member from Queen's Park. I really appreciated that. And thank you to the other members for talking about this important bill.

To the member from Niagara Falls: Your question was about the pumps without pre-payment ability. Those pumps will be grandfathered, so there will be no additional costs to those gas station owners.

Thank you to my colleague the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for her insight on how the bill will enhance the safety of our community.

Member McDonnell reminded us that job creation is vital. The safety of the workplace and employees is equally important, so thank you for that.

Thank you to my colleague from Scarborough–Agincourt for sharing your views on prevention, how prevention is so important. Thank you so much.

Finally, my colleague the deputy whip, the MPP from Cooksville: Thank you for sharing the importance of this bill through your lived experiences.

All that, Mr. Speaker, tells us only one thing: that we have a tremendous opportunity today to enhance the safety of the gas station as a safer place for the employees, community and the customers. Today we have the opportunity to bring that change that would protect not only Ontarians, but those who are visiting our great province.

Again, I want to thank everyone for supporting it. I'm looking forward to the support of all the colleagues. I said it earlier and I'm saying it again: I'm open to all the suggestions as to how we can improve the lives of Ontarians through Bill 231 together.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The time provided for private members' business has expired.

Mr. Anand has moved second reading of Bill 231, An Act to amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act to provide safety measures in respect of workers at gas stations. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Pursuant to standing order 101(i), the bill is referred to the Committee of the Whole House, unless the member wishes to refer the bill to a standing committee. Now I look to the member.

Mr. Deepak Anand: The time to act is now, so I would like to propose the committee on justice policy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member is referring the bill to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy. Agreed? Agreed.

All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, this House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1806.

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Gill, Parm (PC)	Milton	
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Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
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Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
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Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
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Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
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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
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Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	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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