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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 6 April 2022

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 6 avril 2022

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WORKING FOR WORKERS ACT, 2022

LOI DE 2022 VISANT À OEUVRER
POUR LES TRAVAILLEURS

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 5, 2022, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

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

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

Mr. Will Bouma: Good morning, Speaker, colleagues. On this Tartan Day, it's an honour to rise and be able to speak on behalf of workers in the province of Ontario.

If there is one thing I've learned over the years, it's that we are no better than the people who work for us. When I was an optometrist working for an ophthalmologist and we would be seeing 160 patients a day and I would have all of a minute and 40 seconds to see a patient, when I was working in Michigan, in Grand Rapids, all the way to present day, when I have dedicated staff at the optometry clinic—I continue to see patients and get them ready. And I can say as an optometrist, for sure, that in the brief amount of time I have to see patients, the impression that is left about the care that people receive is brought by the people who work for us. It's the exact same in my constituency office: When I think about the people who work there on behalf of constituents—they take the phone calls; they deal with the complaints and the angry constituents. A lot of that filters up to me, and yet, they are the front line on those.

So we have a duty in the province of Ontario to work for workers. That's why, Mr. Speaker, I am happy to speak in favour of the Working for Workers Act, a bill, if passed, that is pro-worker legislation designed to increase economic competitiveness and support Ontario businesses in four pillars:

(1) Labour mobility: We need to ensure regulated workers coming to Ontario from other provinces receive registration decisions within 30 business days. This bill also takes steps towards Ontario's full participation in the Red Seal program.

(2) Critical leaves from work: Ontario will match military reservist job-protected leave to the federal leave.

(3) Future of work: This bill, if passed, will provide core rights for certain digital platform workers. This bill will also expressly provide that the Employment Standards Act, 2000—the ESA—does not apply to certain highly paid knowledge workers if they meet established criteria and will require notification by employers with 25-plus employees of electronic monitoring of employees.

And finally, (4), workplace protections: This bill, if passed, will strengthen fines in the Occupational Health and Safety Act and require naloxone kits in workplaces where there is a risk of a worker opioid overdose.

It's difficult for a lot of us to understand the world in which we live right now, Mr. Speaker, where opioid overdoses are so common. But I can remember doing the training with the fire department, where I served, in the county of Brant so that we could safely administer naloxone. This is critical and very, very important.

Ontario is embracing the future of work and rebalancing the scales, advancing proposals that will, if passed, help improve working conditions for Ontario workers.

In my home riding of Brantford–Brant, I speak to many employers that are facing challenges with worker recruiting, retention and cross-training—and that is across the board, from the smallest family-run business to the largest enterprise-level manufacturers. That being said, responding to the historic disruption to the labour market caused by COVID-19, the government has and will continue to take action with a competitive and pro-worker economic recovery approach and implementing first-of-their-kind changes to make Ontario a top place for workers.

We are building on the success of the Working for Workers Act, and this proposed legislation will, if passed, help further to support, protect and attract workers and make Ontario more competitive, helping address provincial labour shortages. Through these proposed changes, we are taking action to ensure that Ontario is the absolute best place to live, work, play and raise a family.

A crucial part of this proposed bill will ensure workers in regulated occupations from other provinces receive decisions on recognizing their credentials within 30 business days. So, Speaker, what does this proposed change address? Uncertainty and delay in registration times can be a deterrent for those already practising in other provinces and territories. Ensuring a 30-business-day registration time frame for these individuals would help transition applicants into the workforce more quickly. This is an important change for our overall government commitment to

reducing red tape and regulatory burdens for workers, as well as addressing labour shortages in a timely manner.

The proposed changes would demonstrate that Ontario remains the most ambitious and effective leader in creating an optimal provincial mobility environment in Canada. Also, if passed, Ontario will name all Red Seal trades and transfer training, certification and regulation of fuels-related occupations to the Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act, 2021, or BOSTA. Oversight for training and certification for these occupations will be transferred from the Technical Standards and Safety Authority, or the TSSA, to Skilled Trades Ontario. This initiative was announced publicly on February 25, 2022.

Furthermore, three of the 55 trades in the interprovincial Red Seal program are not currently recognized in Ontario. By maximizing Ontario's participation in the Red Seal program, this will further support labour mobility.

0910

Speaker, this bill will, if passed, provide job-protected leave for military reservists. This proposed legislation would amend the ESA to broaden the reasons for taking reservist leave to include military skills training, and to reduce the length of service requirement from six months to three months for job-protected leave, to align with the federal Canada Labour Code. The proposed change would bring Ontario into line with federal requirements and addresses the shortage of reservists and troops exacerbated by the pandemic that had been flagged by the Department of National Defence as a threat to Canadian Forces operations. Ontario will always stand by our military and our reservists, and on behalf of the government of Ontario, I give you all a big thank you.

Another pillar of this proposed legislation, Speaker, will address electronic monitoring of employees. In workplaces with 25 or more employees, employers would be required to establish policies on electronic monitoring conducted on employees: for example, desktop or laptop computers, smartphones, video cameras, sensor-embedded equipment, GPS etc. As more employees are required to use electronic devices in the workplace, electronic monitoring is increasingly prevalent. Many workers may be unaware that they are being monitored. Concerns about transparency around electronic monitoring and impacts on privacy have been elevated by the vastly increased use of remote work spurred by the pandemic.

In recent consultations on privacy issues, Speaker, several privacy advocates noted the absence of government oversight of workplace privacy in Ontario, and I am happy to say that we are addressing this. Electronic monitoring is omnipresent in all our lives and it has been for some time. Our cellphones are monitored even though there are limitations that we can place upon them. Our emails and our TV subscriptions are monitored. Much of it is for good reason: to provide good service, to find a lost cellphone or to keep a check on young kids through their phones so that parents can keep their children safe. The police monitor our streets using cameras in the most problematic or likely areas. Stores, of course, monitor for security and to prevent theft. There are so many good reasons to do so.

Technology is wonderful and it's a great gift that we have been given. It makes our lives easier in so many ways, but it can be abused, and so limits must be defined. However, personal integrity and privacy issues cannot be underwritten by unfettered monitoring. There must be limits, otherwise Big Brother truly is watching. This concern has given rise to encrypted messaging in video apps. Individuals have a right to private thoughts and action. The issue of privacy at work is one that can be complicated, and therefore our government is introducing legislation to protect workers from undue electronic monitoring.

There are so many lessons from COVID and the urgent need for people to work from home was an immediate consequence of it. Though, Speaker, an employer does have a right to monitor their businesses, and the productivity of employees to ensure that a fair day's work is being expended in exchange for a fair day's pay meets that test. Nevertheless, people, workers—anyone has a right to privacy protections, and the lessons learned through the pandemic are still being examined and digested; however, many lessons learned have already emerged.

This government is committed to truly working for workers. New legislation will require employers to tell their employees if and how they are being monitored electronically. Ontario would become the first province to require electronic monitoring policies and protect workers' privacy by requiring employers to be transparent on how employees' use of computers, cellphones, GPS systems and other electronic devices are being tracked.

As I said earlier, Speaker, there are so many ways to track a person. Tracking a vehicle en route, a cellphone that should only be used for business calls, or other electronic media has valid reasons, but people must be advised if, when or if it is always that they are being monitored at work. Everything has changed and we all know that. Where once we were all co-located in a place of work, many work from a distributed model. Work has changed, family life has changed and the world has changed. That is why it is more important than ever to ensure personal freedoms, and full-disclosure policies must be implemented to safeguard one of our most sacred of democratic and human rights.

Under the proposed changes, employers with 25 or more workers will be required to have a written electronic monitoring policy in place for all their employees. The policy would need to contain information on whether the employer electronically monitors its workers and, if so, a description of how and in what circumstances the employer does this. In addition, the employer would need to disclose the purpose of collecting information through electronic monitoring. What this primarily applies to is company computers, cellphones, tablets, GPS systems and other electronic devices that are being tracked. Companies will have six months to implement these policies, and the ministry will provide resources and support on what they could look like.

Let me give you an example: If you're someone working at home with your children nearby, then you deserve and, in fact, have a right to know if, how and why

you are being monitored. This drifts into the privacy of your children and sanctity of the family home, and this is a gap that cannot exist. Most employers are responsible and just in applying security measures, but this legislation will hold them to account and will close a door to those that may hold to looser standards.

To support this legislation, we have previously introduced the right to disconnect. We banned non-compete clauses. Ontario is the first jurisdiction in North America to bring health care benefits to millions of precarious workers. We are examining reforms in the gig economy. We know that this is the right thing to do because a recent Ipsos poll has shown that 89% of people in Ontario believe that the workplace has changed permanently due to COVID-19 and government needs to act to update employment regulations consequently.

Also, this new legislation called the Digital Platform Workers' Rights Act, would provide certain rights and protections to digital platform workers, who provide ride share, delivery or courier services for payment through the use of digital platforms: for example, Uber, DoorDash and Lyft. Other types of digital platform services could be added by regulation.

The proposed legislation would provide a minimum floor of rights to digital platform workers on matters such as minimum wage, anti-reprisal protection and notice of removal from the platform. It would require digital platform operators to provide transparency to workers on matters such as calculation of pay, the collection of tips and gratuities, factors used to offer work assignments and any performance rating system. It would require that all work-related disputes between these workers and digital platform operators be resolved in Ontario. This legislation, if passed, would apply regardless of whether a worker is an employee or an independent contractor.

The impacts of the pandemic have accelerated and amplified dramatic changes in how and where we work in Ontario. Key changes include the growing importance of digital platform-based gig work and the huge increase in remote work. There is a growing consensus on the need to quickly adapt and take new approaches to employment policy. The proposed new legislation presents an opportunity to better protect digital platform workers in non-standard working relationships by setting minimum rights and requiring the terms of their engagement to be established.

This legislation, if passed, will strengthen penalties under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, or OHSA, for violations, including those that result in severe worker injury or death. Sadly, some businesses treat violations of the OHSA that result in severe worker injury or death as a cost of doing business, and the current penalties may not be a sufficient deterrent.

Officers and directors are currently subject to the same maximum fine as any other individual: for example, a worker or supervisor. Distinguishing officers and directors from other persons recognizes their leadership and decision-making role in workplace health and safety matters. It is about the accountability of the decision-

maker. No aggravating factors are currently set out in the OHSA for courts to consider in determining fine amounts. The legislation, if passed, includes both current factors typically relied on by the courts in setting fines as well as additional ones based on penalty provisions and other legislation and case law. The greater the number of aggravating factors that are put before the court, the stronger the case that can be made for a higher fine.

0920

That being said, if passed, this legislation will increase the maximum fine for officers and directors to \$1.5 million from \$100,000 and will increase the maximum fine for all other individuals to \$500,000 from \$100,000. It will add a list of circumstances that shall be considered aggravating factors by the courts for the purposes of determining a penalty under the OHSA. It will provide the authority for the court to make a prescribed order on convicting a defendant in addition to a fine or imprisonment imposed. This legislation will increase the limitation period for commencing a prosecution from one year to two years.

The Working for Workers Act 2 will amend the OHSA to require employers to provide a naloxone kit in the workplace if there is a risk of a worker opioid overdose in the workplace, with related changes about maintaining and storing kits, training workers and related issues.

There is an ongoing public health crisis of opioid overdoses and death in Ontario that has been heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. There were just under 2,500 opioid-related deaths in Ontario between the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, March 2020, and January 1, 2021. In Ontario, there were 17 overdose deaths of workers in the workplace from 2018 to 2021. Naloxone is an effective intervention and can prevent death if administered quickly. The OHSA does not currently require employers to have naloxone available at the workplace. The workplace is a critical point of access to high-risk populations who would benefit from harm reduction, awareness and access to potentially life-saving interventions.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to be a part of a government that has consistently demonstrated the health and safety of Ontarians as a top priority, and the Working for Workers Act 2 is certainly no exception. That is why I am voting in favour of this proposed legislation.

Speaker, again, we recognize—and I know you do too—that we are no better than the people who work for us, in our offices here at Queen's Park, in our constituency offices and the other fields that we have all come from. So to continuously, as a government, take a whole-of-government approach to how we can make the system work better for the workers in the province of Ontario, to do right by them, as they have worked so hard through the pandemic to do right by all of us, is just the right thing to do.

I look forward to having the support of all parties in the House as we move forward with this legislation.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I heard my happy friend from Brantford—Brant start off by telling us that he was an optometrist before coming here. He made a good income,

I imagine. There's a lot of prep work and paperwork involved in being an optometrist. You've got to continue your training, updating your skills, networking in the community. You've got to be out doing charity work, attending charity events and community events.

I wonder how he feels if, as an optometrist, he was only paid for the time he actually worked with a client, actually had hands on, dealing with a client—because this bill doesn't give gig workers a minimum wage unless they're in service on a delivery.

So I say to my good friend, what are you going to do on behalf of your caucus to improve this bill, to change this bill to treat workers with respect—because you're no better than anyone who works for you. How are you going to fix the bills?

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate the question from my friend from Windsor–Tecumseh. Speaker, he has been a very, very good friend to me, and I really appreciate it. I'm going to be very sad to see him go. I've appreciated every moment that we've had together. Also, when he has had the opportunity to be in the chair there, I know that he has been an excellent Speaker—so if I could just take a moment to salute him in that. I just want to say thank you for being a friend and a good colleague.

But do you know what? I agree that we do need to take care of our gig workers, also. What I have consistently heard, Speaker, through the conversations we've had and as we've had this bill in committee, is that this is a good step in the right direction. We need to be able to move the ball forward on these things and to actually provide real support for the gig workers in that economy also. I appreciate the question.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakubuski: I want to thank the member from Brantford–Brant for his presentation this morning, as well. You spoke a little bit about labour mobility. We're building Ontario; this party and this government is building Ontario. You've heard me talk many times in this chamber—I'm so proud of, of course, all our children, but my one son is a Red Seal carpenter. If we're going to build Ontario, we need more of these skilled trades and we need to attract them from everywhere, because what's happening here is unprecedented. But we need that labour force to be able to accomplish it as well.

Could you give us a little more detail, MPP Bouma, on what we're doing with regard to labour mobility to ensure that we have the critical mass of skilled employees and workers to build Ontario?

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate that question. The member is absolutely right. I think we have somewhere in the neighbourhood of 200,000 unfilled jobs right now in the province of Ontario, and since we've taken office, we know that we need at least 100,000 skilled trades workers. On my walk here this morning from the apartment, I see the work being done on the government buildings. It's absolutely critical that we have the people that we need.

To be able to establish the Red Seal, which is accepted in many other jurisdictions, to give that sort of labour

mobility so that if someone has and wants to take the opportunity to see what Ontario has to offer them—it's just absolutely critical. It's so important that we're able to do this and to be able to see the work that's being done through the Fairness Commissioner, with the Ministry of Labour, and other aspects of this too. It's incredible to see that we're doing a whole-of-government approach to taking innovative ways in order to bring workers to market in the province of Ontario. Thank you for the question.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Just listening to the member from Brantford–Brant talking about skilled workers—this morning I have 13 long-term boil-water advisories in my riding, and five short-term. We need skilled workers to be able to build those facilities so that we can get out of the boil-water advisories.

Despite claiming to protect gig workers, this bill does not nearly go far enough to provide and protect workers' rights. For example, gig workers are not guaranteed a minimum wage for the entire workday but only for the time they are delivering.

With this plan, member, how will this government ensure that the gig workers have enough income so that they can live with a decent quality of life, just as we are sitting here? Meegwetch.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you, and I think that's a really good question. What struck me when I was at committee, and we were hearing from gig workers there too, obviously there are issues that we need to resolve, which we are in this legislation.

But, Mr. Speaker, a lot of gig workers actually go into that market so that they don't have to work full-time and work a full eight hours, so that they can take a call or not take a call—if you think of a Lyft worker—and they have the opportunity to make those changes.

Yet, our government is introducing foundational rights for digital platform workers across the province of Ontario. No one in Ontario should make less than the general minimum wage for time worked; be fired without notice, explanation or recourse; or have to travel out of the country to resolve workplace disputes. Our digital platform workers are mothers, fathers, students and young people, and it's an injustice that they don't have these rights.

The other thing I've seen, Speaker, is that many of our drivers are engineers, doctors, lawyers in the countries where they come from. We need to get them certified here so that they can be here also.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker, and good morning. This past weekend, I was at the headquarters of the Ontario Regiment, situated in Oshawa. I was spending some time talking to the reservists who were there about this particular bill and what they felt the impact would be for them and their families.

0930

I'd like the member for Brantford–Brant to please elaborate for the members who are here and for those who

are watching here this morning on the extent and breadth of this aspect of the legislation on the expanded job-protected reservist leave and the impact that he sees on hard-working families.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you to the member to Whitby for that question. I know him well enough, how deeply he feels the connection to the reservists in the province of Ontario and to all our armed forces. And I have to say that also to the member of St. Catharines; she really feels that also.

In my own community, Speaker, we have the 56th Field Regiment. I just want to say on behalf of the government of Ontario to every single person who is there at 56th, thank you on behalf of the province of Ontario.

Our government is working for workers by introducing legislation that protects the day jobs of our military reservists while they put their lives on hold to protect our freedoms. Just as an example, I can remember when we were living in Michigan after I was done my schooling. Our neighbour there was a reservist. He was good at logistics—that was his field—and he had been pulled out and had been, for two years, working full-time for the military. His job with the telephone company that he was working for was over, no more advancement, and he knew that, and yet he served his country. We're taking care of that in the province of Ontario.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I just heard the member for Brantford–Brant talk about the fact that many of these digital platform workers are casual workers. They may be retired from full-time careers. They may be offering occasional rides to top up their income. However, I don't know if that member is aware that 30% of the gig workforce are full-time gig workers, and they do about 80% of the work that is done within the digital platform economy.

Does that member not believe that 30% of the workforce that include many of these newcomers, racialized workers, deserve the same protections as every other worker in this province?

Mr. Will Bouma: I so appreciate that question from the member for London West. That is exactly why our government is introducing foundational rights for digital platform workers in Ontario, because we recognize that people are making their livings at these and they need the same protections that other workers have across the province of Ontario. No one in Ontario should make less than the general minimum wage for time worked. No one in Ontario should be fired without notice, explanation or recourse. No one in Ontario should have to travel out of the country to resolve workplace disputes.

Our digital platform workers are our families, our neighbours, our mothers, our fathers, our students and our young people, and it's an injustice that they don't have these rights. That is exactly why we are making these changes, so that they can be recognized just like other workers are.

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

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: It is an honour to stand, as always, in this House, and it feels more necessary than ever. Sometimes I think I'm in an alternate universe when I'm in this chamber.

Forgive the literary references, but they spring to mind. The first is the question of doublespeak. Almost every bill that the government brings forward means something other than it says it means. "Doublespeak," of course, is a reference to George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*—although he used "doublethink" and not "doublespeak." But it has come to mean this question of saying one thing and meaning something else, often the complete opposite. In this case, this is so clearly not a bill that is working for workers. It is actually a bill that is undermining workers and doing the absolute opposite.

Just this morning, the *Globe and Mail* has a story about how a coalition of precisely the gig workers the government says it is helping have come together to release a press release, saying that this bill does nothing to help them: "Bill 88 won't help gig workers. Rather, it allows the government to introduce 'engaged time' as a legal principle to allow employers to cut away at workers wages in all sectors as soon as their work is organized by gig platforms."

That is such a condemnation of schedule 1 of this bill, and if the government were actually working for workers, it would have listened not to companies that make billions of dollars off the labour of these people, not to companies that exploit them, but to the workers themselves. And this, it hasn't done. If it had listened to the workers, it would not have created the bill in this way.

Obviously, people deserve a living wage for their labour, but that is for all of their labour. As my colleague just asked of the member across the way, what would he have felt like if his only pay had come when he was actually hands-on with a patient? The labour of being an optometrist is so much more than actually figuring out what kind of glasses somebody needs or looking into their eyes. We need to actually think, "What does it take for workers to be able to live?"

I am reminded here of another literary master, Charles Dickens, and his characterizations of the time of worker exploitation in pre-industrial revolution England. He talks in *Hard Times* about a character named Gradgrind, who reminds me very much of some of the folks across the aisle. Let me quote from *Hard Times*: "It was a fundamental principle of the Gradgrind philosophy that everything was to be paid for. Nobody was ever on any account to give anybody anything, or render anybody help without purchase. Gratitude was to be abolished, and the virtues springing from it were not to be. Every inch of the existence of mankind, from birth to death, was to be a bargain across a counter. And if we didn't get to heaven that way, it was not a politico-economical place, and we had no business there."

I think this is such a crucial quote, and I hope that the government members will really think upon it, because the question is, for whom did they create this bill? If you listen to workers themselves, it is not for workers; it is, rather, for their employers.

We need workers in this province and in this country. Every labour economist will tell you that. We need skilled workers. Workers are not stupid, and despite the double-speak of the name of the bill, they will quickly figure out that this bill is actually not in their interest. What it does, in fact, is to create what I'm going to call a gig ghetto, and I think it's an important term and I want us to think about where that term first came from. The word "ghetto" actually means "foundry" in Italian, and that's because in the mid-16th century, Venice was the first city state to confine Jews to a walled ghetto, which had been a canon foundry. That's where that word comes from.

The reason that it matters is because once the Italian city state began, and then other countries followed them, to confine Jews to ghettos, it was very, very, very difficult for them to get out. It was very difficult for the principles and the laws that got created to confine Jews in those ghettos to be destroyed. It took centuries, and, in fact, I'm reminded of so many of the interventions of my colleague from Kiiwetinoong, who talks about exactly the way that that principle ended up getting related to Canada when it was founded by colonizers and Indigenous and First Nations people were shoved into ghettos, or reserves. Same principle—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I would just ask the member to please return back to the bill and be very specific to the bill, please.

0940

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: It matters, because the point here is, once you create the principles and the walls, it becomes very, very difficult to take them down.

Now let's look at what's happened with gig workers. Gig workers have been put into a similar set of circumstances where they have been told that they are, in fact, a separate class of workers. And because they're a separate class of workers, they do not get to belong in the way that other workers do. They don't get the rights that other workers do to join a union. They don't get the rights to be treated as people who are deserving of all of the protections that workers in other sectors are given and that every worker should have from the moment that they set out on their workday to the moment that they come back. That principle is the idea that lies behind this segregation and this new class of worker in this digital rights platform gig worker thing. So what the government is doing is not in fact advancing the rights of gig workers one iota. It is creating a precedent for an encirclement that means that they are now open to all manner of exploitation in exactly the kinds of ways that Charles Dickens decried throughout his many novels.

I think it's so important, as we are entering a world in which increasing numbers of people are in fact gig workers—and one thing here that I have heard over and over again on the government side is that gig workers are people who are just sitting around and every once in a while they'd like to go out and make a few extra bucks. That's not actually the case for so many people and particularly for new immigrants, for Black, Indigenous and other people of colour in particular. Those communities

rely so much on gig work, and so much of that work is exploited.

In my riding of Beaches–East York, there is a group called the South Asian Women's Rights Organization. This group is absolutely brilliant. These are first-generation women, most of whom have come from Bangladesh, and sometimes, because Ontario does not recognize their credentials from back home—they were skilled workers back home, but they arrived and their credentials are not recognized. For any number of reasons, they end up working as gig workers. The exploitation that I hear about over and over and over again from these women when they meet—they describe in precise detail the way that their various employers exploit them, call them at the last minute for shifts, drop their shifts, underpay them, pay them only for a fraction of their work. And when they go and say something about this, they are let go. This kind of exploitation happens because they are considered independent contractors and because they are not included under the Employment Standards Act, and it is criminal. It is criminal that what this bill is doing is, in fact, enshrining principles behind that exploitation in law.

I want the government members to think about this very carefully and I want Ontario to think about this very carefully, Speaker, because this is actually the beginning of the encircling of gig workers and the allowing for their ongoing exploitation, not a step in the right direction. And it is so important that each and every one of us understand it this way.

I want also to talk for a few minutes about the connection between what is happening in this bill and the policies that underlie a lack of housing, precarious housing, unhousing—which is also called homelessness, but I want you to think about it as unhousing, because it's so important that we understand that homelessness is not this thing out there that all of us can just ignore. People become unhoused because they can't afford to stay housed.

Nobody chooses homelessness. Nobody ends up homeless because they made poor life choices and just ended up there. There are series of structural reasons that people do not have the means to remain housed, and an enormous part of that is the lack of a living wage.

I spent a great deal of time during the pandemic on the streets and in encampments talking to people who are unhoused. None of them were there because they were careless or lazy. They are there because of intergenerational trauma. They're there because of colonial violence against Indigenous peoples. They are there because of anti-Black racism that is structural. They are there because of ableism. They are there because of the underfunding of social assistance like OW and ODSP. And they simply cannot manage to stay housed.

A great many of these people actually work as gig workers. Did you know that? Did you know, Speaker, how many people who are unhoused and in our shelters are working people? And they're working as gig workers. But because of the kinds of ways that gig workers are exploited, they cannot make a living wage.

I want that to sink in, and I want government members to really understand that this bill makes things worse; it

doesn't make it better. It doesn't make it better, and gig workers themselves will say it doesn't make it better.

Interjections.

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: It is really rich for government members to protest what I just said, when they've never spoken and consulted with and aren't listening to the gig workers, and who don't go out and speak to people who are unhoused, have never spoken—they were never in encampments actually speaking to people and understanding their stories.

You cannot make policy, as Charles Dickens said, from the perspective of the exploiter. That's not how you make policy. I want the government members to hear that poverty and homelessness and anti-Indigeneity and anti-Black racism, and the whole package of things that go along with it and are all related—ableism—are a policy choice. This government is choosing the exploiter over the exploited, and there is no excuse for it.

My colleague from Hamilton Mountain informed me yesterday that a number of these ride-share companies became registered as lobbyists in February of this year, presumably to speak to the government about this bill. It appears that the government listened to them and did not listen to the workers themselves. I want to say, "Shame on you," because this is disgusting.

Absolutely, there are bits of sugar in the poison. The naloxone piece is incredibly important, absolutely important. That's great. We've come a very, very long way from the first days of this government, where the Premier was trying to shut down safe injection sites. Kudos for having learned something. It is absolutely crucial. We've got a long way to go, but this is crucial.

0950

But I want to make the point here that it is really important to stop putting together omnibus bills that are fundamentally worse than problematic—downright cruel—and sprinkling a little bit of sugar on the top here and there, and then saying, "Look, why don't you vote for this bill?" Create a good soup. Stop putting sugar in a poison soup. Create a good soup.

Finally, I want to make a point about affordability generally, because there will be people listening to this who are not on the verge of being unhoused, and so they don't necessarily see themselves. They think that they are in a very different place. But I want those people to understand, too, that all of these things are connected. They're not just connected for the folks who are dealing with deep poverty or the effects of generations of colonial violence; they affect everybody. Because when you don't create policy that actually uplifts the workers whom we all need as a society, when you don't begin there, when you don't lift everyone up, you create terrible conditions that end up with folks living in shelters, or not having space in shelters and needing to be in encampments because there is nowhere else for them to go. You create the conditions that mean that more people will be incarcerated and that more people will have severe mental health issues.

I want to make the point that shelters, prisons, the social issues that come out of mental health issues, people having

cycles of incarceration—those things are bloody expensive. It is cheaper to support workers at the beginning then to have to deal with the fallout of what happens when you don't. So, on top of everything else, this is not fiscal responsibility. It is not fiscal responsibility. It is wasting taxpayers' dollars and wasting people's lives, and it is absolutely shameful. Stop it. Stop doing this to people. Do better.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: I was hoping that the member could provide me with an explanation. As you know, Mr. Speaker, I have made a lot of friends in the Jewish community over the past four years and it was a great pleasure to introduce, with the member from Eglinton–Lawrence, a bill to recognize the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of anti-Semitism, which was passed as an order in council in the province of Ontario.

The member in her comments made mention that what we're doing with gig workers, with what we're doing in this bill, is comparable to what happened to the Jewish people in the Warsaw ghetto in World War II. I would like her to explain in front of this House—unless she would like to apologize—exactly what she means, to the Jewish community in the province of Ontario, with her comments on that.

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Perhaps the member is not aware that I am Jewish. Perhaps the member is not aware that I lost extended family in the Holocaust. I am owed an apology by this member. That was appalling.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: I'm inspired, always, by the member for Beaches–East York. I think this bill, after listening to that fantastic speech, could more aptly be called working for Amazon, working for DoorDash, working for Uber. This bill is not about working for workers. This is about legislating people in a different employment context.

I want the member to imagine with me—because we only have to survive these folks for seven more weeks—what an NDP government can do to help working people in the gig economy form unions, just like what happened in Staten Island, where Amazon workers voted to join a union. Why doesn't this bill help working people help themselves and form unions?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Thank you to the member from Ottawa Centre. Yes, absolutely, if you are serious about working for workers, then you begin by giving workers rights. You begin by giving workers the ability to actually live—first of all, to earn a living wage, and secondly, to be able to form unions so that can advocate for themselves, so that they can ensure they have all of the protections that they need and that they deserve.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I just can't believe sometimes the self-righteousness of this member from Beaches–East York, where she stands up and accuses people on this side of not understanding anything.

There are homeless people everywhere, including in my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. I work very closely with The Grind, which helps people who are poverty-stricken and homeless in my riding. For you to stand here and say that we don't understand any of that because it's just your way of somehow thinking that you're better than the rest of the people in this place—you used the word “disgusting.” It's disgusting that you accuse good people on this side of the House of somehow being less than yourself because you've experienced something that none of us possibly ever could have. Unless you're the one electronically monitoring the members of this side of the House, you should stand in your place and apologize for the insults and the accusations you make against good people.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Before we would continue, I know this is getting emotional. I would ask that all comments be directed through the Chair and become less personal. Thank you.

I return to the member from Beaches–East York.

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: If the government members really are good people, then they will begin by lifting people out of poverty and not just dealing with conditions once they become unhoused.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I listened to my very learned friend from Beaches–East York. She was talking about Charles Dickens and then she talked about the bargain across the counter.

I was reminded of other comments I've heard on this bill about who was actually consulted during the formation of it. The workers' groups, people working in the gig economy, their views were never taken into account. Yet the Amazons, the Ubers, the Lyfts, the SkipTheDishes—it seems that they have written this bill. Instead of SkipTheDishes, it's like the government has skipped the workers. You skipped the workers, the people that this bill is supposed to be helping. It's not working for the actual people working for these companies.

My question to the member, through you, Speaker, is: What could this government have done and what can they do now to improve this bill before it becomes law?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Thanks to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh for the very good question. It was indeed a skip-the-worker bill. I'm going to say once again that when you create good policy, you begin by consulting the people who are going to be affected. And then you build policy in a way that reflects their issues and their concerns.

What the government needs to do is to throw out schedule 1. It needs to go back to the drawing table. It needs to sit down and talk to workers. It needs to create a bill that provides gig workers with a living wage from the moment that they leave the house until the moment that they come back at the end of the day, that gives them the complete rights of anybody else in Ontario under the Employment Standards Act.

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

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: This morning, when I was driving in and thinking about the legislation that we are debating, the key messages and things like that, I never imagined that the topic of the Warsaw ghetto would be mentioned. I visited the Warsaw ghetto, and I visited the museum of Polish Jews, and I'm just surprised that we could somehow link this piece of legislation to that topic. That's all I will say on that issue.

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But since we are debating Bill 88, the Working for Workers Act, I wanted to ask the member opposite about the naloxone provision. Naloxone is a life-saving medication that reverses opioid-related deaths, and I think it's so important we have naloxone kits available at our construction sites and other places of work in Ontario. Will the member support that provision in the bill? Yes or no?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: I just want to put on the record that the ghetto I was talking about was Venice. Venice is not Warsaw. I didn't speak about Warsaw. The government spoke about Warsaw. I was speaking about the Venice ghetto in the middle of the 16th century.

As far as naloxone is concerned, I will say again what I said when I was giving my 20 minutes, which is that the naloxone piece is absolutely crucial, but you've sprinkled a little bit of sugar in a poison soup. Stop doing that. Create a good soup with good ingredients. Do exactly what my colleagues agree needs to be done: Support workers, write a bill that is actually in favour of workers, and then add the naloxone.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch to the member for the presentation. I know that, back and forth, I hear the term “homeless people.” For me, I think the correct term to use is “people without homes,” because they are people first. I think that's really important. But I also know there's some talk about colonialism as well. I've had my taste of the colonial tea in this place, and it's important to acknowledge how the system works here against minorities.

But I just wanted to go back to the member: Why is this government bowing down to international conglomerates like Uber rather than protecting the rights of workers who are trying to make a decent living?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Thank you to my colleague from Kiiwetinoong for the excellent question. He is absolutely right. It is the reason I never talk about “homeless people,” ever. I will talk about “people who are unhoused,” because I want to make the point that there have been forces that have forced them to lose their housing, and they are people first, absolutely. Housing is a human right, and we need to fix that.

The question he poses is an absolutely crucial one. Why is the government bowing down to international exploiters of people, who make billions of dollars off them—billions of dollars—instead of supporting workers themselves, particularly when we so need skilled workers in Ontario? We need to show them that we can protect them when they're here.

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

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Good morning. It is a continual privilege of mine to stand amongst my peers in this chamber to speak on behalf of this government, and today is no different. I have to say, as the election is coming closer and closer, maybe we've taken for granted all the opportunities we've had in this House, so I think it's very special that we are able to be in this House, in this place of democracy. As the election comes closer and closer, let's remember that every time we speak, it is a huge privilege to stand in this House. Some of us may not be back after June 2; some of us will. But let's not forget the huge and immense privilege the people of our ridings have given us when they elected us into this 42nd Parliament, and let's represent our constituents with dignity.

Speaker, the Working for Workers Act represents the continual commitment of this government to Ontario's workers and businesses. Throughout our mandate, we have been steadfast in saying that when businesses and workers work better together, Ontario thrives. This legislation builds on the success of the Working for Workers Act, 2021, with the aim of further supporting, protecting and attracting workers to make Ontario a more prosperous and competitive economy on the world stage.

I would like to first thank the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development for his continual commitment to Ontario's workers and businesses throughout what was an unprecedented time for our province. With our government, under the leadership of the Premier, the minister worked hard to ensure that workers and businesses alike could persevere throughout difficult circumstances.

I would like to also commend the parliamentary assistant for his work in supporting the objectives of the ministry. It is always great to see my fellow Mississauga colleagues doing great things for the people of Ontario.

Like with many other pieces of legislation from our government, the Working for Workers Act, 2022, was the result of extensive teamwork and collaboration. I would like to thank each and every person, organization and stakeholder who had a role to play in the legislative process.

It goes without saying that there is so much within this legislation that is worth highlighting and discussing, but I want to focus a good deal of my time speaking to a provision within the legislation that is particularly important to me. This legislation, if passed, would require workplaces which are at risk of worker opioid overdoses to have naloxone kits. For my colleagues who may not be familiar, naloxone, or Narcan, is a medication able to temporarily reverse the effects of an opioid overdose, providing valuable time for medical help to arrive to treat the person overdosing. The importance of these kits in high-risk work settings cannot be overstated. The death toll of opioids in our community has been a concern for many years, and it has grown worse over the past two years, unfortunately.

In recognition of this, I was proud to be in this chamber back in 2019 presenting my private member's bill, Bill 105, the Mandatory Police Training Act. With my

proposed legislation, Ontario would have required police officers, special constables, First Nation officers and inspectors to have successfully completed ministry-approved training in both the use and administration of naloxone for the purpose of blocking the effects of opioids. I believe that my Bill 105, though it did not pass, provided an opportunity to highlight the importance of naloxone as a tool in the fight against the opioid epidemic. It also provided an opportunity to start destigmatizing opioid-related incidents. I remember very fondly the conversations I was able to have with community groups, stakeholders and my colleagues in the field of public health in preparing that bill, hearing their feedback and perspectives on the opioid crisis as it was at the time.

Worryingly, though, current statistics underscore that this epidemic remains a poignant one for our province and our country. According to the government of Canada, there was a 95% increase in opioid toxicity deaths between April 2020 and March 2021, totalling 7,224 deaths. This is in comparison to the year before, which had a total of 3,711 deaths—almost twice, this increase that we are seeing. In Ontario, approximately 2,500 people died from opioid-related causes between March 2020 and January 2021. This is a sobering statistic that reiterates just how deadly these drugs are and how important it is to work to protect our communities from their devastating and reverberating effects.

These effects are not isolated. They can be felt in our homes, our communities, our schools, our streets, our places of worship and our workplaces. With that said, of these 2,500 victims who were employed, 30% were employed in the construction industry, by far the most of any industry impacted by these tragic deaths.

I'm proud to say that our partners in the field of construction are supportive of our move to protect workers on the job site, with Geoff Smith, president and CEO of EllisDon, having this to say about the naloxone provision:

"EllisDon is in complete support of Minister McNaughton's announcement to mandate the availability of naloxone kits at all construction sites across the province and the necessary training that goes along with their use. Evolving safety measures of any kind in the workplace is a testament to leadership and we will embrace the implementation and access to this potentially life-saving medication."

1010

Bars, nightclubs and other related establishments have also seen spikes in opioid usage, often involving recreational drugs laced with deadly opioids such as fentanyl and carfentanil, where dealers have taken advantage of unsuspecting persons, resulting in tragic consequences. This latter fact is connected to a concerning trend over recent years relating to the increasing toxicity of opioids sold on the street, which is fuelling the coinciding rise in overdose deaths we are seeing today.

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, toxicity of supply continues to be a major driver of this crisis, with 86% of all accidental apparent opioid toxicity deaths from January 2021 to September 2021 involving

fantanyl. The sheer strength of this increasingly toxic supply and the capability of it to act as a contagion has proved to be a pressing danger to our community.

Workplaces which view themselves as being close to a heightened presence of both overdose incidents and the drugs themselves will be what our government sees to be the high-risk work settings. These employers, their employees, and the broader public will be safer as a result of these mandatory naloxone kits.

There are several benefits to be had by both businesses and workers alike in these spaces where naloxone kits become a requirement. For one, and most importantly, there is the potential for saving hundreds of lives a year—men and women who may have ended up succumbing to an overdose if it wasn't for this life-saving drug being there to buy crucial time for those overdosing to receive medical attention.

Moreover, the placement of naloxone kits in high-risk workplaces will help to raise awareness about the risks of accidental overdoses from either taking or coming into contact with opioids and opioid-laced substances. When the potentiality of risks are at the top of someone's mind, they may choose to engage in less risky behaviour and understand the potential repercussions of their actions before it is too late.

Finally, these naloxone kits will help to reduce the stigma around opioid use because, as statistics suggest, the opioid epidemic is not confined to a certain segment of our communities. Rather, this is a crisis that can affect anyone, of any background, any walk of life and any occupation. When stigmas are lessened, acceptance is raised, and only under these preconditions can the opportunity for rehabilitation be a viable way forward for those struggling with this terrible addiction.

We must also recognize the role that mental health and housing insecurity can have in conjunction with opioid addictions, and ensure that a response to this public health crisis recognizes this nexus.

It was the Canadian Mental Health Association who had this to say with regard to our naloxone requirement provision: "We are encouraged by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development efforts through this consultation in recognizing the important roles employers and workplaces could play in responding to the ongoing drug poisoning crisis which has worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic."

Our approach toward this crisis can have broader implications on other connected areas such as, for instance, housing insecurity and prevention, given that these two societal issues are interconnected.

It was the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development who said it best: "Everyone in our province knows someone who has been impacted by the opioid epidemic. These are brothers, sisters, mothers and daughters, and we need to do everything in our power to save lives."

Monsieur le Président, maintenant il est important de parler de la logistique de concrétisation de ces dispositions dans une approche qui s'engage à travailler avec les

entreprises et les employés pour s'assurer qu'elle est la mieux à même d'atteindre ces objectifs de sauver des vies. Bien que j'aie mentionné précédemment qu'il existe certains types de milieux d'affaires où le risque de surdose d'opioïdes est plus élevé—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I apologize for interrupting the member, but it is now time for members' statements.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

REPORT, FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Just before we move to that, I beg to inform the House that the following document was tabled: a report entitled 2020-21, Interprovincial Comparison: Comparing Ontario's Fiscal Position with Other Provinces after the First Year of the COVID-19 Pandemic, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Jeff Burch: It is exasperating for us on this side of the House to continually raise the concerns of so many out there struggling on social assistance to no avail. People on OW and ODSP are struggling more and more every day, unable to support themselves and their dependents.

Linda Weir lives in Welland with her two 14-year-old grandchildren. She is paying rent, which eats up most of her ODSP, which is less than \$1,200 a month. The child tax benefit helps, but she sleeps on the couch so the grandkids can have a bedroom. She knows that many in her position cannot even afford to eat. A taxi to get groceries, when she can afford them, is \$35 for a round trip. She knows that many in her position have become homeless and are living on the streets, and she knows that food banks are overwhelmed. This pandemic has hit us all hard, but for those on social assistance the future is becoming more and more bleak as the cost of living rises and their benefits remain frozen.

Folks like Linda are crying out for help. This government has not increased social assistance rates since 2018 even though inflation is at its highest in 30 years. It is true that this government inherited an ODSP program that was gutted by the former government, but this government has done nothing to improve it. Right now, Speaker, ODSP and OW payments are simply not enough. As Linda told me, making ends meet for her and her grandkids is a challenge every single day. If this is a disability support program, you would never know it. We have failed those on social assistance and failed in our responsibility to care for those most in need before, during and after this pandemic.

JEANNINE MOHNS

Mr. John Yakabuski: On March 12, our daughter Heidi turned 41. But I didn't attend a party for Heidi; I attended a party for someone who was celebrating a birthday that Heidi won't see for another 59 years. I joined family and friends to celebrate the 100th birthday of Jeannine Mohns.

Speaker, a 100th birthday is not as rare as it used to be, but it is still quite an amazing accomplishment. I've had the honour of attending a number of them over the years. But I have never seen one quite like Jeannine's. When I entered the hall, I expected I would be saying hello to someone in a chair, perhaps even a wheelchair. I asked her son Tom, "Where is your mom, the guest of honour?" He pointed to a young-looking lady engaging with the folks attending the party, moving around in a way that would defy my age, let alone hers.

Her son Rick managed to get Jeannine to sit down long enough for us to make a couple presentations and, of course, for me to sing a couple songs. Besides myself, presentations were made by Theresa Sabourin on behalf of the town of Petawawa and by an old family friend and former MP, Hector Clouthier, after which Jeannine jumped up, took the mike herself, regaling the guests with memories and stories that only a centenarian could pull off. She even treated them to an old wedding night joke that had everyone in stitches.

Speaker, I don't expect to be around anywhere near 100 years. But it was a special treat to witness someone with that kind of vigour and vitality, even as she moves into her second century. In fact, I spoke to her son Tom today and he said she was out playing bingo yesterday. Speaker, may God continue to bless Jeannine Mohns and her family.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Good morning, Speaker. I'm sure you were watching the national television news when downtown Ottawa was held hostage while protesters were demanding the overthrow of the Liberal government. That occupation started in late January and lasted more than three weeks. And I'm sure you were watching when some of these same demonstrators blockaded the Ambassador Bridge between Windsor and Detroit. They moved in on February 7 and it took a week to come up with a peaceful resolution. That illegal blockade shut down international trade over the Ambassador Bridge at a cost of more than \$300 million a day. Manufacturing plants were shut down, workers sent home, and businesses in the area of the bridge lost their customers.

Speaker, a protest against the federal and provincial governments and the way vaccines against COVID were mandated brought our international trade to a halt for a full week. Now, Windsor taxpayers are on the hook for \$5.7 million, the cost of people breaking the law during that illegal blockade. The feds have put more than \$2 million on the table to help the small business community affected during this bridge protest. Store and business owners can

apply for up to \$10,000. The feds did the same for businesses in Ottawa, and Ontario said they would match half of that, up to \$5,000.

1020

But Speaker, here's the rub: Despite repeated requests, Ontario has yet to announce any money for the losses in Windsor. Fair is fair, Speaker. Windsor taxpayers are on the hook for more than \$5.5 million. Our small business community is out more than \$2 million. When will Ontario step up, do the right thing, help pay some of the bills in Windsor?

Speaker, there's an election coming. Windsor's Conservative candidates will have no place to hide on this one.

LIBERTY FOR YOUTH

Mr. Will Bouma: It's such a pleasure to rise in the House today and talk about the amazing work and people from my riding of Brantford-Brant. Liberty for Youth is a non-profit charitable organization supporting at-risk youth, providing mentorship, education-related assistance, and a safe and welcoming environment. In my riding of Brantford-Brant, Liberty for Youth has a ranch which has the goal of enabling youth to escape the city and develop new skills. Liberty for Youth provides a place where marginalized youth can find acceptance, regardless of their life situations. Of particular interest is their basketball program, which seeks to direct the energy of at-risk youth to a positive team sport, developing skills of discipline, teamwork and activity.

I am so happy to announce that, through the Trillium grant program and Resilient Communities Fund, this coming Friday, April 8, Liberty for Youth is celebrating a grand opening of their new basketball court. The Trillium grant funding received has enabled them to build a wonderful basketball court which will allow them to continue reaching out to the youth in our community.

Kudos to Liberty for Youth and all involved in this amazing project, and I look forward to the ribbon-cutting ceremony this Friday afternoon.

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

LOGEMENT EN MILIEU DE SOUTIEN

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: I want to bring your attention to an issue happening in my riding and other regions: access to francophone residential group homes.

Monsieur le Président, il existe très peu de centres résidentiels uniquement francophones en Ontario. Ceci est une triste réalité, surtout pour les familles comme celle de Miguel.

Mr. Speaker, I want to put emphasis on the sad but true reality of what's happening in my riding because of the lack of access for francophones. The mother of Miguel asked our office to help her son. He is now 21 years old. He will not be able to attend high school in September. He is a non-verbal francophone. Mr. Speaker, this mother is looking for a francophone group home for her autistic son.

She wants her son nearby. Iroquois Falls is the nearest residential group home that offers some French services, but there is no spot for him. This means she either sends him down south and leaves her job to be close to him, or just drops him off and can't see her son. This is absolutely inhumane and not a decision a mother or a family should be making.

Mr. Speaker, I hope this government is aware of this situation and not ignoring such an important file—and if they have any plans to invest in creating francophone residential group homes in northern Ontario.

COST OF LIVING

Mr. Stephen Blais: Mr. Speaker, too many Ontarians are struggling to make ends meet. Under this government, despite promises four years ago, we've seen the price of gas go up, we've seen the price of hydro go up, we've seen the price of food go up and we've seen the price of housing go up. At the same time, we've seen access to health care go down, access to OSAP go down, progress on building the green economy go down, autism services down, mental health supports down. Everything that should be up is down, and everything that should be down is up. This government's upside-down priorities are having a negative impact on the quality of life of Ontarians.

Ontarians expect their government to have a plan to make life more affordable, to take strong actions and provide relief, to ensure that all Ontarians have the economic dignity they deserve, living in the most prosperous province in the country. Whether it's the cost of a new home, the cost to turn on the lights, the cost to commute to work or the cost of groceries on Saturday morning, this government has no plan to provide relief for middle-class families. Whether it's the cost of home care, the lack of funding for ODSP or the cuts to public health, this government has no plans to provide for those who are suffering the most.

The government doesn't have a plan to make Ontario more affordable. And what's worse, they've delayed the budget, the opportunity to provide that plan for Ontario families. They've announced lots of gimmicks, but a handful of gimmicks does not make a jobs plan. A handful of gimmicks does not make an economic recovery plan. A handful of gimmicks does not help families with inflation and the runaway cost of living.

It's time for real leadership, Mr. Speaker, and a real plan for Ontario families.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: These past few weeks, I had the pleasure to visit many businesses in my riding of Mississauga–Erin Mills. I toured restaurants like East Tea Can, Village Taste, Al-Omda, karaoke at Masrawy, and I visited convenience stores like Stop and Go Food Market. I visited food stores like Adonis, Arz and Alnejma. I had the honour to speak to the owners and the employees at those businesses.

We are committed to giving Ontario's small businesses and workers the tools they need to succeed. From reducing the business tax by 1% to covering the gas costs by 5.7 cents per litre, we will make sure more money stays in the pockets of Ontarians.

We also recently announced a \$5-million investment to help Black, Indigenous and other racialized entrepreneurs overcome economic obstacles. With funding, training and culturally relevant services, no entrepreneur in Ontario will be left behind.

These measures will help businesses around Mississauga and across Ontario to grow, create new jobs and adapt to future challenges. Entrepreneurs and workers alike are counting on our government to keep up with the rapidly evolving post-COVID-19 playing field, and our government is committed to answering their call and to get the job done.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. John Vanthof: I would like to take the opportunity to make the House aware of a tale of two restaurants: the Outfitter Bar in Temagami, a high-end restaurant—beautiful, on the lake. You can boat up to it; you can snowmobile up to it. It's a fantastic spot. I recommend it to everyone here. And the cafeteria in Sturgeon Falls: It is what it sounds like. It's owned by Carmen Binette—and good, hearty food. It's affordable. You always come out of the cafeteria well-fed and happy.

Two totally different business models, both successful, both extremely stressed: What they do share is both those businesses, and many other restaurants across the province, were denied the small business relief grant when they were closed in the last lockdown.

In the case of the Outfitter, the Outfitter put in investments because they qualified, and were denied. The cafeteria had never applied before. They had gone through the first two and thought, "Okay, we're being closed. This grant is there." There is no appeal process—summarily denied. This government does not understand small business, though they claim to.

TARTAN DAY

Mr. Jim McDonell: The tartan of many colours stands for the people of Scottish culture who carried their values of Scottish enlightenment to many distant lands and gave birth and meaning to modernism and innovation as we know it.

A mere 300 years ago, Scotland was known as the poorest nation in all of Europe, but with the union of the two Parliaments in 1707, the Scots became in short order the most educated and literate population of the time, casting their moral values wherever they travelled.

The Highland Clearances started in the mid-1700s and continued for approximately 100 years, forcing more than 100,000 Scottish citizens to emigrate, many looking to North America to create a new life.

There are many prominent Scots who impacted the world, and most notably in Canada, where people claiming Scottish ancestry are one of the most populous groups. Father Alexander Macdonell organized displaced Highlanders into the Glengarry Fencibles, and after fighting for king and country during the Irish Rebellion of 1798, their loyalty was rewarded with a land grant in what is known today as Glengarry county. As the first bishop of Upper Canada and a member of this Legislature, he went on to organize the immigration of tens of thousands of Scots to Ontario.

All in all, the story of the Scots in Ontario is one of harmony and respect for other cultures and religions, held together in the peaceful pursuit of abundance. Today, displaced Scots around North America celebrate Tartan Day, a day of ceilidhs and single malt Scotch whisky, as they remember 2,000 years of hardships and victories in protecting their harsh homelands from the Vikings, the Romans and the English to the south. Mr. Speaker, happy Tartan Day.

1030

Hon. Paul Calandra: Point of order.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I believe if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to immediately move government notice of motion number 14, respecting the expedited passage of Bill 111, An Act to amend the Fuel Tax Act and the Gasoline Tax Act with respect to a temporary reduction to the tax payable on certain clear fuel and on gasoline, and that the Speaker shall immediately put the question on the motion without debate or amendment, and that no deferral of the vote on the motion be permitted.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Mr. Calandra is seeking unanimous consent to immediately move government notice of motion number 14, respecting the expedited passage of Bill 111, An Act to amend the Fuel Tax Act and the Gasoline Tax Act with respect to a temporary reduction to the tax payable on certain clear fuel and on gasoline, and that the Speaker shall immediately put the question on the motion without debate or amendment, and that no deferral of the vote on the motion be permitted. Agreed? I heard a no.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I would like to take the opportunity to welcome our page Ria Somaia's family: Indira, Sachin, Surendra, Raj and Madhu. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'd like to welcome the OLIP intern who is serving in my office right now, Dia Mukherjee, who is in the gallery today.

I'd also like to introduce Ryan Clayton, who is from British Columbia, here to learn more about Ontario politics today. Both are in the gallery.

QUESTION PERIOD

COST OF LIVING

Ms. Sara Singh: My first question is for the Premier. For most Ontarians, the cost of living has skyrocketed under this Conservative government. Since June 2018, the cost of buying a home in Ontario has doubled, now costing over \$1 million. The average cost of rent has gone up \$200 a month. Families are spending more in the grocery store. Under this Premier, the price of gas has gone up 19%, along with home heating, which is now up 18%.

When will the Premier stop with the gimmicks and take real action to help everyday Ontarians struggling with out-of-control costs of living?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member for Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill.

Mr. Michael Parsa: I thank my honourable colleague for the question. Here's the difference between a party and a government that puts people first, that is fighting every single day to reduce costs and make life more affordable: What you see and hear from the opposition day after day is, they will talk about minimum wage—"We'll raise the minimum wage to \$15"—and what do they do? They vote against it.

We lower costs and we fight for those jobs to come to Ontario so that we can raise every single person in this province. What does the opposition do? They vote against it. They will come time after time and they will talk about making life more affordable for Ontarians, and then every time we've actually put tangible work toward making a difference in people's lives, the opposition votes against it. There is a clear contrast.

We will continue to fight for those jobs in Ontario. We will continue to make life more affordable for Ontarians while the opposition continues to say no.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: The Premier forgets that wages for about a million workers in this province are frozen, thanks to Bill 124. For hundreds of thousands of front-line grocery store clerks and retail and service workers—there have been no gains for them because of the low minimum wage here in the province of Ontario.

For Ontarians stuck with this Premier's low-wage policies, just trying to make ends meet is hard enough. Just to pay the increase in rent alone, Speaker, a minimum wage worker would have to work an additional 13 hours a month. With this Premier's low-wage policies, why is this government making it harder and harder for working people to have a roof over their heads?

Mr. Michael Parsa: Again, I thank my colleague for the question. Quite the contrary: Every single day, what we are doing is to make sure that life is more affordable for the people of this province. And in contrast, what the opposition does is continuously fight and oppose every measure that we're putting.

I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, as a result of us raising minimum wage, more than 760,000 Ontarians are now

able to take a bigger paycheque. And do you know what's going to happen in October? That's going to be raised to \$15.50, so a further bigger paycheque for Ontarians. We'll fight every single day for every single Ontarian, while the previous government gave up on Ontarians, while the previous government gave up on jobs for Ontario. We want not only jobs, we want good-paying jobs to come back in this province for every single Ontarian, and we'll fight every day.

They didn't get it done. They supported them. We will get it done, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Final supplementary.

Ms. Sara Singh: Speaker, I'd like to remind my colleague that this government froze the minimum wage when they took office in 2018, making sure that workers didn't get the pay bump that they deserved. Let's be clear: You have done nothing to make housing more affordable, nothing for renters, and nothing for seniors who drive. There is nothing on offer for folks who can't afford high car insurance and no relief for high hydro prices.

It doesn't have to be this way. We could have a government that is working to make life more affordable, starting with affordable homes for families in my city of Brampton and starting with an end to the Premier's low-wage policies. When will this government stop with the election gimmicks and start tackling the high cost of living here in the province of Ontario?

Mr. Michael Parsa: I thank, again, my colleague for the question. I want to thank the Minister for Municipal Affairs and Housing because he has been a champion in this province. The problem that the NDP just woke up to discuss today, this minister identified and this Premier talked about the very first day. They acknowledged the previous government's failed policies year after year after year. But the problems that we're facing today are because they failed the people of Ontario. And don't forget, Mr. Speaker, when the opposition, the NDP, had the balance of power, what did they do? They also failed the people of this province, but not under the leadership of this minister and not this Premier.

We will continue to work hard every single day to make life more affordable for Ontarians. That means better-paying jobs. That means affordable housing. That means more housing all across the province, from corner to corner to corner, for every Ontarian, under the leadership of this government, this Premier and that minister.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Sara Singh: My next question is also for the Premier.

For people in Ontario, the wait in the emergency room can be painfully long, some waiting hours and hours. The wait for a family doctor can be weeks. The wait for surgery is now several months long, or even some years for some folks. This morning, the FAO laid bare the reasons behind these long waits. Ontario spends less per person on health

care than anywhere else in Canada—much less, Speaker, 10% less than the average.

My question to the Premier is, why does this government believe that Ontarians deserve less health care funding than everywhere else in Canada?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. This government has invested more in health care than any government in Ontario's history. We've invested an extra \$5 billion, and during COVID-19, an extra \$5 billion on top of that. We have been investing more in health care and in hospitals and in doctors.

As you know, we just announced 295 medical spots, with some assigned to the northern Ontario medical school, which is very important for making sure that we have the resources up in the north and in rural and remote communities. We're doing everything we can to make sure that people have access to hospitals, to health care across the province and in every community when and where they need it.

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

1040

Ms. Sara Singh: Speaker, this is not a new problem, and frankly, the numbers don't lie. The previous Liberal government started the process of bringing health care to its knees. They froze hospital budgets for five years and laid off more than 1,600 nurses. But what has the current government done? They cut. They withhold funding. They put in place low-wage policies, like Bill 124, disrespecting health professionals and driving them out of the province of Ontario.

My question to the Premier is, why is he driving away health care professionals instead of fixing our health care system?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you again to the member opposite for the question. Quite to the contrary, this government has invested in the largest health human resource recruitment initiative in Ontario's history. We have 27,000 PSWs and nurses going into long-term care to fulfill our promise of four hours of care on average per resident. We have recruited another 8,000 nurses and PSWs for hospitals and home care. And we have, as I just mentioned, 295 new places for doctors across the province. That is the first increase in doctor placements in 10 years in this province.

We are doing everything we can to make sure the resources are there for people who need them. We have been adding pandemic pay to our front-line health care heroes throughout the pandemic, and we recently contributed \$763 million to nurses to have a \$5,000 bonus.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Final supplementary.

Ms. Sara Singh: Well, Speaker, here's the reality of the situation: Ontario has the fewest beds per person. Ontario has the fewest registered nurses per person. And in my beautiful city of Brampton, we only have one emergency room for over 700,000 people. In the northern and

rural communities, people are forced to drive hours for care, and for many First Nations people, they are actually forced to fly out of their communities to access a hospital.

Everyone in this province deserves so much better. Investing in public universal health care is a good investment. It actually helps governments save money in the long term. Why is this government underfunding and withholding money from our health care system rather than investing in it?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you again to the member opposite for the question. As I've indicated through my other two answers, this government has done more investment in health care than any other government in Ontario's history. But what has the opposition done—the opposition who supported the Liberals for 15 years while they did nothing, invested in nothing and left our health care system in this current state?

The NDP have opposed our government's commitment to protecting people's health at every turn, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. We provided investments of more than \$1 billion to support the rollout of Ontario's vaccine plan; they voted no. They didn't support us when we invested over \$1.8 billion in the hospital sector in 2021-22 or our \$125 million to expand critical care capacity across the province; they voted no. We invested over half a billion dollars to surgical recovery; they didn't support it.

Opposing our government is really all this opposition party is able to do. That's why they're going to be forever in opposition.

BIRTH ALERTS

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: *Remarks in Oji-Cree.*

Good morning. My question is to the Premier. In July 2020, the government directed children's aid societies to stop using birth alerts targeting Indigenous women by October 2020. A year and a half after this directive was given, we are still hearing from the Matawa Chiefs Council that this practice continues. Now instead of apprehension based on birth alerts, they are happening through the duty to report.

Speaker, birth alerts are a gross violation of the rights of the child, the rights of the mother and the Indigenous community as a whole. Will the Premier tell this House how the government has ensured that the birth alert directive of 2020 was implemented?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Our government is listening and taking tangible steps to combat systemic racism, including in Ontario's child welfare system.

In 2020, the ministry directed children's aid societies to end the practice of birth alerts, which partners told us disproportionately affected First Nations, Inuit and Métis families and communities. No woman should be deterred from seeking prenatal care or parenting supports while pregnant due to fears of having a birth alert issued.

Eliminating birth alerts is an important step in creating a child welfare system that responds to the needs of children, youth and families through prevention and early intervention.

I thank the member again for the question.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Speaker, I've had my taste of colonial tea in this place.

In 2014, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission called upon all levels of government to reduce the number of Indigenous children in care. In 2019, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls recommended the abolishment of birth alerts. Child welfare involvement, birth alerts and other institutional policies and practices that target Indigenous families have very real effects on our nations.

Speaker, is Ontario's 2020 directive just birth alerts under a different name? Can Ontario ensure Indigenous families that the colonial, oppressive and discriminatory practice of birth alerts are not still being used against Indigenous families?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Again, no woman should be discouraged from seeking prenatal care or parenting supports out of fear that their child will be taken from them. We heard from Indigenous and other racialized communities that this practice separates newborns and parents shortly after delivery and unfairly affects racialized and marginalized mothers and families.

Ending birth alerts was a key recommendation of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. And instead of immediately separating families and making assumptions about a mother's capacity, we are directing children's aid societies and hospitals to collaborate and create new protocols that support vulnerable mothers and families. Ending birth alerts, let me be clear, is a critical step in creating a child welfare system that is focused on prevention and early intervention. Thank you again for the question.

HIGHWAY TOLLS

Mr. Lorne Coe: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Ontarians continue to be concerned with the cost of living. It is no secret, though, Speaker, that for 15 long years, past Liberal governments imposed unjust cost burdens on Ontarians, including putting costly tolls on drivers in my community.

Can the Minister of Transportation please tell the House what this government is doing to right the wrongs of the Liberals and keep costs down for hard-working Ontario families?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I want to thank the member from Whitby for such a great question and for being such a great advocate on behalf of his constituents.

Speaker, when our government took office four years ago, we made a commitment—a commitment to reverse the costly policies that were enacted by the Del Duca-

Wynne Liberals, and to keep more of your hard-earned money in your pocket where it belongs.

Last month, I was pleased to stand with the Premier and members of caucus to announce that we are delivering on our promise to the people of Durham to remove the unfair tolls that Steven Del Duca and the Liberals imposed, and to cut costs for drivers in the region. Speaker, I am so pleased to say that, as of yesterday, tolls on Highways 412 and 418 are officially gone for good. That means one less dent in your pocket when you take your kids to school or commute to work.

Mr. Speaker, we are not repeating the past mistakes of the Liberals. We are saying yes to putting and keeping more money in your pocket.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I would ask the member for Ottawa Centre to come to order, please.

I recognize the member for Whitby.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I would like to thank the Minister of Transportation for that response and her long-standing leadership and commitment to remove the tolls on the 412 and 418.

1050

Speaker, I know that this is a long time coming for drivers in my riding, who were ignored by the Liberals for years on this issue—years. Instead of listening to voices in my community and across this entire province, the Liberals took every chance to make life more expensive and more difficult for Ontarians.

Can the Minister of Transportation please tell the House more about what this government is doing to cut costs for drivers in other areas?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Thank you again to the member for the question. When our government took office in 2018, we inherited a disastrous situation from the Liberals. But you don't have to take my word for it, Speaker. Just look at their record: Under Steven Del Duca and the Liberals, electricity rates were skyrocketing and 300,000 manufacturing jobs left the province. And when Mr. Del Duca was Minister of Transportation, licence plate sticker fees rose by nearly 10% per year.

But our government is correcting their wrongs. We're taking concrete steps that will save drivers precious time and money. We're saying yes to removing the tolls from Highways 412 and 418. We're saying yes to eliminating licence plate renewal fees and stickers. We're saying yes to building the future Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass toll-free, and yes to cutting the gas tax by 5.7 cents per litre. What do we hear from the NDP and the Liberals on the other side of the House, Mr. Speaker? "No," every single time.

HIGHWAY TOLLS

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: My question is for the Premier. Speaker, in the middle of the pandemic, while many small businesses were forced to shut down and many more Ontarians lost their jobs, this government gave the owners of Highway 407 a billion-dollar write-off. Recently, there

have been calls to help drivers by getting more vehicles off the 401 using existing roads. The city of Mississauga unanimously passed a resolution calling on this government to reduce traffic on the 401 by lowering tolls on the 407. Instead of spending \$10 billion to build Highway 413, will the Premier give drivers a break and get his buddies to lower tolls on the 407?

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

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Congestion is a problem that affects all of us in this House and people across the province of Ontario. It affects our quality of life, it impacts the cost of goods and it adds costs for businesses. Highway 401 is the most congested highway in North America. For years, the Liberals had the chance to address this issue. They didn't build new subways, and when they built new highways in the greater Golden Horseshoe, they built them with tolls, Mr. Speaker.

We want to put money back into people's pockets, which is why we removed the tolls from Highways 412 and 418. We want to get people moving. We want to get people where they need to go, which is why our Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Plan addresses the gridlock that the Liberals let develop year after year. Congestion is only going to get worse as the population of the greater Golden Horseshoe increases, which is why we are taking steps to increase our highway capacity by building Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass toll-free.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: The Auditor General has confirmed that she will be looking into the billion-dollar handout this government gave to the private corporation that owns Highway 407, and I'm sure that her report will be enlightening. Speaker, the 407 runs just north of my community. It was originally designed as an outlet to direct traffic away from the 401, but few people in my community actually use it because of the expensive tolls.

Instead of taking action or reducing these tolls, the Premier gave the owners of the 407 a billion-dollar write-off. Now he's going to spend another \$10 billion to build a highway through the greenbelt to help his developer buddies, who are some of his biggest donors, make even more money.

For once, will the Premier do the right thing and put the interests of everyday Ontarians ahead of the interests of multi-billion-dollar corporations?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I'm happy to tell the member opposite that our government is doing the right thing. We're taking action in ways that the Liberals and the NDP won't do. We are building the infrastructure that people need to end congestion in the greater Golden Horseshoe.

Mr. Speaker, MTO has been looking at the gridlock problem for decades. The GTA west corridor stage 1 environmental assessment looked at all the alternatives. Under this EA, modelling showed that if Highway 413 is not built, the 407 would be at or above capacity by 2030 even if the tolls remained. That means that we need to get

building today. We need to build a Highway 413. We need to build the Bradford Bypass.

We are a pro-transit government. We're investing \$61 billion in transit to build new subways, new LRTs. We are taking the steps. We are showing the leadership in transportation that the Liberals did not for years, condemning generations of Ontarians to congestion. We are going to do what's right. We are saying yes to building.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. John Fraser: I'm sure, like the rest of us here, we'd all like to know where the pixie dust is being spread today. We all know the Premier likes to promise big things, really big things, and not deliver—and really not deliver—like a 20% income tax cut or a 12% reduction on your hydro rates. Now, with Bill 88, he's promising that he's working for workers. Instead, he's making them second-class workers under the Employment Standards Act, workers who don't have the same rights and protections that all Ontario workers have fought for and deserve.

When will the Premier stop saying things just because they sound really good and actually deliver on the protections that Ontario's gig workers need?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, let's think of what he just said there: "When will the Premier stop announcing things that sound good?" So if they sound good, it means that they must be good for the people of the province of Ontario. I guess that that's what it means, right?

The member opposite thinks that reducing taxes for the people of the province of Ontario is not something we should be doing, that it's too good for the people of the province of Ontario; that providing better protection for workers in the province of Ontario, something they didn't do for over 15 years, that the workers don't deserve it. That's what the Liberals think. We don't. That reducing the gas tax for the people of the province of Ontario at a time when carbon taxes, war in Ukraine is hurting all of our economy—they think it's too rich to put more money back in the pockets of the people of Ontario.

And that is fundamentally the difference between the Liberals and the NDPs in a coalition. We believe in putting money back in the pockets of people to build a strong economy where people can live, work, invest and raise a family. And there is no better place in North America to do it than Ontario right now, under the strong, stable Progressive Conservative—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Thank you. I return to the member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: I don't think my colleague across the way got it. It's actually the Premier saying things that he's doing, like a 20% income tax cut or 12% off your hydro rates. I don't know about you, but if you guys think they've happened, maybe you should go and knock on a few doors.

The Working for Workers Act doesn't actually work for workers. In fact, this is a government and a Premier who

like to say no. They want to say no to protections for their health and safety, no to vacation pay, no to termination pay, no to rights to organize, no to a fair living wage. And just like the Ontario Autism Program and so many other things, the Premier likes to say big things, really big things, and promise big things and then come up short, really short, or not at all.

When will the Premier stop talking the big talk and actually deliver real rights and protections to gig workers in Ontario?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, Mr. Speaker, let's go back to 2018, before we were elected. We saw jobs and investment fleeing Ontario because of the policies of the Liberals and the NDP. They never saw a regulation that they didn't like. They put in regulations. We were twice as regulated as any other province in the country. Jobs were fleeing. And what has happened since we have come to office? Not only are we making important investments in health care, including in his own community—his own government, and he was parliamentary assistant, refused to put investments into the Ottawa Hospital. It took us to get that done.

We're cutting taxes for people. That's what Conservatives do: more money in their pockets. Jobs are coming back to Ontario. We've saved the auto sector, Mr. Speaker. We're building transit and transportation. And do you know what? When we build transit and transportation, it works. We don't build bridges upside down like the Liberals did. Ontario is getting back to work because of a strong, stable Progressive Conservative majority, and after June 2, they will get another one.

1100

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Dave Smith: In honour of national Tartan Day, I am wearing my family tartan: McPherson.

My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. My constituents have heard that the government's plan to stay open includes adding 3,000 new beds over 10 years and the continuation of the over 3,100 beds in hospitals that were added during the pandemic. My constituents have sacrificed so much during this pandemic and want to know more about how this government is fixing the failure of the previous government.

To the President of the Treasury Board: How will this legislation and the plan to stay open protect Ontarians for generations to come?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the parliamentary assistant to the President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member from Peterborough-Kawartha for that question. The member is correct. Through the Ministry of Health, we are investing over \$30 billion over the next 10 years to address long-standing challenges in our hospitals, created by the former Liberal government. In addition, since the onset of this pandemic, the government has added nearly 1,000 more intensive care hospital beds.

Speaker, after a decade and a half of neglect, the people of Peel region are finally getting the new hospitals they deserve. Last December, we announced the largest investment in hospital infrastructure in Canadian history to completely rebuild the Mississauga Hospital in Mississauga–Lakeshore. And last Sunday, the Premier announced another \$21 million to invest in expanding the William Osler Health System. This funding will transform Peel Memorial into a new in-patient hospital with a 24/7 emergency department and expand cancer care for Brampton Civic Hospital.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I return to the member for Peterborough–Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: I'd like to thank the Treasury Board representative, the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore, for that answer. It's really important that we build on the lessons we've learned from COVID-19, and I'm pleased to hear that we're actually doing that. I can't believe that after 15 years of Liberal inaction, we're actually getting hospitals built, something that is completely foreign to what the previous government did.

I think that the answer highlights another important area for me, though, and that's training future health care practitioners in Ontario. It's great to have new beds, but we need nurses and we need doctors to actually be there to make sure that people are getting the care that they deserve. It's also important that we're attracting and retaining other medical professionals.

Can the minister please tell the House how these initiatives will help Ontario weather future emergencies?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Thank you again to the member for that question. To stay open, we need to retain as many staff as possible, retraining more people and breaking down barriers for skilled workers who choose to stay here in Ontario. Through the new Ontario Learn and Stay grant, up to 2,500 students will be eligible to receive full, upfront funding for tuition, books and other things for education. As well, that will keep them here in the graduated areas that they want to work in.

We are also supporting foreign-trained medical professionals by proposing an amendment so that internationally trained health care workers can receive certification from the regulatory colleges in a timely manner and start working as soon as possible.

Finally, we are also building the health care workforce for tomorrow by adding 160 new undergraduate seats and 295 new postgraduate positions across the six medical schools in Ontario over the next five years.

I want to thank the Minister of Colleges and Universities and the Minister of Health for all the work that they are doing to help us rebuild the system that was neglected by the previous Liberal government. We are getting it—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Thank you. I recognize the member for Mushkegowuk–James Bay.

SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS

M. Guy Bourgouin: Ma question est pour le premier ministre.

Depuis presque quatre ans, je tiens ce gouvernement responsable du manque d'accès aux services en français. Malheureusement, la situation ne s'améliore pas. Je suis frustré d'entendre encore des commettants dans mon comté qui disent ne pas recevoir des services en français, des services payés du gouvernement—région désignée.

M. Aubertin, qui demeure dans mon comté, a dû se rendre à Sudbury pour un examen de conduite de la route. Il a fait un appointment. Il a demandé les services en français. Ils ont dit : « Oui, on va avoir les services en français. » Il a payé une chambre de motel, de l'essence, le temps personnel pour payer la personne qui a voyagé avec lui. Une fois arrivé pour son examen, personne n'était là qui parlait en français. Ils ne pouvaient pas lui donner des services en français. M. Aubertin n'a pas eu de succès dans son examen.

Monsieur le Président, je veux que ce gouvernement explique pourquoi M. Aubertin a dû vivre cette expérience—et de fournir des explications pour ce manque. C'est inacceptable.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Merci. I recognize the Minister of Francophone Affairs.

L'hon. Caroline Mulroney: Moi, je suis très fière de faire partie d'un gouvernement qui a, pour la première fois, modernisé la Loi sur les services en français dans la province de l'Ontario après son introduction dans les années 1980. Les libéraux avaient 15 ans pour moderniser cet acte qui est si important pour la communauté francophone de la province de l'Ontario, et c'est notre gouvernement qui a mis de l'avant ce projet de loi—et bien sûr, il a reçu la sanction royale le 9 décembre, 2021.

Monsieur le Président, en plus de moderniser la loi, nous mettons en oeuvre des mesures pour fortifier la capacité pour faire la promotion des services, mais aussi pour la stratégie de la main-d'oeuvre francophone et bilingue. Il y a un manque, une pénurie de main-d'oeuvre francophone ici en Ontario, et c'est pour ça, avec notre modernisation dans le cadre législatif, qu'on fait tout ce qu'on peut pour renforcer la main-d'oeuvre francophone pour livrer ces services.

Nous prenons ce problème très au sérieux, et je serais heureuse de parler avec le membre opposé de ce problème.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I return to the member for Mushkegowuk–James Bay.

M. Guy Bourgouin: J'apprécie la réponse de la ministre, mais la situation ne s'améliore pas, monsieur le Président.

J'ai une autre commettante frustrée. Encore le même scénario : elle a fait les appels nécessaires. Elle a demandé un appointment en français avec les services en français, pour se faire dire, une fois arrivée à Sudbury, qu'on n'a pas les services, qu'on ne peut pas offrir ce service-là. C'est inacceptable : pas de services en français, puis la madame, encore, a échoué. Ça, c'est sans mentionner les personnes d'OSP qui sont obligées de se déplacer et de payer 1 200 piastres. Je ne pense pas qu'ils sont capables de dépenser 1 200 piastres. Inacceptable qu'en 2022 les services ne soient pas offerts en français. Encore plus inacceptable que les commettants vivent ces scénarios, puis qu'on n'a même pas ces services en région.

Encore au premier ministre : est-ce que votre gouvernement réalise l'ampleur de la situation et ce que vous faites vivre à tous ceux affectés à cause de votre manque d'engagement envers les services en français?

L'hon. Caroline Mulroney: Honnêtement, monsieur le Président, notre gouvernement s'est démontré ouvert au problème des services en français, et c'est pour ça que nous avons modernisé la Loi sur les services en français pour la première fois depuis les années 1980.

Je comprends certainement la frustration de nombreux Ontariens en ce qui concerne les tests au volant. Bien sûr, en raison de la pandémie, nous avons mis sur pause les tests au volant. En juin de l'année dernière, j'ai présenté un plan audacieux avec un investissement de plus de 16 millions de dollars pour augmenter le nombre de tests routiers. On a embauché plus de 250 personnes, des examinateurs supplémentaires, pour offrir des services routiers avec des heures prolongées à travers la province, y compris dans le Nord, pour les Ontariens du Nord, y compris les francophones. Nous avons apporté la modernisation du test G pour améliorer l'efficacité pour nous assurer que tous les Ontariens, anglophones et francophones, puissent avoir accès à ces services. Mais je continue à demander la patience.

TAXATION

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: My question is for the Premier. Recently, this government finally admitted that they will fail to deliver on another promise from their 2018 election campaign: to reduce gas and fuel taxes in their first term in office—another promise made and promise broken.

During the 2018 election campaign, the Premier promised to bring in tax relief by cutting the provincial tax on gas and fuel in his first term in office. By November 2021, with this promise still not fulfilled, the Premier said a cut in gas taxes would come before the next budget. Now the budget is on its way and the government has stated that only a temporary cut in gas and fuel taxes would come, and only if they are re-elected.

Looking back on the last four years of a wasted opportunity, why did the government not keep its commitment to cut the provincial tax on gas and fuel during its first term in office?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Michael Parsa: I thank my colleague for the question. We're introducing legislation that, if passed, would temporarily cut the tax by 5.7 cents per litre. That is on top of the 4.3 cents that has already been cut for Ontarians. These savings, coupled with the recently announced elimination of the licence plate fees, would save an Ontario household \$465 per year in 2022.

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My question is to my colleague: Why isn't she and all members in the opposition not helping us in fighting the carbon tax which is adding so much cost and burden to Ontarians? Once again, we are fighting every day to make

sure we lower costs for Ontarians. The opposition does the opposite and always votes against every initiative we put forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Returning to the member for Cambridge for the supplementary.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: They keep talking about the carbon tax, and they've implemented their own. A cut to the provincial tax on gas and fuel would have been a great help to Ontarians over the last four years, especially as this government and its forced lockdowns and mandates shuttered businesses and put people out of work. But this government failed and broke its promise.

Now they have admitted that, under a PC government, there will never be a permanent cut to the gas and fuel tax. The government has said they will cut the gas and fuel tax but only if re-elected and only for a few months. Why is that? Why is tax relief for Ontarians only a good idea for a few months and only if the government is re-elected? Why won't the government cut gas and fuel taxes today and make the cut permanent?

Mr. Michael Parsa: Again, I thank the honourable colleague for the question. Today, tomorrow and every day since we've been elected, we've been fighting for Ontarians, and we won't stop doing that. Mr. Speaker, the latest that we announced after two very difficult years for Ontarians—and there was a lot asked of Ontarians, individuals and families, which is why we make sure that every single initiative we put forward benefits Ontarians.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that on top of the 5.7-cents-a-litre reduction in the fuel tax that the member alluded to—and I hope that everybody in opposition votes in favour of this—we also removed licence plate fees. Thanks to the Minister of Transportation—removing tolls for Ontarians.

Again, every single time we put these forward, the opposition votes against them, but that's not going to stop us. Every single day, we will work hard to make sure that we make life more affordable for the people of Ontario, including members in her riding.

NORTHERN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENT

DÉVELOPPEMENT DU NORD DE L'ONTARIO

Mr. Jim McDonell: My question is for the Minister of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry. We all understand that our province's northern regions have different needs than those of the south. Whether it's a consequence of harsher winters, tougher terrain or the often-remote landscapes, it's clear that living, working and doing business in northern Ontario comes with a particular set of challenges.

Speaker, through you, how is this minister and our government levelling the playing field for northern Ontario businesses and communities?

Hon. Greg Rickford: I want to thank the member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry for his exceptional career and the advocacy for his constituents over the course of time.

Mr. Speaker, we've heard in recent weeks in light of the situation in Ukraine that the world has come to the doorstep of northern Ontario. And Sudbury, as our flagship city, with all it has to offer in the mining sector and the mining services supply sector, needs to be ready for that. Like northern Ontario communities across some 800,000 square kilometres, we're ensuring that the quality of life in those communities is where not just families who currently live there want it to be at, but also future families.

We're on the move, and we're growing. That's why I announced the three quarters of a million dollars for an open theatre in the downtown core, enhancements to the Kivi Park for trails and, of course, 105 000 \$ dans le Conseil scolaire public du Grand Nord de l'Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, Sudbury is on the move—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Thank you. I recognize the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you for the hard work on shaping a more inclusive Northern Ontario Heritage Fund that has reaped success. I congratulate the minister and all those who have worked to create a better and broader entity for their efforts. I'm certain that these investments will prove equally as valuable to the communities as they will to those who receive them directly. After all, building and investing in businesses and community infrastructure makes for better communities, creates jobs and helps strengthen a community's core identity. I think that's a lesson that the Wynne-Del Duca Liberals could reflect on as they consider their tainted legacy of dismal stretch goals.

To the minister: How is this government working to rebuild the tarnished relationships left by the previous government, to improving northern Ontarians' quality of life?

Hon. Greg Rickford: During my visit to Sudbury, I also announced an example of what the northern Ontario resource development program can do. We understand the impact of the resource sector on our towns and cities across northern Ontario. I was able to announce funding for Sudbury to develop a roundabout, which would divert some of the resource traffic in and around Sudbury. It was very well received by the deputy mayor.

But really, this is about preparing all of our towns and cities for a reality. Whether it's the forest sector or the mining sector, the United States of America and the European Union have come a-calling. They want northern Ontario to supply them with their forestry products and their mining products, particularly critical minerals. But time and time again, all our investments are met with resistance from the Liberal-NDP coalition. The no democratic party, in particular, says no to growth and development in northern Ontario—

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

Hon. Greg Rickford:—and the people there know it. That's why they're rallying behind the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Thank you. I recognize the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

ROAD SAFETY

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: My question is for the Premier. People in Thunder Bay–Atikokan and across the north are very concerned about the safety of our roads. My office received an email last week from a constituent with photos of yet another recent accident involving trucks. I have frequent phone calls about near misses and stretches that have regular accidents, and I know the government has heard about the famous Sistonens Corners. Some conversations are harder because we have to talk about fatalities and serious injuries.

I thank the OPP for a recent enforcement blitz, but where is the investment in infrastructure to make it safer? My caucus brings bills and motions forward and asks questions. When is this issue actually going to be taken seriously? When is this government going to get serious about road safety in northwestern Ontario?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I thank the member opposite for the question. On this side of the House, we take road safety very seriously, especially in the north, where winter driving conditions can make driving even more challenging. We take winter maintenance seriously. After 15 years of Liberal government, things only got worse in the north, so for the last four years we've been taking important steps to improve the safety of driving on northern roads in all sorts of ways.

With respect to infrastructure, we have taken important steps. I was in Kenora recently with the Minister of Northern Development and Mines to celebrate the expansion of Highway 17 from Kenora to the Manitoba border. We're expanding Highways 11 and 17 from Thunder Bay to Nipigon. The member asks: Where are the investments? The investments are in bills that our government puts forward that the NDP continuously votes against.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I return to the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan for the supplementary.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: My question is for the Premier. I'm glad the minister mentioned winter roads because we're having a snowstorm in Thunder Bay today, so just a heads-up.

Another major concern on road safety is the transport trucks travelling the Trans-Canada Highway. Residents report that drivers are going too fast, especially on winter roads, when safety means driving below the speed limit. Our highways are not provided with equal plowing and salting to the 400 system in southern Ontario. There aren't enough transport inspectors, and we know truckers are under a lot of pressure to get their cargo to their destinations.

We also know that there isn't enough training or testing to make sure that drivers are operating safely in winter conditions. That's an issue for both them and other drivers, like local residents who have to use their personal vehicles. When is this government going to do something to make sure northern highways are safe?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Since our election in 2018, we have been taking important steps to ensure that roads

are safe. We have announced that we are building new rest areas and expanding existing rest areas across the north to improve safety for truck drivers.

With respect to training, though, Ontario has a very robust commercial licensing system in place. It is, in fact, among the most robust anywhere in North America and we are committed to taking steps to ensure that it is upheld. The training standard includes a minimum of over 103 hours of instruction and it covers entry-level knowledge and skills that are needed for truck drivers to operate on Ontario's roads.

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Mr. Speaker, I'm working with the Minister of Colleges and Universities to ensure that our organizations that provide training are designated and approved under the ministry's certification program. The ministry and I have been in regular contact with the trucking industry over the last year to gather feedback on the effectiveness of that training program. We're going to take all the steps we need to, to ensure that our roads continue to be among the safest in North America.

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

M^{me} Lucille Collard: My question is to the Premier. Despite the Premier's promise to stay away from cronyism, this government's track record on political appointments has been less than stellar. We've seen numerous examples of appointments that favour the Premier's friends, without seeing the qualifications associated with the high-profile positions that they've been appointed to. From the Ottawa Police Services Board to Dean French's appointment free-for-all, this government seems to choose who to appoint based on their donors list, despite campaign pledges to the contrary.

Will the government apologize for not taking politics out of the appointment process?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, in fact, that's exactly what we did. We saw that, after years of cash-for-access and a whole host of ethical challenges that the previous government faced, whether it was air Ornge or—oh, my gosh, the list is just too much. We all remember windmills in communities that didn't want them, for power that we didn't need, and the chief of staff going to jail, of the previous Liberal government, and—

Interjection: Gas plants.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I forgot about gas—there are so many ethical challenges from the Wynne-Del Duca times that it is hard to keep up with all of them. But that all changed in 2018. We brought openness and transparency into government. We've made so many changes in this place alone to make Parliament work better for all people, including giving the opposition, or the minority—I shouldn't even say the minority—the few Liberals that are left an opportunity to ask four questions. Imagine that they would ask a question on ethics, that the Liberals would ask a question on ethics, Mr. Speaker.

We're going to continue doing all that we can to make this the best place to live, work, invest and to raise a family. That, the people of Ontario can count on.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I return to the member from Ottawa–Vanier for the supplemental.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Having good ethics in appointments is a good thing. Appointing people you want to reward who don't have the skills required for a job has real impacts on the services to Ontarians. When the media picks up on examples of evident favours being returned through appointment to high positions, the public has good reason to be concerned.

Premier Ford had committed to be more transparent with provincial appointments since elected, yet the numerous reports we see in the news every day clearly demonstrate that the government has broken that promise time and time again. So why is it that the Premier does not bring the rigour and the transparency he promised to Ontarians?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I don't know how many questions they get a week—very few—and they ask this question now, Mr. Speaker. Not that it matters, because, with everything else that is going on in the world, the Liberals are asking a question on ethics, which—they set the bar so low. I mean, again, we talked about a previous Liberal chief of staff to the Premier going to jail, the failed gas plants, air Ornge—just on and on.

But if the opposition wanted accountability for appointments, one would think that when they have the opportunity in front of the government agencies committee to actually vet those appointments, they would actually take that opportunity. But, of course, because they didn't show up and had no interest in it, the committee couldn't even meet. I guess that means they believe that the appointments we're making are good for the people of the province of Ontario. They have shown that, day in and day out, because this is an economy that is on fire, and that's what the people of the province of Ontario care about.

DISCRIMINATION

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Premier. Last week, I sent a letter, with my colleague from Ottawa Centre, to the minister Raymond Cho and—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): The member for Ottawa South and the minister of sport and culture will come to order.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, I'll start again. My question is to the Premier. Last week, I sent a letter, with my colleague from Ottawa Centre, to the minister, Raymond Cho, and Chief Commissioner Patricia DeGuire from the Ontario Human Rights Commission. We were raising a serious case of disability discrimination, and have not heard a reply.

Kismutt Dog Rescue recently informed Erin and Mike Doan from Listowel that they're ineligible for a dog adoption. Why? Because their son, Henry, is on the autism spectrum.

Speaker, we're thankful for the hard work of dog rescue agencies, and no one would question their need for a rigorous interview process to ensure adopted dogs go to safe homes. We asked the minister responsible to take action. Will this government commit today to take action and make sure that disabilities—

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

I recognize the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. There is no place for discrimination of anyone here in Ontario. Our government is committed to creating that environment, and we will continue to work on that.

It was very disappointing to see that article that the member is referring to. As an owner of dogs, I appreciate the warmth and love that they can give individuals and their families. Every child with autism has unique needs, and we need to understand how to address those needs. I think that we will all agree, on all sides of this House, that discrimination is not acceptable, period.

I'm pleased to see that the family worked with another shelter and that the family is now in the process of being matched with a dog.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: Words are not enough. There is a dog rescue that continues to operate in the province of Ontario that says they will not let dogs go to families whose children are on the autism spectrum. That is still a functioning business that is in non-compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. This minister, this government, must stand up for the law. Disability discrimination should be illegal.

My colleague's question got a little muffled there, Speaker, so I'm going to repeat it to the government: Is this government going to take action against Kismutt Dog Rescue that continues to post on social media that they will continue to discriminate against autistic folks, against children who are autistic? They need animal companionship, just like all of us who celebrate that. Are you going to act, yes or no? That's the question.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Let me be absolutely clear: There is no place for discrimination against children with autism or their families or anyone else.

Let me take this opportunity to explain the unique needs of children with autism and their families and how our government is addressing that, with a world-leading program that is creating a needs-based, comprehensive program to support the families with doubling of the funding, with 50,000 children who are being moved into services as we speak, with 40,000 already in the programs. We make sure that the program is evolving with the independent intake organization. The well-being of children with autism and their families is at the centre of everything we do at the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, and the children with special needs, so we're creating these programs.

There is no room for discrimination of children with autism.

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. Mike Schreiner: My question is for the Premier. This week, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released a chilling report stressing that there must be rapid, deep and immediate cuts to climate pollution. It's now or never for climate action. Yet, the same week, the government introduced legislation to support fossil fuel consumption and accelerated their scheme to build the Bradford Bypass Holland Marsh highway. It's clear the Premier's big sprawl, expensive agenda clearly trumps climate action and adaptation.

We need to protect water, farmland and wetlands. Our lives and livelihoods depend on it. That's why I've put forward a bluebelt plan to double the size of the greenbelt.

Will the Premier say yes to clean water and local food and yes to our plan to double the size of the greenbelt?

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

Hon. David Piccini: I thank the member opposite for that question. Speaker, what you really heard in that question was fundamentally no to any growth in the province of Ontario.

This Premier has said yes to record investments into transit. We're seeing tangible reductions in the largest source of GHGs being transportation. As we transition to electric vehicles—the only province, and first province, to launch clean transportation fuels. As we work with industry, we've seen a phase-out of coal from some of the largest industry emitters, working with the steel sector for a six megatonne reduction.

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We've launched the largest wetlands restoration program in Ontario's history. In fact, I was just at the Winkworth property in my riding to see a project that started in the 1980s continuing to grow.

We understand that we have to plan for growth in the province of Ontario. That means the dignity of a new Canadian, a house over their head, as it was for my grandfather when he emigrated from Italy.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, what you just heard in that answer is that the government is saying yes to expensive, big sprawl. I don't understand what the government has against local food and farmers. I don't understand why the government refuses to protect Ontarians from flooding. I don't know why they want to continue to build these super-sprawl, super-pollution highways that we simply can't afford. Why does the government want to force people into expensive, long commutes, spending time away from their family and friends, when instead we can build connected, livable, affordable homes in places near where we work?

Will the government take this opportunity to say yes to farmers, yes to local food, yes to protecting us from flooding and yes to doubling the greenbelt?

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, what you really heard—it's so disappointing from that member opposite—is no. He said no to any future road or highway growth. We've

said yes. The member opposite wants us to listen to the science. The science and the environmental assessment said that gridlock is paralyzing the growth of this province and future generations.

That member wants a farmer in rural Ontario to bike. That member is against the historic EV investments this province has made, the leadership of this minister. Perhaps it's because he's against the critical mineral strategy, because he would rather see China succeed—the Communist Party of China—and he wouldn't like to see investments in the north, Marten Falls and Webequie, led by Indigenous; historic investments into EV; historic investments in the lowest carbon major transit project with the Ontario Line. We're going to keep doing that, working with—

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

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Premier. Recently, the city of Hamilton made a decision not to expand their urban boundaries and to try and focus their housing strategy within their boundaries. The government, both the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the member of Flamborough–Glanbrook, described that as anti-growth and anti-housing ideology.

The question is, how can trying to protect Ontario's most precious resource, the best farmland in North America—and, because it's got the best climate conditions, a gift that we should do everything we can to protect. How can protecting that be anti-growth and anti-housing ideology?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Steve Clark: Thanks for the question. Ontario is in the middle of a severe housing supply shortage, driven by high demand. We've tabled a number of solutions, and we're providing real opportunities to get shovels in the ground faster. Again, New Democrats couch their words one way, but when it comes to supporting our More Homes for Everyone plan, it's very simple: New Democrats are always going to vote against increasing housing supply. New Democrats are always going to vote against protecting tenants. They're always going to vote against strengthening community housing. They've continually voted against and spoken against our call to get more money out of the federal government so we can build more community housing.

The choice is going to be very clear: Do you want a party that says yes to housing opportunities or do you want a party that says no?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): That concludes question period for today.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member from Ottawa South has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the government House leader

concerning Bill 88. This matter will be debated today following private members' public business.

SCOTTISH HERITAGE DAY

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize a point of order from the minister of sport, culture and tourism.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Also heritage, Speaker, and that's why I'm here today. I want to invite all members—so I stop getting text messages—if you are wearing a tartan or any type of plaid or you'd love to be Scottish just today, please join us on the gallery over here and we will get a picture taken. We're really excited to celebrate Jim McDonnell and his wonderful piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Not really a point of order, but we will all cherish the culture and sport opportunity today.

MARY FRASER

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member for Ottawa South on a point of order.

Mr. John Fraser: Point of order, Mr. Speaker, and this is not about pixie dust, so we can all stay calm. I'd like to wish my mother, Mary Fraser, a happy birthday. She turns 90 today.

Applause.

Mr. John Fraser: Yes. She's a pretty amazing woman. And when I asked her this morning, "How does it feel to be 90?" because I was with her this morning and came back here, and she says, "It's hardly believable," with a straight face. But it is believable, Mom. We love you. Happy birthday. I'll see you tomorrow.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): It is not a point of order, but we all wish Mom a happy birthday.

BILL MURDOCH

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): If the House would just indulge me, as it is Scottish Heritage Day—I would normally do this from my seat, but obviously, I can't do that today. Former MPP Bill Murdoch introduced the Scottish Tartan Day, and today I would like to acknowledge him and his efforts. And also, he is suffering from some pretty challenging health, so I would ask the House to send their prayers and wishes to him and his family as he struggles through his challenge.

This House stands recessed until 1 p.m. today.

The House recessed from 1136 to 1300.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: I beg leave to present the 20th interim report of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Ms. Skelly presents the committee's report. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Ms. Donna Skelly: As a member of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight, I am pleased to table the committee's 20th interim report.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the membership of the committee for their work: Darryl Kramp, Chair; Tom Rakocevic, Vice-Chair; Bob Bailey; Gilles Bisson; John Fraser; Christine Hogarth; Robin Martin; Sam Oosterhoff; Sara Singh; and Effie Triantafilopoulos, as well as substitute members Doly Begum, Michael Mantha and Dave Smith.

The committee extends its appreciation to the Solicitor General for appearing before the committee. The committee also acknowledges the assistance provided during the hearings and report-writing deliberations by the Clerk of the Committee and the staff in legislative research.

Report presented.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

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

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

Bill Pr59, An Act to revive 201827 Ontario Ltd.

Bill Pr65, An Act respecting the Ross Memorial Hospital.

Pr71, An Act to revive Eleanor Fulcher Ltd.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on General Government and move its adoption.

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

Bill 93, An Act to amend the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021 and the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, 2012.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

PETITIONS

BAIT MANAGEMENT

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: I have a petition entitled "Fix the Baitfish Zoning Boundaries in Northwestern and Northeastern Regions."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the bait management zones in certain towns make it impossible for anglers to purchase live bait in their respective zone and go fishing in the area because of the set boundaries;

"Whereas 95% of all stocked lakes near Hearst are situated west, and no legal option to purchase live bait and go fishing on those nice, stocked lakes;

"Whereas all the time and money spent throughout the years by government trying to stock those lakes and keep a healthy trout population for fishing enthusiasts to enjoy;

"Whereas the owners of outfitters in the region can no longer purchase their baitfish in the area with the new zoning and no other options exist by road to purchase baitfish in their zone close to their lodge;

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

"—to allow an exemption or exemption options for the north, especially for towns like Chapleau, Wawa and Hearst, where two zones are separated based on the railway lines or roads;

"—to call on the Ford government and the Minister of Natural Resources to re-evaluate this new zoning regulation to make logistics possible for all anglers to purchase live baitfish and to enjoy this sport that represents our lifestyle in northern Ontario."

I fully support this petition. I will sign it and I will send it with the Brianna to bring to the Clerks' table.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I have a petition from the Greenbelt West Coalition calling for an expansion of the greenbelt.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the environment provides habitat and underlies our ability to live on this land through providing food and water for all rural and urban inhabitants; and

"Whereas groundwater and drinking water in particular are threatened by the Places to Grow Act, which projects that one third more residents will be moving to this area of the province by 2041; and

"Whereas Indigenous peoples have treaty rights and inherent rights that must be honoured now and into the future; and

"Whereas Ontario's farmland is one of its most precious and valuable assets, providing livelihoods and food for the people near and far, yet development pressures and streamlined building processes are threatening southwestern Ontario's farmland now more than ever; and

"Whereas Ontario is losing 175 acres of farmland every day to development; and

“Whereas over 900 people have signed an online petition organized by the Greenbelt West Coalition stating the above;

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

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately expand the greenbelt to include protecting 532,000 acres of diverse land and 6,000 kilometres of waterways and shoreline, including the Grand River Watershed and the Paris-Galt moraine.”

I support this petition, will sign it and ask page Rhythm to bring it to the table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WORKING FOR WORKERS ACT, 2022

LOI DE 2022 VISANT À OEUVRER POUR LES TRAVAILLEURS

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 6, 2022, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

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

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): When we recessed the debate this morning, the member from Mississauga Centre had time on the clock. I return to the member from Mississauga Centre to resume the debate.

M^{me} Natalia Kusendova: Je suis ravie de continuer le débat au sujet du projet de loi 88, Loi de 2022 visant à oeuvrer pour les travailleurs.

Maintenant il est important de parler de la logistique de concrétisation de cette disposition, dans une approche qui s'engage à travailler avec les entreprises et les employés pour s'assurer qu'elle est le mieux à même d'atteindre son objectif de sauver des vies. Bien que j'aie mentionné précédemment qu'il existe certains types de milieux d'affaires où le risque de surdose d'opioïdes est plus élevé, nous assurerons la réactivité de cette législation en travaillant avec tout employeur qui croit qu'il existe un risque de surdose sur ses lieux de travail. Cela garantit que l'approvisionnement de ces kits essentiels ira là où ils sont le plus nécessaires et auront le plus d'impact, grâce à un dialogue avec les employeurs de tout l'Ontario.

Notre gouvernement exigera que le personnel d'une entreprise identifiée comme un milieu à risque de surdose reçoive une formation appropriée sur l'utilisation efficace et sécuritaire d'une trousse de naloxone. Ces entreprises devront s'assurer que le personnel travaillant sur place a non seulement la formation nécessaire pour administrer une trousse de naloxone, mais aussi qu'il ou elle est en mesure de reconnaître les signes d'une surdose d'opioïdes.

1310

Le ministère du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences évalue les moyens de

soutenir les entreprises qui doivent disposer d'une trousse de naloxone au moyen de subventions qui assureront l'approvisionnement approprié en trousse et la formation des employés.

En ce qui concerne la logistique des trousse elles-mêmes, le ministère s'efforce, au moment où nous parlons, de s'assurer que des quantités suffisantes de naloxone sont prêtes et accessibles pour les lieux de travail qui en auront besoin. Cette disposition n'entrera en vigueur que lorsque le processus d'approvisionnement sera terminé et prêt.

Je tiens aussi à remercier le ministre associé délégué à la Santé mentale et à la Lutte contre les dépendances, ainsi que tous nos intervenants et partenaires de la communauté, pour leur travail acharné visant à faire de cette disposition une réalité pour les communautés de l'Ontario.

Monsieur le Président, l'exigence de naloxone dans les milieux de travail à haut risque, ainsi que le reste des dispositions incluses aux côtés des règlements existants qui protègent la santé et la sécurité des travailleurs de l'Ontario, seront étayées par le renforcement des amendes en vertu de la Loi sur la santé et la sécurité au travail pour les employeurs qui choisissent de violer leurs responsabilités légales.

Notre gouvernement a été clair : risquer de se blesser ou de mourir ne devrait jamais être le prix à payer pour faire des affaires.

Alors que la plupart des entreprises en Ontario font tout leur possible pour assurer la santé et la sécurité de leurs travailleurs, certaines choisissent de percevoir des amendes pour leurs pratiques commerciales inappropriées et de les traiter comme une autre dépense. Avec ce projet de loi, nous mettrons fin à cela en introduisant les amendes les plus élevées au Canada pour les entreprises qui ne respectent pas les lois sur la santé et la sécurité au travail. Comme je l'ai dit, cela inclurait les entreprises qui ne parviennent pas à protéger leurs employés contre une surdose d'opioïdes sur place en ne disposant pas d'une trousse de naloxone prête et accessible à l'utilisation.

La nouvelle amende maximale pour les dirigeants et les administrateurs des entreprises qui ne fournissent pas un environnement de travail sûr entraînant des blessures graves ou la mort d'un travailleur au travail est désormais de 1,5 million de dollars en vertu de la Loi sur la santé et la sécurité au travail, la LSST, en cas de condamnation, avec une amende maximale de 500 000 \$ pour tous les autres individus coupables.

D'autres changements en vertu de cette loi—I'm talking about the Occupational Health and Safety Act—comprendront:

—l'ajout d'une liste de circonstances qui seront considérées comme des circonstances aggravantes par les tribunaux aux fins de la détermination d'une sanction en vertu de la LSST;

—l'ajout d'un nouveau pouvoir en vertu de la loi, permettant aux tribunaux d'imposer une ordonnance, conformément au règlement, lors de la condamnation d'un défendeur, en plus de toute amende ou peine d'emprisonnement imposée; et

—de porter le délai de prescription pour engager des poursuites d'un an à deux ans.

Grâce à ces ajouts, nous veillerons à ce que la santé et la sécurité des travailleurs de l'Ontario soient fortement protégées et priorisées par leur employeur, quel que soit le secteur ou l'industrie dont ils font partie, dans le but de faire de l'Ontario le meilleur endroit où travailler et gagner sa vie, non seulement au Canada, mais dans le monde entier.

Speaker, the Working for Workers Act represents a continuation of our government's commitment to making Ontario one of the best places to work and raise a family in the world. We know that our economic strength is a product of having world-class employers and workers, and we know what great things can be achieved when they work hand in hand. Our government will always be there to support Ontario workers to ensure that they can work and make a living in the safest environment possible.

I also want to address the stigma around the use of opioids. We know that oftentimes workers who are injured on the job or elsewhere rely on opioid treatments like OxyContin, hydrocodone or even Tylenol 3 for pain relief and to be able to resume their activities of daily living. This treatment can also be prescribed to any individual or patient suffering following surgery, dental work, a post-traumatic injury like a motor vehicle accident or even a simple slip and fall. Opioid treatment can be used in the management of acute perioperative pain and other painful conditions in the emergency room, with the focus being mostly on acute and short-term treatment. Using opioid treatment for chronic or long-term relief may cause side effects, including addiction and constantly having to increase the dosing to achieve adequate levels of pain relief.

In my time working as a nurse, I have seen this many times. Whether they were opioid-naïve patients—meaning patients who are just starting their treatment and have, therefore, low tolerance—or opioid-tolerant patients, anyone can be at risk of developing an addiction or a condition called opioid use disorder. Opioid use disorder can involve misuse of prescribed opioid medications, or the use of diverted opioid mechanisms, or the use of illicitly obtained opioids.

Speaker, I'm stating this all to make a point. The point is that anyone can become dependent on opioids. What often starts as a legitimate medical treatment can turn into a long-term and devastating addiction. This addiction does not discriminate. It can happen to CEOs, managers, people from all walks of life and all creeds—and yes, it can happen to workers, too. That is why it is so important that as many places of work and places of business as possible have access to life-saving Naloxone.

Our government will also always be there for our job creators, ensuring that they have a business environment conducive to investment and prosperity, because our economy is a cycle, and when our businesses thrive, we all thrive.

With this legislation, we are ensuring a bright, prosperous and strong future for the province that we love by addressing the challenges that we currently face, while building on all that we have achieved so far.

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to the member from Mississauga Centre for that presentation. I have to congratulate her: I thought it was really positive, her doing some shifts, returning to work as a nurse during the pandemic.

As a health care professional, I'm sure the member realizes that home care professionals and nurses as well work as gig workers. I'm wondering why the government didn't take this opportunity to address such an important part of our health care system and the gig workers in our health care system, knowing that it's such an important part of the solution.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Thank you so much for that question. I can say I'm proud of the work that we are doing for gig workers, but also specifically in the home care sector. We have recently announced another piece of legislation that will make the raise for PSWs a permanent one. Whether it's \$2 or \$3 per hour, depending on which sector they work in, PSWs will now have this raise as a permanent raise. This includes, of course, our PSWs working in home care. That is a big change, and I'm very proud that our government is really ushering in this change in Ontario.

Also, with this particular legislation that we are bringing forward, we are introducing foundational rights for our digital platform workers. We're actually leading the country. No other province has done this so far. This will ensure that foundational rights are given to those gig workers that we are talking about today in this bill.

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

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I also want to say thank you to the member from Mississauga Centre for always being an advocate for people suffering or being victimized by opioids.

I just want to check with what you are asking the workplace: What are the workplaces that should be required to have this kit ready for opioid victims?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: I think that is an excellent question. I know that we are still conducting consultations, and some of this bill will also be—we will prescribe more in regulation. I know that about 30% of people who are involved in workplace-related overdose ingestions—it happened in the construction industry, so that's why the first round of this rollout is in the construction industry.

Frankly, any business in Ontario should have access to a naloxone kit. We also have a pharmacy naloxone program where any Ontarian can go in and request a naloxone kit free of charge. I have one in my office. I suggest to all members to have one in their office. It's completely free of charge, and I think that once we start becoming more familiar with using naloxone, we will be able to administer it and potentially save lives.

1320

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Mushkegowuk—James Bay.

M. Guy Bourgoïn: Je voudrais remercier ma collègue d'avoir parlé français. C'est tout le temps un plaisir

d'entendre parler en français en Chambre. Fait que, je veux vous remercier pour les bouts de français que vous avez mis dans votre discours.

Mais ma question est concernant les travailleurs de concert et aussi l'économie de partage. Dans votre projet de loi, ça ne leur donne pas droit à des règlements qu'on est habitué d'avoir comme travailleurs en Ontario. Ils ne sont pas assujettis à la loi du travail—comme la pension, comme les fêtes publiques, comme le CPP, et la liste est bien longue. Vous avez créé des travailleurs de deuxième puis de troisième classe.

Je vous demande pourquoi. Comme vous avez fait avec la section 5, enlevez la section 1, pour que nous, on puisse peut-être supporter votre projet de loi. Mais vous avez mis des travailleurs de deuxième classe, ce qui ne devrait pas être accepté en Ontario. Beaucoup de monde a témoigné en comité à ce sujet. Je voudrais entendre votre point là-dessus.

M^{me} Natalia Kusendova: Merci beaucoup pour la question. Merci pour ces mots, « économie de partage », en français. I will answer my question in English, just because I'm still learning some of the vocabulary in French.

What I did want to say: I was listening very intently as the Chair of the committee through which this bill went, and nothing can be more removed from the truth. We are absolutely not creating a second class of workers.

Interruption.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: The workers who are in this bill will have foundational rights that they currently have in no other provinces. They are still able to fall under the Employment Standards Act. No rights are being taken away. If they qualify for those rights, they are more than welcome—

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

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: —to ask for them.

Okay. I will answer more after. Sorry.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): If I could please remind all members: If you're going to be speaking in the House today at all, take your phone and put it on your chair, not on your desk, so it doesn't rattle the ears of the poor people in broadcasting.

I recognize the member from Niagara West.

M. Sam Oosterhoff: C'est un plaisir chaque fois d'écouter la membre de Mississauga-Centre. C'était très important pour la contribution à ce débat aujourd'hui, et je veux vous remercier pour votre travail sur ce sujet et aussi dans le secteur de la santé.

Mais ma question est simple : pourquoi est-ce que tu penses, quand tu considères que, le Parti libéral et le NPD, pour beaucoup d'années ils étaient en gouvernement, mais ils n'ont pas créé de droits pour les travailleurs digitaux, ils n'ont pas créé d'opportunités pour les travailleurs digitaux—et maintenant, quand nous proposons un bon changement pour le projet de loi, ils n'aiment pas ce changement. Pourquoi est-ce que tu penses que le NPD et les libéraux sont contre les travailleurs digitaux?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Thank you very much for that question. I think it's a very important one. I was

actually surprised that the NDP is not supporting this bill, because they are the party that claims to be for workers. They are not supporting this bill.

But the truth of the matter is that we are providing foundational rights for the very first time in Ontario, and these rights will include the general minimum wage. Workers will be able to keep the tips that they earn. They will also have rights to certain information as to how their pay is calculated.

One really important thing is that they will have the right to resolve their work-related disputes in Ontario. We've heard so many stories about workers having to travel from outside of Ontario—to other countries, even—to have their day in court, so this is a foundational change. We are ensuring that Ontario workers can go to court and dispute any challenges they have with their employers right here at home in Ontario.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I was listening to the minister when he made his initial comments yesterday, and he said, “Data now shows as many as one in five Canadians work in the gig economy—a number that is only predicted to increase. However,” the minister said, “these workers often face uncertain working conditions, including finding it difficult to predict paycheques or resolve workplace complaints.”

We in the NDP know what it's like to work with workers and help to resolve their difficulties, and we can't understand why this bill supposedly working for workers, helping workers, doesn't allow people in the gig economy making deliveries to be paid a minimum wage unless they are actually on a delivery, as opposed to all the time they put in on a shift. So can the member please tell the House: How can you stand up and say that you're working for workers when you're pitting them against the time clock?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Thank you for that question. The Working for Workers Act, if passed, ensures workers will be paid from start to finish of an order. This includes time spent on the way to an order, waiting at the restaurant and on the way to deliver.

But, furthermore, this bill will introduce portable benefits. We've been talking a lot about gig workers not having access to benefits, and this bill is actually changing that so, for the first time in Ontario, workers will have access to portable benefits. This will rebalance the scale and give workers the confidence they need to drive their careers forward, as Ontario will be expanding health and dental benefits to millions more workers, regardless of where they work. I think this is a positive change. I really encourage the members opposite to vote in favour of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Markham–Thornhill for a very short question.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to my colleague from Mississauga Centre for a wonderful presentation and also her passion for the health care system. Tell me quickly: Why is this government proposing to require

naloxone kits, and what types of workplaces will require them?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Thank you so much for that important question. As I said, an opioid misuse disorder doesn't discriminate; it can happen to anyone. It can, frankly, happen to any member sitting here. So I think it's so important that we do everything we possibly can to protect our workers, to protect the general public. This is another step forward that our government is doing to ensure the health and safety of workers as they work hard to fuel our economy.

The more we talk about naloxone, I think the more the public and all of us will be comfortable with actually using the naloxone kits and potentially saving lives. I also commend the minister for requiring training as part of this bill, because it's really, really important that workers actually know how to administer naloxone and feel comfortable with doing it.

This is a positive step forward. It will save lives in Ontario.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Much has been said about this bill. There are many good things included, as we've said. There are also poison pills.

There's that one section that just has to go—it just has to go. It's unfair, and it does nothing to help working people in Ontario. Those are the people working in the gig economy for huge conglomerates such as SkipTheDishes, Uber, Lyft or whatever else. The bill says that they are eligible for a basic minimum wage, which sounds good. It really sounds good. But they only get that while they're on a delivery—on a call, involved with an actual delivery. What about the time that they're on the job, waiting for an assignment? When you go to work and you're waiting for the phone to ring to send you somewhere, you should be paid for that. You're on the job.

To prove my point—Speaker, look, in this House, the basic pay for all members is \$116,000, as you know. I understand cabinet ministers get something like \$165,000, and the Premier gets more than \$200,000 a year. So if fair is fair and if we want to stand up for workers and treat all workers equally, then I say, what if members, cabinet ministers or the Premier actually only got paid for the actual time they stand and speak in the Legislature? It's like a gig worker being on the job. But the government says that you're only going to be paid when you're actually doing something.

So, in the House, we are seen to be here and seen to be working by our constituents when we rise in our chairs, recognized by the Speaker, and we have something to say. Cabinet ministers, for example, Speaker—during question period we'll pose some questions to them; that's one of the few opportunities they have, otherwise, for the most part, unless they're introducing legislation, they rarely speak. Look at it this way, I guess: If we only heard from people during question period, and that's the only time they got paid, what about that minimum wage? What about the minimum wage for the people actually on a delivery in the

gig economy—fair treatment, everybody being treated the same?

1330

Cabinet ministers may get a question. Out of four days a week, they may get one or two, except for the health minister, of course, who's up pretty well every day, and the Premier—Ontario's hard-working Premier. Speaker, we all know how many days he shows up for question period. We all know how long he stays here. We all know the number of questions that are put to him, and we all know—you can read it in Hansard—how many times he answers a question that's put to him during question period.

My point is, if a gig economy worker is only going to be paid for the time they're actually performing their job, what if the Premier of Ontario was only paid for the time he was actually in his chair, recognized by the Speaker, stood up and answered a question? Where would the minimum wage be for the Premier of Ontario—somebody who earns, I don't know, \$208,000 a year or something. If he was paid for his performance in the Legislature, based on the number of words spoken, what would that work out to, do you think, Speaker? I haven't done the math; don't get me wrong. That's not where I'm headed.

I'm just suggesting that for a government to bring in legislation that says to a gig economy worker, "You're putting in an eight-hour or a 12-hour shift today, but we're only going to pay you if your phone rings and you go to the store and you pick up a delivery and you deliver it, and then you're off the clock until your phone rings again"—so if we say to the Premier, "Buddy, come on in. We'll throw out some questions, but if you decide not to answer, you're not going to get paid"—I mean, fair is fair. We have to treat people for the value of the work they bring to the table.

These gig workers—some of them don't have a vehicle; they do it on a bicycle. They're out in the rain, they're out after dark, they're out in the snow, and we're saying to them, "We're only going pay you the minimum wage under this government legislation if you're actually on a call, in service, making a delivery."

Speaker, as you know, I used to work at the CBC and was actively involved with my union, the Canadian Media Guild. I was on several national bargaining committees, several national grievance committees, standing up for workers. I've been on the picket lines. I know the value of a union. I know the value of work. For those who don't have a good unionized job, I know the value of the minimum wage, and I question why this bill purports to have the best interests of the workers in mind and it actually does the opposite.

Like I say, there's a lot of good things in the bill. We heard the member from Mississauga Centre talk about opioid addiction and naloxone kits—all very good. But if the bill is passed the way it is written, it will only pay drivers a minimum wage for the time they're actually on a call, not for the time they're parked, not for the time they're waiting for another call, or cruising the neighbourhood if you're offering Uber rides, waiting for someone to flag you down. And this is a bill that claims to be working for workers.

We've heard it so many times during these debates at various stages of the bill. You've heard it yourself, Speaker: A cashier in a grocery store, at a terminal, would only be paid if there's a customer in line, putting her groceries up, waiting for you to ring them up. Where's the sense in that? There's no sense in that at all. I guess one word I could use is nonsensical—no sense, nonsensical—and yet, despite being told time and time again, we heard nothing from our friends across the aisle about correcting this injustice.

It's an injustice, I say to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook. It's an injustice. You purport to stand up for the working people, I say to my friend from Niagara West. Stand up for working people. You hear the arguments in the House and surely you're saying, "Okay, maybe we slipped up on this one. How do we correct it?" We're saying take all the time you need, but correct it. It's something that does need a correction.

If you're going to protect workers, if you're going to stand up for workers, working with workers to make a better workplace, this bill can be improved. We should correct any flaws that are identified. Speaker after speaker has identified flaws in this bill. It's a tough world out there. It's a hard-knock world out there. I couldn't believe how much I had to pay to fill up my car just the other day. It used to be 40, 50 bucks. It was more than \$80 to fill up my Windsor-built Grand Caravan—and that's a car that gets good mileage.

Friends tell me about their increases in rent and their insurance payments. Insurance companies made a lot of extra money during the pandemic, with fewer vehicles on the road, and yet the insurance companies still had the audacity to raise their rates when they had fewer cars on the road. Many of us had them parked in the driveway or by the side of the house.

It a hard-knock life, my friends, and for a government that claims to be doing everything it can to lower costs—and there are examples and examples, and we'll hear more about them later today—the cost of doing business in Ontario keeps going up.

Just in a quick aside, after I grabbed lunch downstairs with a couple of my friends across the way, I checked my emails when I got back up to my office. My buddy Ken Marshall is a proud member of my Legion in Windsor-Riverside, Branch 255. He dropped me a line. He had a question for me, to which I had no answer, but he wanted me to do what I could to track something down for him. I say to the members opposite: When you have a chance to stand this afternoon, perhaps you can answer this question for my buddy Ken Marshall back in Windsor.

Ken says, "I do have a question for you about a rumour I heard"—a rumour—"regarding the dropping of the licence plate fee and refund which I already got." Ken says that he's got his money back, and he's very proud of that. "The rumour is"—it's a rumour, Speaker—"they will be replacing that with a mandatory safety inspection every two years at a cost of \$300. If that is true," Ken writes—I'll send his letter over if you want it—"shouldn't the

public be aware of it before the election?" He goes on to say, "They get rid of one thing and add another."

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Not true.

Ms. Donna Skelly: It's a rumour.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I hear the members opposite saying that it's not true, that it's a rumour, and I respect that. I was obligated on behalf of my friend to put the question out there. Hopefully, one of you at some point will stand in Hansard this afternoon and I'll give it to Ken on Friday when I get back in my riding. If you want to contact him directly, here's his email. Just say so and I'll send it over with a page.

Would you like it, Sam, member for Niagara West? Is there a page in the House? Could you take this over to the member from Niagara West? Thank you very much.

The cost of living just keeps going up. The cost of hydro goes up. It started with the former Conservative government that wanted to sell off a public asset to the private sector, just like they sold a public highway to the private sector. I'm not saying that they're not doing a few good things on a minor scale, Speaker, but last weekend, I've got to tell you, I deposited my cheque from the licence plate refund for \$470. They only had one tag down, but I must have paid for my other vehicle as well—my pre-election goody from the President of the Treasury Board, my rebate for the licence tags on my Windsor-built Grand Caravan. I actually joke with my wife, with my tongue firmly planted in my left cheek, that I may even consider voting for the President of the Treasury Board for sending me that cheque. But alas, Speaker, I live in Windsor–Tecumseh and not in Pickering–Uxbridge, so I'll be unable to do that.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: No, no. The cheque came from the President of the Treasury Board. You should look at your cheque, sir.

I was not fooled by that \$470 gift in the mail. I wasn't even remotely tempted, beyond poking fun at my friend the President of the Treasury Board to consider changing my upcoming vote. I saw it for what it is. For the \$1 billion the government is giving away instead of using that money to help pay for better health care, for better mental health care, for better education, for pay raises to the health care heroes who were slapped with a 1% pay increase—hundreds of better ideas, hundreds of ideas out there, but for some reason, I'm getting my money back for the stickers on my vehicles.

1340

Speaking of better health care, Speaker, I have a friend. We went to the University of Windsor together back in the mid-1970s. Peter Hrastovec is his name. He's a prominent lawyer in Windsor, but he's also a poet, with a new book out. One of his poems is called "Waiting for the Cardiologist to Call." Peter writes:

Pacing is unnecessary. It cannot be helped, nor can the second cup of coffee.

The two-hour range for a consultation is "normal" they say.

Who are “they”, who decides what is “normal?”

Is it by committee, by decree, a body of people, numbering three or seven, a star-chamber for the new age, rulings conceived in a large conference room, the table circular constructed of the finest teak wood, varnished and polished to mind-numbing perfection?

I imagine an agenda including words redefined: “pandemic”, “lockdown”, “covidiot”, “new normal”.

The decision-markers decked in the greyest of gabardine, androgynous dress for uncharacteristic times.

They focus, debate, and reach a consensus.

They may flip a coin or play “odds and evens,”

With bejewelled and well-manicured hands.

They will disagree on many things, including meal choices as they break for lunch.

Their choices will be the fodder for online rants and public scrutiny, their definitions found on t-shirts available through social media.

Histories will be written on process, speculation fed on Twitter, rehashing highlights on nightly news, reconsideration and revisioning by late night comics.

All of this before I get my call while I wait, wondering without opportunity to share my opinion with no one, telephone in hand, the on-hold music incidental, tiny, distant.

That’s from Peter Hrastovec’s *There Will Be Fish*, his new book of poetry. It was called *Waiting for the Cardiologist to Call*.

I have a letter I received in my office yesterday. It’s from the Western Ontario Wardens’ Caucus and it sets the caucus’s priorities for 2022. We’re talking about working for workers and improving the lives of working people. Well, the wardens’ caucus has their priorities, and they identify the priorities as:

“—affordable and attainable housing in rural areas;

“—workforce development through the implementation of the Western Ontario Workforce Strategy;

“—continued broadband infrastructure and investment and advocacy;

“—mental health and addictions.”

I know this bill is mostly about the gig economy, but we heard from the member from Mississauga Centre, with her great speech on addictions and the opioid crisis and so on.

“The caucus will continue advocating for long-term care and seniors funding as well as ensuring that municipalities are included in the Ontario health teams governance” model.

“The western Ontario region requires,” by the way, “173,000 new housing units by 2041.”

Under “Workforce development ... there will be an estimated 24,000 jobs to be filled across the region between 2020 and 2030....

“Broadband infrastructure investment and advocacy”: The wardens “recognize that broadband has become an essential service and that universal access to high-speed Internet plays a fundamental role in securing the future

prosperity of small urban and rural communities in southwestern Ontario. Residents in our underserved communities are at an economic and social disadvantage when compared to their urban counterparts.

“The Western Ontario Wardens’ Caucus is committed to improving to high-speed Internet services across northwestern Ontario....

“Mental health and addictions: Our region is facing ever-growing numbers of opioid overdoses and the strains of mental health and addictions on our rural communities,” as we heard from the member from Mississauga Centre just a few moments ago.

“The Western Ontario Wardens’ Caucus” for your sake, for those who may not be aware, “is a not-for-profit organization representing 15 upper- and single-tier municipalities” in southwestern Ontario, representing more than one and a half million residents.

I was reading a story in the *Toronto Star* back on the 22nd of March trying to clear up some of the confusion around the gig workers—I want to say an article written by labour lawyer Ruben Goulart. He writes: Bill 88, with its Digital Platform Workers’ Rights Act, is “a step forward for gig workers in Ontario. But does it do enough” to clarify “the relationship between app-based workers and their digital platforms? And does” it protect “digital platforms who want to go further than the bill by, for example, offering benefits to these workers?”

Mr. Goulart says, “No, on both counts.” But he writes that we, in this House, can fix these shortcomings—we in this House.

He says Uber’s new, innovative relationship with UFCW Canada offers a guide. Those entities are “advocating for laws requiring platforms to extend benefits to drivers and delivery people.”

He says that Ontario’s Minister of Labour says “Uber and other” platforms “can bring these benefits on their own to” gig workers. However, voluntarily offering benefits “could become the very grounds used to reclassify the workers as employees, and not independent contractors. Accordingly, most digital platforms ... stay away from ... offering benefits for fear that this could” impact their relationship with workers, unless the right laws are in place.

Canada’s Supreme Court has a test for whether a worker is an employee or an independent contractor, which analyzes “the degree of control over the worker; who provides the tools the worker uses; and how entrepreneurial the worker is (i.e. how much the worker is responsible for their profit and expenses). These factors help” determine “is the worker working for themselves, or for someone else?”

“Benefits are traditionally the domain of true employers. For instance, homeowners don’t offer pensions to their plumbers. Consequently, a platform’s creation of a” worker benefit fund “would be used as evidence that the worker’s business is actually the platform’s business, and that the worker is actually its employee.”

Bill 88, according to this labour lawyer, Mr. Goulart, guarantees an ongoing minimum wage for app-based

workers, but “this reduces the worker’s entrepreneurship, as the platform is ensuring their earnings. If platforms simply offered a minimum wage on their own, this increases the risk that the worker suddenly becomes an employee.” So there are a lot of Catch-22s in there, Speaker.

I wish I had more time this afternoon. Unfortunately, I am out of time, but I will be most pleased to answer any questions that are put to me.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: I do want to respond to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh and thank him for his statement and his presentation today.

I want to touch on a couple of things. I hope he’s not making the statement to the general public out there that the only work anyone in here ever does is the time—that’s why I’m getting up, so as I can earn my pay here, get a few words in; because if the only time we actually work at something that’s worthwhile is when we’re up speaking in this House—when he knows full well that that is anything but the case.

I do want to respond to his question from Ken. That’s the way rumours get started, to the member. Ken, no, there are not going to be safety checks or inspections on vehicles as a result of this rebate, when we’re trying to save people money. It would be as redundant as when—we got rid of Drive Clean because there were no cars failing. We don’t have enough mechanics to be doing safety checks every two years. It’s not going to happen.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I appreciate the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for putting that on the table so that my friend back in Windsor will know—and I will make sure that he is aware—that that is not going to happen, that rumour.

Speaker, as you know, it’s not just the time you’re in the House and speaking; it could be the time you spend heckling. The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke would not have a fear about making his minimum wage because of the excellent heckles that he sometimes offers across the floor, especially when he was on this side of the aisle and heckling the Liberal government on the other side, as they worked hand in glove, the Conservatives and the Liberals, for 15 years—15 years, and he was the most outspoken of them all.

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to my good friend from Windsor–Tecumseh.

There was a real pattern with this government over the term in the way that they consult. We saw it recently with a housing bill where they had a task force, didn’t involve municipalities and blaming municipalities for the housing crisis after the task force. Here we have a task force on gig workers that involved absolutely no representation from workers, and I would ask my friend why the government would hold a task force and consult on a bill about workers and not involve workers on the task force?

1350

Mr. Percy Hatfield: What a great question, Speaker. I’m so glad it’s on the table. The simple answer is, you

don’t need to talk to the workers when you’re in the pocket with their bosses, the owners, the billionaires who own the multi-conglomerates who come to Ontario and say, “Oh, we’re going to register as lobbyists just before this bill gets introduced so we can have our say. Oh, would you like some money for your next campaign?”

Look, the workers are the people that should have been consulted. This bill is about the workers. It’s about the people who will not be paid unless they’re on a delivery, unless they’re actually under the terms of an order that’s sent to them from a dispatcher. All that other time they’re out there—they’re going to work 12 hours, they’re going to put in 12 hours in the rain, sleet and snow, they’re going to on a bicycle or in a car—they won’t be paid unless they’re actually working on an order, and that comes from on high, from the owners right to the government’s ear, Speaker.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much, Speaker. I’d like to ask the member why he thinks the government failed to include gig workers in any workplace health and safety protections?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Here’s the softball—boom. Speaker, they didn’t consult with the workers because they don’t want the workers to have a say. They don’t want to protect workers. They don’t want to be seen as working with workers because they are so beholden to the people who give those workers an opportunity to work their butts off for nothing, to go out on a 12-hour shift and only be paid for the time they are actually dispatched, actually picking up an order, actually bringing it to your apartment door, Speaker.

The workers are the ones who should have had a say. Their unions, their organizations gave input, and crickets. The government didn’t want to hear from the workers, and yet they put a title on the bill “working for workers.” What a lot of balderdash, Speaker.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I’d like to note that the member opposite does know a great deal about balderdash, I’m assuming, having worked for the CBC for many years. I just want to thank the member for contributing this afternoon to the debate on this legislation.

I recognize, of course, that the member is representing his home community and bringing forward their concerns, but obviously workers’ rights are very important to all members of this House and we recognize the importance of ensuring that every worker in the province of Ontario has a decent wage, and that’s really what we’re trying to do with this legislation. But the member opposite seemed very upset that our government didn’t do more on this file. I respect the fact that he’s brought forward these issues, but my question is very simple: If he cared so much about this, why didn’t they bring forward legislation when they worked with the Liberal government to keep them in power government for 15 years?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: You should apologize to the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook, who worked in

journalism for so many years, and I know she never worked at the CBC, but she has great respect for the journalism offered by the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. I know you do. I know you did, perhaps until today, but thank you for the opportunity on the question.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Tell us about your time in the valley.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Order.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke does remind me that I did work in the Ottawa Valley at what was then CHOV radio and television. I used to interview his father, actually, back in the day, Speaker, when his father was a member in this House and highly respected, highly regarded back in our home community.

I thank the member from Niagara West for the question, whatever it was.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay.

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: This bill is anti-worker, anti-labour. The reason we're seeing this bill is probably because unions were starting to be winning these decisions on behalf of the workers to certify the workers. I'd like to hear your end, because you talked about your labour background and all this, but I think this bill reflects that calling them independent employees or independent operators makes it so that they cannot be certified. So I'd like to have your input on the bill regarding this point of view.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you to my friend from Mushkegowuk–James Bay for that question. I was watching, I think it was, CBS Sunday Morning last weekend and there here was a story, I believe out of New York City, where for the first time ever an Amazon warehouse has been unionized—I think by the Teamsters; I'm not 100% on that. But as we know, in unionizing drives, if one warehouse gets unionized, pretty soon it's going to be the domino effect across America. It will come to Canada.

I believe we all could benefit from a unionized workforce for some of the largest, most profitable companies in the world. They should be sharing some of what they take home, what the owner takes home, with his or her employees or the board's employees, because it's the employees who make the company. It's the employees who make and deliver the product that brings the profits to the owners.

So I expect more unionization in the future. I expect we cannot go on forever bullying and picking on the lowest-paid people in society, the gig economy. They need a better life. There's more and more of them coming, and they deserve better than what we've been offering so far.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member for Ottawa South for a very short question.

Mr. John Fraser: Why do you think they call it the Working for Workers Act if it doesn't work for workers?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Welcome to the young people who have joined us this afternoon. I hope you'll pick up something during this debate that enlightens you.

We're saying to the government, you can put a title on a bill that says "working for workers," but if you don't

protect the workers, if you don't stand up for the workers, if you don't make sure they go home after a job safely and are paid properly for the work they've done—if they put in 12 hours, they should be paid for 12 hours, not just for the little bits where they might have got a dispatch to go to a restaurant and bring some food to your home.

So enjoy your time in the chamber this afternoon. My time is up, but I wanted to thank you for coming.

Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity this afternoon.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Before we proceed, I'll just remind all members to please put all comments through the Chair, not heckling from side to side, particularly when we have guests in the House.

Further debate?

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to welcome our guests who are here today to watch our debate. I want to say to the government that I am not going to mention "pixie dust" in my remarks. However, I will refer to Peter Pan, because it's looking a lot like the land of the Lost Boys over there, and it's a bit of a lost cause.

Bill 88, the Working for Workers Act, doesn't actually work for workers. It doesn't work for gig workers. It doesn't actually provide them the same kinds of benefits and protections that Ontario workers have earned over the years. It doesn't give them the right to a paid vacation, a stat holiday. It doesn't actually include them in workplace health and safety protections. It doesn't actually guarantee a fair minimum wage. It's not in the bill.

My question to my colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh was short and sweet, but to the point: Why would the government call this bill the Working for Workers Act if it's not working for gig workers? It's because the government likes to say, "We're working for workers." It's easy to say. It's quick. It's a good sound bite, but it doesn't actually represent what's in the bill.

What was the first thing that happened with this bill? We sent it to committee after first reading. Why did we send it to committee? Because the government put in the Working for Workers Act the removal of the college of traditional Chinese medicine. They were going to take away a health college whose primary purpose was actually protecting patients.

Eventually, the government didn't do that because the community rose up and said, "You can't do that. That's not right. We wanted this college. We want it to protect patients. We want it to be a profession." So the government eventually did the right thing. They sent it to committee and they pulled out that part of the bill, but they still kept other parts of the bill, like not protecting gig workers with WSIB and not protecting gig workers with a right to termination pay or severance pay if you are terminated for no cause.

1400

No vacation pay. Now, with vacation pay, everybody thinks it's a week or two weeks or whatever you get; it's actually a percentage of your income. That's how it's calculated. That's how employers calculate it. That's how we've calculated it over the years. Statutory holidays—same way; employers can calculate that as a percentage.

So why don't these workers deserve the same kind of protections that Ontario workers have? I don't understand. But I think what it came down to and what the government failed to recognize is that there are almost a million—880,000—gig workers. For all of them, it's not a secondary income. For many of them, it's a primary income that they need to have to raise their family, to put food on the table, to pay the rent, to help their kids with school, to buy kids' clothes. They're not different from other Ontario workers. Yes, we've got a platform that has changed and is changing the nature of work, but they're still workers and they deserve protection. The government fell really short on that. They didn't put it in there. They looked at the 880,000 people working in the gig economy and said, "Well, that's a secondary income for them. That's by choice."

And when they talk about creating jobs and they talk about creating jobs in the gig economy, how come they don't treat those jobs the same way they treat other jobs in the economy? I don't understand. I hope, in the questions, that somebody on the other side will be able to explain that to me. I'm looking forward to it.

Here's another interesting thing about the bill: There are protections for electronic surveillance at work. I think that's a good thing. I think that workers should know if their employer is watching them in some way. I think we'd all agree that it's the right thing to do.

We had two people come before us. The first one was a research chair in this field, who said, "I think you need to define this. Define what it is. Because it's not defined in the bill, and here's a reasonable way of defining that." The second person who came, the Information and Privacy Commissioner, the one who reports to all of us here, said, "That is a very reasonable amendment. That is a thing we should be doing. We've got to define what we're talking about. What is electronic surveillance?" That's a reasonable, rational, thoughtful thing to do that will help people. The government voted it down. I can't figure out why. It doesn't make sense.

These are amendments that they came forward with, the Information and Privacy Commissioner and the research chair. It wasn't something generated by the opposition. It wasn't some political "gotcha." It was like: "This is what's going to help your bill help people."

So the Information and Privacy Commissioner said, "You know what? With these policies that you are now enforcing on businesses or asking businesses to have or requiring businesses to have, they should send it to me in 30 days so I can collect that data, so we can actually see what we're doing here. I can provide you with information to see if you're effectively doing the things you're trying to do."

What did the government do with that? They voted it down. Really? It's a reasonable and sensible thing to do, and I can't understand it being voted down. Maybe the government was in too much of a hurry to get it out of committee. I don't understand. They were in a hurry to get rid of the college of traditional Chinese medicine—the government is in a real rush.

Just to recap, the Working for Workers Act really fails to do things like give gig workers the protection of WSIB and health and safety. It doesn't give them things to access like vacation time, which all of us get, or the right to termination pay when you're terminated without cause, let go. That's something we've had for years in this province, and it was governments of all stripes that put this forward.

There's no right to a fair minimum wage. I don't understand it. The government didn't actually really talk about engaged time. They used the term, but what is engaged time? The way that it's being put forward, at least by those companies, is that engaged time is time when the worker is working but not when they're idle, waiting for a call. So there were some agreements—there was an agreement between a union and an employer that said, "Let's make it 120%, to be fair," because really, when you say "engaged time," it would be like me when I was managing grocery stores saying to a cashier who worked for me, "I'm only paying you if there's someone at your cash." That's what it's like saying.

These workers are not different from other workers. Sure, there are some of them where it's a supplementary income, but there are thousands and thousands and thousands of gig workers in this province who, because of the nature and change in work, are trying to raise a family, who are trying to pay the bills, who are trying to put food on the table. If the government really wants to help them, then what they need to do is to treat them like other workers in Ontario: Give them protections.

Speaker, you know, just saying that you're working for workers is not good enough. Maybe it will work as a sound bite that will make people believe that you're working for workers. They may not even know what's in the bill. It's so hard for people to know what we're actually doing here, what governments actually do. You know that. But repeating "We're working for workers" when you really aren't working for workers is not right for those people. It's not right that you're saying something that you're really not doing.

Sorry, this just came to me; I was just trying to conclude. One of the things the government was so proud of was that workers will be entitled to a pay stub. Wow. That's progressive.

Speaker, I really look forward to the questions, and I always look forward to afternoon debate. I will do my best not to utter the words "pixie dust" again for the rest of the day.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: Throughout the afternoon, in listening to earlier speakers, there seemed to be a pattern that people don't enter this particular profession by choice and that it isn't a valued profession. I would have to argue with you that many of these people who are gig workers actually enjoy the flexibility and the ability to make good money.

One Uber driver through the ride-share program I was speaking to on the way to work was telling me—I was asking him about this particular legislation and whether he

agreed with it, and he liked the idea of being able to work for more than one employer. So while you're suggesting that he's not being paid in idle time, he's working for three different companies, and they're telling him, "You've got a ride here. You've got a ride here. You've got a ride here." He said, "I make a lot more than what could ever be minimum wage."

My question to you is, do you value the opportunity for people to make their own decisions to enter a line of work that gives them flexibility and independence that you and members of the opposition seem to not really value?

Mr. John Fraser: I value that, and I actually talked to a person who was actually someone who came before committee and said it's a secondary income. But I told him, "You know, I get what you're saying. I agree with that, but do you know that there are thousands and thousands of people who it's not a secondary income for? Do you know that they don't have protections for health and safety? Do you know that they don't have a right to vacation pay or pay when they're terminated?" At the end of the day, it's almost a million workers, and I've got to tell you, the majority of them are not doing that for convenience.

You didn't even look at the agreement that came between an employer and a union that outlined some stuff. It was an agreement that the workers came to. You didn't even look at that. You didn't even consider it. They talked to you; you ignored it.

1410

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: My friend from Ottawa accurately pointed out that this is not a government that has been working for workers. Of course, that's a cumulative thing. There have been so many things over the last four years that the government has done that have been very unfriendly to workers.

What are some of the worst unfriendly practices towards workers in Ottawa that this government has been engaged in over the last four years?

Mr. John Fraser: Oh, my gosh. I only have a minute, right? Look, what's the first thing this government did when they got in? They cut minimum wage. They cut it—bam—and they froze it. Then the Premier, four years later, just when an election is coming up and he can hear that clock ticking in the crocodile—that's a Peter Pan reference, by the way—he says, "I'm raising the minimum wage," to what it would have been two years ago, and wants everybody to pat him on the back.

Paid sick days: They took away paid sick days, and then it took 400 days of just about everybody in Ontario saying "You need to do this" for them to come back with three.

Equal pay for equal work: Now you've got Bill 109, and there will be a problem there with that too. It just goes on and on and on and on.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank "Peter" over there for his dissertation today—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I remind the member to only use ridings.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, yes, Ottawa South. Sorry about that. Or Never-Never Land—one of the two.

Anyway, when I was a younger man, one summer my brother and I were hired by a guy to take sawlogs, cut them up and split them into firewood. We were paid so much a cord. We weren't paid by the hour; we were paid by the cord. If we wanted to work hard, we made money. If it was a hot day, we might take it a little easier and didn't make as much money. I have a guy who cuts my grass now. I got about an acre and a half at home. We pay him so much every time he cuts the grass. He wouldn't have it any other way, because he knows when he comes in there he's getting at it and getting out of there.

The comparisons you have just really don't make any sense. You guys have found something you're latched onto. In 15 years, I never heard you guys once talk about doing something for those in the gig economy. Now, all of a sudden, it's like Peter Pan flew over and woke you up.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I return to the member from Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: Well, I appreciate the comments from the member opposite. As a young man, probably wasn't many years ago, but maybe, because I would have been—we both look about the same age. Look, we're talking about moms and dads, people trying to raise a family. Those are the people we're trying to protect. And over the last four years, the gig economy has exploded. It's really exploded over the pandemic, because of the needs for delivery.

All I'm really saying is that we need to protect those workers, we need to give them basic rights. You had an agreement between an employer and a union that said, "Here's the way we're going to handle all this," and you essentially ignored all of it. You're not giving them health and safety protection, you don't have a definition for engaged time, people aren't getting a fair living wage. I don't think that's an unreasonable thing to ask for.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: In hot pursuit of my friend from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and his talking about Peter Pan, and the member for Ottawa South talking about Peter Pan this afternoon, there's a quote: Peter Pan says, "All the world is made of faith, and trust, and pixie dust."

Now, my question to the member from Ottawa South: When I Google "pixie dust," I find out it's "a substance or influence with an apparently magical effect that brings great success or luck." Could you tell the House, and put it in Hansard, what is your fascination with this government and pixie dust?

Mr. John Fraser: Well, I'm obviously applying it as an oxymoron.

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: Oh, gotcha.

Yes, there may be some pixie dust over there, but I don't think there's a lot of faith and trust, right? At least not with gig workers. They were looking for something

else. They were looking for protections, they were looking for a fair wage, they were looking for things like vacation pay, they were looking for severance pay when let go without cause. What did this government say? What they like to say: No.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: I want to go back to what I raised earlier. The member from Windsor–Tecumseh may have worked as an independent journalist—I'm not sure if you were ever freelance—but I was freelance. There a lot of benefits when people choose to go that route: tax benefits, you can write off an awful lot. A lot of people in small business don't have the protections that you were talking about, yet it was a path that they chose to pursue, knowing that they had an unlimited amount of money that they could make. There wasn't a ceiling, there wasn't a cap.

You're painting a picture of gig workers as people who are using it simply as a second income, who aren't making good money, who aren't valuing their job. Do you recognize that for many people this is a choice, because there's value in independent work, freelance work?

Mr. John Fraser: For decades and decades and decades, governments of all stripes have moved to protect workers because they know there needs to be a balance between the employer and the employee. The nature of work is changing, and that balance is not there. That's what needed to be in the bill.

Some of these big companies, when they came to Ontario, you know what they did? They started doing things that were against our regulations, and nothing happened. They didn't want to pay taxes. Something eventually did happen. Something has to happen here for workers. It's just that simple. You have to balance that power to protect workers. If you don't, you're going to see the kind of things that we saw 100 years ago.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): There's time for one quick question and a quick answer.

Mr. John Vanthof: I enjoyed the speech from the member from Ottawa South. I think one of the issues with this bill is that the government has sold it as providing a minimum wage base for workers, and yet the way it's actually written, you're basically on call. Actually, your wage protection could be less than it was previously.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): The member from Ottawa South for a short reply.

Mr. John Fraser: I just said that about engaged time. It's like, if people are on call, generally you're paying them. If the cashier is standing at the cash register, you're paying them. Right? If the cook in the restaurant is waiting for the next customer, you're paying them.

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: That's exactly right. The thing that's fair to do with these workers is figure out what's fair for them, and the government hasn't done that. That's what the point of my debate was this afternoon.

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm very pleased to speak in support of this legislation. I think it is very important that government and all parties unite behind the aspiration of getting young people working in Ontario. We still have in this country a stubbornly high rate of youth unemployment. For all of us who aspire for our children or grandchildren to get good jobs, to get access to high-wage jobs in this country, we need to set them up for success and we need to remove the impediments that provide a disincentive or a competitive disadvantage for young people as they graduate and enter into the economy. This legislation will enable their success in the private economy, which is what we need.

We want them to be productive. We want them to be able to be employed in meaningful work in the economy that could lead them to go through the apprenticeship of life as a Canadian, to get a good job, to be able to afford a home and to one day retire with dignity. That's the full aspiration that we want for the people of this province, and it starts with legislation that enables access to jobs, to training and ultimately to better incomes. The working for workers legislation, as introduced, will help to achieve those very important imperatives.

If we look at the unemployment rate in Ontario and in Canada, the unemployment rate is now at a two-year low. We have in this province been able to recoup more jobs pre-pandemic by over 193,000 people, meaning 193,000 more people are working today than since the beginning of this pandemic. Youth unemployment increased by 85,000 people last month alone.

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My point is, the fundamentals that enable private sector growth is very much what our government is about. It's about creating the conditions for job growth. We recognize government does not itself create jobs, but we have an opportunity to create the conditions for employment, to increase foreign direct investment, to incent domestic investment and growth in high-wage industries. That's precisely what our Premier has done, and it's what this legislation seeks to achieve.

Speaker, you look at the demographic challenges on the horizon: As John Manley, the president of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, said, there's a "ticking time bomb" with the aging demographic, baby boomers. Some members in this House may subscribe to be a baby boomer. I wouldn't know what that means, Speaker, but what I do know is that for my parents and others who are exiting the workforce or for some that are soon exiting the workforce, we know that we are going to further compound the challenge of people without jobs and jobs without people. That paradox exists in Canada. It is a pre-existing reality that our government has contended to fix.

I would argue the source of this problem overwhelmingly rests with bad government decisions by the former government. This bill is not about them; it's about the work we're doing today. But I just think it's important to understand the genesis of where this problem arose. For many years, we had a government that really didn't place an emphasis on the economy, on supporting private sector

growth, on ensuring wages rose and young people got access to good jobs, particularly in the skilled trades, which is the focus of this bill. And 15 years later, we had 300,000 good-paying jobs flee the province. We had businesses using market forces and decisions of where the best return on investment was. We were paying very high costs of electricity, with massive regulatory burdens, with red tape that had never been higher, at least since institutes have started to monitor the impacts. When we have chambers of commerce suggesting that we have become the have-not province of Confederation, when we required equalization from other provinces to offset our own critical investments—the fundamentals of our economy were not sound. Our credit rating took a hit, confidence in the economy took a hit, and people ultimately paid the price—300,000, often high-wage, unionized jobs in the auto sector and other manufacturing sectors left. And the assumption amongst many private sector economists is that these jobs will forever be gone.

The reason why this bill, I believe, is consequential to provide a competitive advantage for young people to help reorient our economy on a pathway of growth, of employment, of opportunity for young people is why I'm here today—yes, as the Minister of Education, but principally as the member from King–Vaughan, recognizing that many businesses in my community face these challenges, and if we can meaningfully enable access to the skilled trades at a younger age and create pathways to employment, then we have done our job in the Legislature.

That's why I'm here today to speak in support of this bill, recognizing that 1.8 million workers—there will be a shortfall by the year 2031. We know there's a need for people, we know that there are businesses without access to those people, and that intersection, that truth, that challenge is going to make it very difficult for the economy to grow. But our government has a plan that is supported by this legislation.

One of the great challenges I've heard from many individuals in the country is the inability for labour market mobility. What I mean by this is that we have tradespeople and skilled professionals from across Canada who ultimately cannot gain efficient, speedy access to a job. The frustration, I think, of many citizens is that they just want to work. They want government to get off their back, get out of the way and let them do what they do best, which is take a good job, produce an income, put food on the table, help their families etc. I think the frustration and the undercurrent across many parties throughout history is that truth.

Now, I think we are hyper-focused on fixing that problem, and the reason why this bill is critical, in my estimation, is because we are going to guarantee that qualified workers can now get access and registration and start working within 30 days. That's a metric that we can really focus on when it comes to making it easier for engineers, for mechanics, for plumbers and for other regulated professionals to move to this province and to fill those in-demand jobs that we know are critical to drive our economic growth in this province.

I also will note that skilled workers from across Canada will now be able to more seamlessly continue working by officially recognizing all Red Seal trades. This is actually very important. We heard the member of the Liberal Party speak about the bill. It's troubling that it took till this year for a government to figure out how we remove the inter-governmental barriers for people with skills to enter our economy, to enter good jobs. Why were they waiting months on end, sometimes longer, to simply work? Is the disincentive in the economy or is it in the government? Often, these problems manifest within governments because they can be the challenge to people's success.

This bill removes that barrier. This bill materially and meaningfully reduces that burden and creates a service standard that people can bank on: that within 30 days, they'll be able to work in the economy, helping to bridge the gaps and the employment needs of our economy.

This is really important. It's something that I hope all members would accept is something that ought to have been done in the past, but we're pleased to get it done today. As I listened to my learned members opposite, those from Windsor, those close to Oshawa and the GTHA, I thought of colleagues right across Ontario, where we all have manufacturing sectors that need people. I often ask employers in my community, "If we can do one thing for you, what is it?" The answer is often not "cut corporate income taxes" or "reduce red tape," because they know that we've largely achieved those things. The overwhelming message, factually, is, "I need bodies. I need people, women and men who can do the job. We can't find them. I'm paying 30, 40, 50 bucks an hour for something that, three years ago, I paid 20%, 30% less." That is the competitive challenge we have, and our government is seized to fix it, remediate it and invest in a plan that provides labour market mobility to get people into our province and ultimately get them working.

Another component that really resonates with me is the emphasis on foreign credential recognition, which is something that the government has really made a priority to date. We have people in this province who have come here from different parts of the world and who simply cannot work. They simply do not have access to jobs because their credentials have yet to be recognized. I again believe it is regrettable as a nation that we don't have a more macro regime in place to get these folks into our province, into any province to up their skills, if required; get them the recognition they deserve so that they can do the job.

We saw this so demonstrably during the pandemic to the extent that we were taking [*inaudible*] during the pandemic. Many of us still were. You speak to these folks, men and women, other people in other economies, saying, "I'm taking this job because the government in Canada and the province have not recognized my skill." What a missed opportunity for those nurses and PSWs and front-line doctors, among many others, particularly in the skilled trades, when we know they can do the job. They are prepared to do the job. They want to do the job.

The impediment rests with government, and this legislation helps to remove the roadblocks to the individual success of citizens in Ontario. That is so important.

Mr. Speaker, to align with the spirit of this legislation, to ensure we have access to people working, to ensure we have a talent pool of young people, we are working in lockstep with the Ministry of Labour and Skills Development to build the infrastructure, the systems in place to enable young people to pursue the skilled trades. To fix that paradox of people without jobs and jobs without people, we are starting now in kindergarten to encourage skilled trades, at the youngest levels.

This government has, unlike the former Liberal government, who—look, I can't speak to motive, but I can tell you they seem to have ignored any curriculum modernization in any meaningful way. They let the curriculum in math and science remain static for a decade under their leadership. Since 2004 and 2005 is the last time the math and science curriculums were updated, with no emphasis at all and often, in some cases, no reference even to the words “skilled trades” in the expectations of our curriculum. So it is not a coincidence that young people graduated from Ontario without really knowing about the good-paying jobs that exist in the skilled trades.

Our government, in collaboration with labour and skills development and under the Premier's leadership, is now, literally—we're sending skilled trades staff, we're sending recruiters into schools in the province of Ontario. I think this is really important: 63 recruiters in more than 800 secondary schools,—which is, Mr. Speaker, all of our secondary schools. We are literally in there in real time, trying to create meaningful engagement and excitement around the good-paying jobs, these jobs with dignity—entrepreneurial, high-wage—that these young people should know about.

1430

We have reformed the curriculum from kindergarten until grade 8 in elementary—and, of course, in every grade thereafter in high school—starting in an age-appropriate way about finding courage and exciting young people around these great jobs that are so necessary for our economy. And so we have sent in recruiters. We have reformed the curriculum in math and science. We are giving young people the tools they will need to succeed, and part of that, if you want to work in the skilled trades, is some acumen in financial literacy and an ability to code.

I think that one thing where perhaps members opposite would agree is that one of a long list of failures of the former Liberal government was the lack of emphasis on coding within the curriculum. For the first time, under our government's leadership, we have mandated coding from grade 1 through 8, in now both math and the science curriculum, universally ensuring access to that knowledge and those computational skills young people need to do these types of jobs, because the skilled-trade jobs have changed from our parents' generation. They are highly technically oriented and require that skill set that they can learn through Ontario's new, modernized math and science curriculum.

We're teaching children basic financial literacy, the numeracy skills that I think many of us wish we learned, that many of your children ought to have learned but did not. And so we went back to the basics. We emphasized the foundational skill sets young people need to be able to succeed in mathematics, in numeracy and in financial literacy: teaching young people how to do a mortgage, how to pay taxes. These are life skills, and the challenge we had in the curriculum—if we asked young people today, they often would say, particularly if you asked them in high school, “I'm learning a lot of abstract knowledge, nothing that I could apply to my life today, to my ability to pay for post-secondary” in the coming days or years in their life, and so we're literally requiring them to do a budget before graduation as part of a requirement to graduate in Ontario. It's this type of practical, transferable knowledge that makes the difference for young people in Ontario, and we're very proud of that.

Mr. Speaker, we also recognize that in order to incent young people, they need to be able to participate in the skilled trades within their schools, and we have now expanded the Specialist High Skills Major program—an additional \$39 million over three years, starting this year, which will help encourage more access to the skilled trades within Ontario's publicly funded schools. There are now over 1,100 programs, 59 new programs, 13 prioritized psychological education programs, with a projected enrolment of 22,000 students in Ontario's schools. This is an increase of over 2,700 schools from 2020-21. This is a material difference. This is how we're going to get our economy back on track. This is how we ensure Ontario's economy is set up for long-term success.

We hear sometimes the rhetoric from political parties about the future prosperity of Canada, but this is how we achieve it. It is literally by ensuring that people graduating from Ontario retain the knowledge required to succeed in the economy. Whatever they pursue, public or private, they need to have life skills, job skills, critical transferable skills, and the government is getting it right in this respect. We're finally doing what parents asked of us, what employers have asked of us and, I believe, what Canada's future demands.

Mr. Speaker, we also will note that there are approximately 59,000 students who are going to be projected to participate in the SHSM programs, these Specialist High Skills Major programs, which is an increase of roughly 5,000 in that program, 9% more than the year prior. That's really exciting. We are achieving the objective we all want, which is to give these young people pathways to the skilled trades.

In its relevance to the legislation before us today, the fact that we're doing career fairs and the fact that we're sending in recruiters—we've modernized and overhauled Ontario's curriculum—I want to just reemphasize that this legislation, I believe, will make a tremendous difference in cutting red tape for workers and encouraging them to come to our country. We know that there are 330,000 vacant jobs across Ontario today, including many in the

skilled trades, and to give Ontario a competitive advantage, we want to encourage more of them to enter these jobs.

And so, Speaker, I just want to express an element of gratitude to the Premier for making this an area of emphasis, for ensuring that young people could get those jobs, for ensuring that we meet the needs of our economy now and in the future, and most especially for ensuring that we can increase the wages of individuals in our economy to increase their productivity in the economy and, more importantly, to give them the hope that they deserve.

One of the reasons why I ran for public service almost four years ago was because I felt that so many young people in Ontario, under the former Liberal government, were being fundamentally ignored: tuition rising sharply, housing entirely unaffordable. No young person could live in the community they were raised, practically. They couldn't get a job related to their skills, there were low-wage jobs and so many young people in their late twenties and thirties were living at home. I just thought, "That is an unacceptable reality."

We are literally one of the most prosperous democracies on earth, and our young people deserve every opportunity. I think we should not permit for the first generation in Canadian history to be worse off than the generation before, since Confederation and before it. There has been one truth enduring in the intergenerational reality of Canada: Our immigration story is that we've always worked hard so the next generation could be better off. This is the first generation where that history is at risk.

This legislation enables the growth of our economy, and to restore the opportunities that I believe young people in King–Vaughan—but to be fair, Speaker, across this country—deserve, so I want to thank the minister and the Premier for making this a priority. I want to express gratitude for all members who will support this legislation, who will ensure we focus on the jobs of the future. That will support the modernization to curriculum, that will ensure labour market access from abroad and at home, across our country from sea to sea. This is a plan for prosperity. It enables young people to have some hope when they graduate. I'm proud of the work we're doing across governments to achieve the imperatives that I have set out today.

I also want to recognize, Speaker, that in order to ensure we fill those 330,000 vacant jobs across Ontario—many in the skilled trades—we need to ensure that, as a first principle, they know that these jobs exist; that they know that they are good jobs; that we work together to reduce any stigmatization of them. For all of you who have worked in the skilled trades—I think of my father and grandfather, both of whom who came to this country driving a truck. I think of many members of my community who continue to carry on that heritage today. For them, for their children and for the future of our country, this legislation will ensure that they have the hope, the opportunity and the individual prosperity they deserve.

Speaker, I now move that the question be put.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): The member from King–Vaughan has moved that the question now be put. With over six and a half hours of debate, and 13 members having spoken, therefore I am satisfied there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House.

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

All those in favour of the motion that the question be now put, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion that the question be now put, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred to the next instance of deferred votes.

Vote deferred.

TAX RELIEF AT THE PUMPS ACT, 2022

LOI DE 2022 SUR L'ALLÈGEMENT DE LA TAXE À LA POMPE

Mr. Parsa, on behalf of Mr. Bethlenfalvy, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 111, An Act to amend the Fuel Tax Act and the Gasoline Tax Act with respect to a temporary reduction to the tax payable on certain clear fuel and on gasoline /
Projet de loi 111, Loi modifiant la Loi de la taxe sur les carburants et la Loi de la taxe sur l'essence en ce qui concerne la réduction temporaire de la taxe à payer sur certains types de carburant incolore et sur l'essence.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Further debate? I recognize the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance.

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Mr. Michael Parsa: I want to start off by letting you know that I'll be sharing my time with my good friend and colleague the member for Brantford–Brant and also a parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance.

Before I get into what this bill means to Ontarians, I would like to take a moment to thank and congratulate the Minister of Finance for tabling this bill. The work that he is doing and has been doing in the ministry is remarkable. He's delivering on our party's promise that we made to Ontarians years ago to make life affordable for all Ontarians. Under the leadership of Premier Ford, we'll continue to deliver on this promise for as long as we remain in government.

We want to put more money into the pockets of Ontarians. We know that taxpayers are under pressure. We recognize the impact inflation is having on families, and our government is here for them. We have introduced rebate programs such as the Ontario Childcare Access and Relief from Expenses Tax Credit to put money back into pockets of families who need relief. We have also introduced the Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit to help make sure workers get the training they need and deserve, because we want to ensure that when they step foot on a job site or into an office, they have all the tools they need

to do their jobs effectively and efficiently. We have also introduced numerous other programs such as the Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit, the low-income individuals and families tax credit and the Ontario Energy and Property Tax Credit, just to name a few others.

The bill we are talking about today, the Tax Relief at the Pumps Act, 2022, builds on our commitment to not only act in the best interests of Ontarians but make sure that we are putting money in their pockets so that they can take care of themselves and their families. The Tax Relief at the Pumps Act, 2022, builds on this promise and would temporarily cut the gas tax by 5.7 cents per litre and the fuel tax by 5.3 cents per litre for six months, beginning July 1, 2022. This is the latest step in our plan to put more money back into the pockets of Ontarians, Ontario families and Ontario businesses.

I want to share with the members in this House exactly what the proposed legislation will do for the people of Ontario. Individuals and families in Ontario would see significant direct savings from this proposed tax cut. Combined with the recently announced elimination of licence plate renewal fees, vehicle owners would benefit from an average of \$465 in 2022. A family living in southern Ontario that owns two cars and drives regularly will see hundreds of dollars in savings—dollars that matter remarkably in such difficult times. And even households that do not own vehicles will benefit from the impacts of the proposed tax cuts in the price paid for things like taxis, food delivery and consumer products. As you can see, Speaker, the bill we are discussing would bring much-needed relief to both families and businesses.

Now, in the time that I have today, I want to speak briefly to the implementation details of this piece of legislation as well as how this bill fits into our government's broader plan to provide tax relief to people and businesses. We have a plan to work together with the industry, including gas and fuel tax collectors, registered importers, wholesalers and retailers, to deliver this relief. But we have to be mindful of the fact that businesses would require some time to adjust to these changes. So let me briefly explain how implementation would work for this bill.

Gas and fuel tax is pre-collected by designated collectors and importers at the wholesale level and included on the invoice to the retailer. The retailer then recovers the tax amount when the sale is made to the consumer. Our plan to deliver relief has to take into account the implications that this tax cut would have on the supply chain. If this legislation is passed and the rate decreases on July 1, 2022, importers, wholesalers and retailers that hold tax-paid inventory at the time of the rate cut would be required to take inventory and then a credit in the amount of the difference would be provided.

This tax adjustment for registered collectors and importers will reimburse them for the adjustment they will provide to the retailers, and so the Ministry of Finance is engaging and working with the industry to ensure there is an implementation plan in place—a plan that is efficient for the industry and effective in delivering the proposed

tax cuts, so that this proposed tax relief would be in place for the July 1 effective date.

Speaker, now that I have spent some time on the implementation details, I want to redirect to how this bill fits into our broader plan to bring tax relief to the people and businesses of Ontario. We've done our homework, and thanks to the analysis by Ontario's independent regulator, the Ontario Energy Board, we know that gas regulation in other provinces, like the NDP are proposing, has caused higher prices than the competitive, market-driven approaches we have here in Ontario. As I've said on countless occasions, we will not be taking any lessons from the opposition on this issue—or on any issue for that matter—related to affordability in our province.

What the NDP is promoting and advocating for is making life more expensive, while this government is working for the people of Ontario to do the exact opposite. On this side of the House, we know that a responsible government must act in order to address the inflationary pressures that people and businesses are experiencing. I want to point out that even though Ontario is getting stronger—with the latest job numbers pointing to an economic recovery that includes 194,000 jobs gained in February—and even though the critical investments we've made during the pandemic are paving the way for healthier communities, new jobs and opportunities, and even though there are many reasons to celebrate the enormous progress we've made together, we also know that the people and businesses want our government to keep working for them, to keep serving them and to do more to keep costs low.

Speaker, we know that seniors, workers and families want to keep their tax dollars where they belong, and where they belong is in their pockets going towards whatever they want or need to invest in themselves, their communities, their families and their futures. This is why we have brought forward the Tax Relief at the Pumps Act, 2022.

We have a clear, long-term vision to transform the province, starting with transforming the auto supply chain to build the cars of the future. Our province is poised to become a North American leader in electric and hybrid manufacturing. We will become the leader by combining our strengths in the auto and tech sectors with our wealth of critical minerals—minerals that are essential to manufacturing electric vehicle batteries—and by harnessing the strength of our province's clean tech sector, the largest in Canada.

Last month, Mr. Speaker, we announced two game-changing investments in the Ontario auto industry. The first was a major investment by Honda Canada to upgrade and retool its plants in Alliston, ensuring the production of its next-generation vehicle models. And the second was our exciting achievement of the largest auto investment in the history of this province: LG Energy Solution and automaker Stellantis, formerly Fiat Chrysler, are joining forces, with the support of Ontario and the federal and municipal governments, to build the province's first large-scale electric vehicle battery manufacturing plant right

here in Windsor, Ontario. In the words of the Premier himself, these investments are securing Ontario's place as a North American hub for building cars and batteries of the future.

Speaker, as you can see, our government has a plan to keep costs low for Ontarians and businesses, a plan to provide urgent and much-needed relief at the pumps today, while building a bright and exciting future for the auto industry of tomorrow. This will be achieved partly through the tax relief we're providing to the people and businesses of Ontario.

1450

The legislation we are discussing today is one aspect of our plan to keep costs down for families and businesses, to help make life more affordable. Another part of this plan includes the numerous benefits and credits we've made available to give the people of Ontario a break this tax season, through credits like the Ontario Child Care Tax Credit, which allowed families to claim up to 75% of their eligible child care expenses, including care provided by child care centres, home and camps. People can benefit from a 20% top-up to this credit when filing their taxes this year.

Another one is the Low-income Workers Tax Credit, which provides \$850 each year in personal income tax relief to low-income workers, to be used to reduce or even eliminate an individual's personal income tax, excluding the Ontario health premium.

Or the jobs training tax credit, with \$2,000 in relief for 50% of eligible training expenses: Workers can get the training they need for a career shift, retraining or even to sharpen their skills. And there's so much more.

Our seniors' home tax credit is not only helping keep costs low for our seniors; it's also helping them stay in the home they love longer. With this credit, a senior or family can use up to \$2,500 to make their homes safer and more accessible. We've extended this tax credit for the 2022 tax year to help seniors who may not have had a chance to use it in 2021.

Even more, we introduced the Ontario Staycation Tax Credit to not only help keep costs low for families, but to encourage them to travel and discover this beautiful province, while also helping our tourism and hospitality sector get back on its feet following the severe financial losses they've endured because of the pandemic. With this credit, families can claim 20% of their eligible 2022 accommodation expenses, wherever they go. Let me explain: People can claim eligible expenses of up to \$1,000 as an individual or \$2,000 if they have a spouse, common-law partner or eligible children. This means that a person can get back up to \$200, or \$400 as a family. It doesn't matter where you go, whether it's a campground, a hotel or a cottage. This is just one of the many, many ways our government is working to help put more money back into the pockets of all Ontario families.

The bill we're discussing and the related tax relief for people and businesses also includes a plan to address the housing affordability crisis here in Ontario. It has not escaped us that young families, seniors and workers are

desperate for housing. People are struggling to find housing anywhere, let alone housing that meets their needs. The reason that these dreams of home ownership are collapsing is because of lack of supply, on top of the rising cost of absolutely everything.

We've created an affordability plan that not only helps bring that dream of ownership back within reach for so many Ontarians, but also includes cracking down on foreign real estate speculation, with the most comprehensive non-residential speculation tax in Canada. We've increased the non-residential speculation tax rate to 20% from 15%. We've expanded the tax to apply province-wide, and in doing so we're strengthening efforts to deter non-resident investors from speculating on Ontario's housing market. We're eliminating loopholes to support hard-working Ontarians who are trying to buy their first home. We're doing this by focusing tax relief eligibility exclusively to newcomers who commit to laying down roots here in Ontario for the long term. Again, this is just one more aspect of our plan.

We're making it easier to buy a home, and this plan includes protecting the people of Ontario, protecting homebuyers and increasing housing supply. The More Homes for Everyone Act was built on the recommendations from the Housing Affordability Task Force and the first-ever provincial-municipal housing summit. This includes both short-term and long-term commitments to provide more attainable housing options for everyone— young people, new couples, families—because we firmly believe that every single person in Ontario deserves to live in a home they can afford.

Let's transition to a different lens and talk about how the Tax Relief at the Pumps Act, 2022, would benefit businesses that use gasoline or diesel; for example, the transportation industry, which moves people and goods as part of the critical supply chain network, or the small business owner who fills up their tank and uses the vehicle to keep their businesses running. Keeping costs low for these businesses is part of our broader plan to provide tax relief to businesses.

Since taking office in 2018, our government has been committed to lowering costs, not only for individuals and families, but for employers and businesses. We not only want to help the people of Ontario with the costs of everyday life by making everything more affordable, but we want to lower costs for employers, help them grow, protect existing jobs and create opportunities for workers.

I want to share some examples of how we are doing this:

We've lowered costs for employers by supporting a reduction in the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board premiums.

We've allowed businesses to accelerate write-offs of capital investments for tax purposes. This is an incentive that is encouraging businesses to invest in our province and create jobs for the people of our province.

We cut the small business corporate income tax rate to 3.2% from 3.5%, effective January 1, 2020, and, in doing so, we fulfilled a commitment our government made in

2018 to cut the rate by 8.7%. This measure alone was estimated to provide more than 275,000 businesses with up to \$1,500 in annual tax savings—savings that are helping to create a more competitive environment for small businesses.

Before I go on with another action that we've taken, I want to pause for a second to reiterate how this government is pulling jobs in and attracting investments to the province of Ontario. While the previous government pushed these opportunities away, we have reduced property taxes by lowering the high business education tax rates for job creators, therefore creating more than \$450 million in annual savings for more than 200,000 businesses and business properties. To make this crystal clear, this is approximately 95% of all business properties in Ontario.

By increasing the employer health tax exemption from \$490,000 to \$1 million, we eliminated a tax on jobs for an additional 30,000 employers. Again, to clarify, this means that about 90% of employers now pay no employer health tax and that eligible private sector employers now save up to a total of \$19,500 annually in employer health tax. That's money they can invest in jobs and growth in our province.

Without a doubt, Ontario businesses had the backs of the people throughout the pandemic, doing the right thing to follow public health measures to keep people safe. Our businesses made incredible sacrifices to keep us safe and to keep our communities safe, and our government is going to continue to have their backs through tax relief and other supports to help them not just to recover but to grow and thrive and prosper, create more jobs here in our province, paving the way for a brighter future.

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Speaker, as you can see, this government has thought of every aspect of our plan to bring affordability back into the lives of Ontarians, and the proposed legislation, the Tax Relief at the Pumps Act, 2022, is just one part of our government's plan to provide tax relief for people and businesses in Ontario, by temporarily cutting the gas tax by 5.7 cents per litre and by temporarily cutting the fuel tax by 5.3 cents per litre for six months, beginning July 1, 2022. This bill puts money back into the pockets of people and businesses so that they can invest their hard-earned dollars in a way that makes sense for them.

For vehicle owners, this means significant direct savings. As I said, households will benefit from an average saving of about \$465 in 2022, when the tax relief is combined with the elimination of licence plate renewal fees and refunds for fees paid since March 2022, and for households that do not own vehicles, benefiting from the gas tax in the prices paid for things like, again, taxis, food delivery and consumer products.

This builds on our relief for drivers, relief such as the permanent removal of tolls on Highways 412 and 418, which came into effect yesterday, on April 5. Thanks to the Minister of Transportation—I see her here. Thank you very much, Minister, for the great work in providing affordability for the people of Ontario. We're bringing

fairness and relief to the Durham region after disappointing treatment by the previous government, after then-transport minister Steven Del Duca went out of his way to increase costs for drivers in this area.

Speaker, I urge all members of this House to support this bill. It's a very important bill at a very critical time, and together we can help keep costs low for seniors, keep costs down for families, workers and our small businesses who have sacrificed so much during the pandemic.

Ontario is getting stronger, by putting more money back into the pockets of people and businesses, by battling inflationary pressures and making life more affordable for people and businesses. Perhaps in years past, discussion and debate about inflation largely happened among economists and banks, but today it's something that's discussed by friends and families around the kitchen table. Families and businesses want to know that their government is taking meaningful action to keep costs low and to battle inflation. Our government is doing just that. Our government is paving the way for a strong economy that benefits every person.

Mr. Speaker, it's an absolute honour and it's a privilege to work with Minister Bethlenfalvy and my colleague from Brantford—Brant on this bill. Minister Bethlenfalvy is laser-focused on doing everything to make sure that life is more affordable for people and the businesses of this province. We are incredibly excited about the future of this province after two very difficult years for us here in the province. But because of the great work of the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, we're bringing back those jobs to the province that we had lost for many, many years.

It's exciting times in the future of this province. We need to make sure, though, that Ontarians—individuals, families and businesses—have the support that they need in the next little while as we start rebuilding after these long two years of global pandemic. One of the ways that we can do this is by cutting costs for everyone in the province. What better way to do it than to lower gas at the pumps, where it would affect not just when you're filling up your car, and not only for small businesses that transport goods back and forth, but when you buy goods as a small business owner—myself, I can tell you that every time that you go to the pumps, when you pay, your car and your trucks that are on the road, it impacts the price of everything in the province, and it has an effect on every single person.

Once again, I want to thank Minister Bethlenfalvy for the great work, and my colleague the parliamentary assistant, Will Bouma, for the great work as well. I hope that my colleagues in this Legislature on all sides support this very important legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Parliamentary assistant Parsa did reference that he would be sharing his time with parliamentary assistant Bouma, so I now recognize the member for Brantford—Brant.

Mr. Will Bouma: It is my pleasure to rise and share details related to our government's proposed legislation on the gas and fuel tax. The bill is aptly titled Tax Relief at

the Pumps Act, 2022. I'm happy to have the opportunity to share both details related to this legislation, as well as our government's overall plan to help keep costs low for my constituents from Brantford–Brant and, indeed, for all Ontario businesses and families.

I will share details related to how our government intends to keep life affordable for those who commute or spend their time driving for a living. But before I get into that, Speaker, I'd like to thank the Minister of Finance for his leadership on getting this legislation from the drawing board into the Legislature, and for all the hard work of my fellow parliamentary assistant, the member for Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill.

I've had the opportunity to spend some time in the Premier's office as his parliamentary assistant, and now in the Ministry of Finance, and with all of the colleagues here on this side of the House it is so incredible to see a whole-of-government approach to affordability for the people of Ontario.

Of course, I have to say more about the Ministry of Finance, because while cutting a tax may seem simple, there is actually a lot of work going on behind the scenes. Let me be clear: This proposed legislation will impact drivers and it will impact the heavy duty transportation industry, because we know supply chains simply cannot wait for a more moderate price of diesel fuel. This targeted tax relief will have broader impacts on our economy than just on drivers.

For many people in the province of Ontario, driving is not simply an option; it's a necessity. These are the people who are disproportionately impacted by spiking oil prices and the federal carbon tax, and who would be affected by the NDP's gas regulation approach, which we know would only drive prices higher. We stand here to support the people of this great province, which brings me to the details related to this legislation. Let's get started with that this afternoon.

If passed, the Tax Relief at the Pumps Act, 2022, would temporarily cut the gas tax, as we've heard, by 5.7 cents per litre, and the fuel tax by 5.3 cents per litre, beginning on July 1, 2022. But what does this actually mean for people? Well, coupled with the recently announced elimination of licence plate renewal fees and refunds for fees paid since March 2020, households in Ontario are expected to benefit from an average combined savings of about \$465 in 2022. That is more than \$450 back into the pockets of the people.

Effective July 1 until December 31, 2022, the gas tax rate would be cut from 14.7 cents per litre to nine cents per litre. This represents that cut of 5.7 cents per litre.

The fuel tax rate, which applies to diesel, would be reduced from 14.3 cents per litre to nine cents per litre. This represents a cut of 5.3 cents per litre.

I also want to be clear about the effective date of this proposed legislation. This proposed tax cut would be effective on July 1, 2022, for one key reason: to provide the industry the required time to adjust their systems and business processes. This is a prudent approach. That is why, in addition to celebrating the birth of our nation this

year, we will also have the opportunity to reflect on greater affordability for the people, should this legislation pass.

Some of you may be asking yourselves why and, more specifically, why now? Well, my friends, many of you already know the answers to these questions, and I alluded to some of the rationale earlier. So many of us spend a significant amount of time in our daily lives in our vehicles, criss-crossing the province to best serve and be of service to our local constituents. You may have noticed prices at your local pumps, and you have most likely also noticed the media, online coverage and chatter on social media around the yo-yoing pump prices, especially during these last few months.

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We have experienced so much uncertainty over these past two years, thanks in large part to the COVID-19 pandemic, which presented unprecedented challenges for us both locally and indeed around the entire globe. Supply chain disruptions reminded all of us that even the best and strongest systems can waver in the face of global geopolitical conflict and extraordinary health and health care system challenges. After more than two years of social and economic uncertainty, our government's proposed Tax Relief at the Pumps Act, 2022, at the very least brings some degree of certainty to one aspect of people's daily lives.

Relief at the pumps would also put money back into the pockets of people and businesses so they can use their hard-earned dollars as they see fit, helping families and businesses bring down their costs so they can focus on what is most important.

More broadly speaking, I am also here today to speak to Ontario's plan to help bring relief to families across this province. As I mentioned previously, our government's proposed Tax Relief at the Pumps Act, 2022, is just one piece of a larger puzzle aimed at keeping costs down for Ontarians. Here are other examples of efforts that have already been announced and are already under way across the province of Ontario.

Let's start with auto insurance. The government of Ontario is continuing to create long-term, meaningful change in the automobile insurance sector that puts drivers first by making auto insurance more affordable and accessible. In April 2019, the government released Putting Drivers First, a blueprint for Ontario's auto insurance system. In the blueprint, the government is committed to lowering costs and fighting fraud in the auto insurance system, including modernizing rules on UDAP, or unfair or deceptive acts and practices. With the implementation of the Financial Services Regulatory Authority of Ontario's new UDAP rule, effective as of April 1, the government is enabling insurers to put more money back into the pockets of Ontario consumers by permanently enabling rebating and incentives, subject to consumer protection processes.

In the blueprint, the government also committed to fixing Ontario's broken automobile insurance system and making automobile insurance more affordable for Ontario's 10 million drivers. And, as indicated in budget

2022, the next phase of the blueprint focuses on increasing choice for consumers by enabling insurers to offer more coverage options, including optional not-at-fault property damage coverage known as direct compensation property damage, for example, for drivers who may determine that insuring their older vehicle costs more than the vehicle is worth. A classic example of that is my son, who has his first vehicle. He spent \$2,000 on a Toyota Corolla. He doesn't need coverage to replace that vehicle in the event of an accident, because it will cost more to fix than that vehicle is worth.

Our work on making life more affordable for drivers did not stop with auto insurance reform. To help commuters in the Durham region, our government has also eliminated the road tolls that were placed on Highway 412 and Highway 418 by the previous government. It was so wonderful to see the pictures of the Minister of Transportation there yesterday for that.

Who thought that the drivers of Durham deserved to be shaken down for more cash, just for trying to get from point A to point B? For context, Highways 412 and 418 were the only tolled north-south highways in the entire province of Ontario. Removing tolls as of yesterday, April 5, provides more travel options for local residents, relieves gridlock on local roads across the entire Durham region and helps improve economic competitiveness for local businesses. Most importantly, our government restored fairness in the Durham region, while also addressing local congestion.

We also provided relief to all drivers in the province, making life more affordable and convenient for nearly eight million vehicle owners by eliminating licence plate renewal fees and the requirement to have a licence plate sticker for passenger vehicles, light-duty trucks, motorcycles and mopeds effective March 13, 2022. The government introduced red tape legislation that would enable the province to refund eligible individual owners of vehicles for any licence plate renewal fees paid since March 2020. Thousands of refund cheques started to arrive in mailboxes at the end of March. Eliminating renewal fees will save vehicle owners \$120 per year in southern Ontario and \$60 per year in northern Ontario for passenger and light commercial vehicles.

Now that I have covered some of our government's actions related to affordability to date, I would like to pause briefly to highlight one case study. Let's consider vehicle owners in Ontario who would see a significant direct savings from both the proposed gas tax cut and the recently announced elimination of licence plate renewal fees and refunds for fees paid since March 2020.

Because Ontario's gas tax program supports public transit in municipalities across Ontario, our government will ensure this funding would not be impacted by these proposed cuts. Funding for the gas tax program is determined by the number of litres of gasoline sold in the province during the previous year. Two cents per litre of this revenue will continue to be dedicated to support municipal public transit through the gas tax program. Our government recognizes that while not everybody drives a

car, investments to transit will also ensure people can keep moving smoothly across this province to get to their jobs, to see family and friends or to visit one of Ontario's many attractions, especially with summer right around the corner.

The impacts of lowering this tax—if, of course, our legislation is passed—ladder up to large-scale impacts for families, for businesses and communities all across our province.

I would be remiss if I did not also briefly address some of the recent reforms that our government has introduced related to housing, because no prices have received so much attention in the media as housing and gas prices have over the past few years. Indeed, housing prices in Ontario have almost tripled in a decade, growing so much faster than incomes across the province. This has made homeownership beyond the reach of most first-time buyers across the province, even those with well-paying jobs. Housing has become too expensive for rental units, and it has become too expensive in rural communities and in small towns. The system just is not working as it should, and our government hopes to change that.

As part of our commitment to tackle Ontario's housing crisis by prioritizing Ontario families and homebuyers, the government has increased the non-resident speculation tax to 20% and expanded that tax to apply province-wide, effective on March 30, 2022. Increasing the tax rate to 20% from 15% and expanding the tax to apply beyond the greater Golden Horseshoe region will strengthen efforts to deter non-resident investors from speculating on Ontario's housing market and help make homeownership more attainable for Ontario residents.

Ontario will consult on potential measures to address concerns related to land speculation. For example, the province will explore ways to discourage construction slowdowns that may be artificially driving up prices of new homes for Ontario families through land speculation. Our government is hard at work, and we will continue to fight for the people of Ontario.

Speaker, our government's work to make costs lower for people also extends to some of our advocacy, and here's what I mean by that: The Ontario government is continuing to call on the federal government to help families and businesses in the face of rising costs by cutting the carbon tax, which increased to 11.05 cents per litre on gasoline and 13.41 cents per litre on diesel on April 1, 2022.

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If you would allow me to just rewind for a moment, it would be inaccurate to say our advocacy to the federal government on this file is new. In fact, since the beginning of our mandate, our government has urged the federal government not to move ahead with its job-killing carbon tax.

In 2018, we implemented legislation to eliminate the previous government's cap-and-trade carbon tax to reduce gas prices by 4.3 cents per litre and lower home heating costs, savings households an average of \$260 per year in fuel and other costs, and to remove a burden from Ontario

businesses, allowing them to grow, to create jobs and compete around the world. But the federal government implemented a law to force low and middle-income seniors, workers, families and small businesses to start paying a rapidly escalating carbon tax starting on April 1, 2019. We knew then that families and businesses simply could not afford another cost-of-living tax hike, and yet every year since then, that tax has been going up.

Speaker, our government is urgently calling on the federal government to step up and do something about rising gas prices. Families in Ontario should not have to make the difficult choice between filling their tank or filling their refrigerator. That is our bottom line, and it will continue to be our bottom line.

On the topic of keeping costs low for families: We also recently reached an agreement with the federal government for \$13.2 billion in funding for a Canada-wide early learning and child care system, providing Ontario families with children five years old and younger in participating licensed child care centres with up to 25% in savings to a minimum of \$12 per day retroactive to April 1, 2022. This agreement will deliver an average of \$10-a-day child care for eligible children by September 2025. I would just like to take a moment to thank the Minister of Education for his incredible persistence and work on this file and not giving in when he had the opportunity to take a deal early, so that he could do right for the people and families of Ontario.

Speaker, it is clear to our government that the families are looking for ways to cut back on their household expenses. Businesses are also feeling squeezed as they search for ways to turn a profit without passing their increased costs on to their customers. Everyone's pocket-book is feeling the pressure right now, and although we know the causes of this pressure did not begin in Ontario, governments at all levels have a responsibility to step up and help the people and the businesses who are feeling the impacts of these rising costs.

Our proposed legislation, Tax Relief at the Pumps Act, 2022, would temporarily cut the gas tax by 5.7 cents per litre and the fuel tax by 5.3 cents per litre beginning on July 1, 2022. Effective July 1 until December 31, 2022, the gas tax rate would be cut from 14.7 cents per litre to 9 cents per litre, which represents that cut of about 5.7 cents per litre. The fuel tax rate, which applies to diesel, would be reduced from 14.3 cents per litre to nine cents per litre, which represents that cut of 5.3 cents per litre. This proposed tax cut would be effective on July 1, 2022, to provide the industry, including manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers, the required time to adjust their systems and business processes.

After so much uncertainty and sacrifice, both personally and collectively, now is the time to take bold action and meaningful change that will impact the bottom lines and the pocket books of Ontario's businesses and families. We will also continue to press the federal government in our fight against inflation, fighting for the workers, the drivers, the hard-working everyday people of our province who build and grow our communities, our

front-line heroes and families across every corner of this province.

Speaker, Ontario is getting stronger. Over the past two years, we have worked together and made enormous progress to battle the COVID-19 pandemic. Employment in Ontario increased by over 194,000 jobs in the month of February alone. This increase in jobs points to a brighter economic situation as we continue to protect our hard-fought progress against COVID-19. We are poised to unleash Ontario's economy and look forward to our future economic prosperity.

However, Speaker, we know that despite these promising signs, people and businesses in Ontario are still feeling pinched by increasing living costs. Whether they are buying groceries for their families, whether they are saving for a down payment for a house or whether they are filling up at the pump, costs are going up, and these inflationary pressures are not unique to this province of Ontario. Supply chain challenges, geopolitical conflicts and the lingering economic impacts of a global pandemic are just some of the factors at play. Although the causes of these inflationary pressures did not originate in Ontario, governments at all levels have a responsibility to step up and to help the people and businesses who are feeling squeezed by rising costs—and that's just what our government is doing.

Again, Speaker, the Tax Relief at the Pumps Act, 2022 would, if passed, temporarily cut gas tax by 5.7 cents per litre, and the fuel tax by 5.3 cents per litre for six months, beginning on July 1, 2022. This relief at the pumps would put money back into the pockets of people and businesses, so they can use their hard-earned dollars how they see fit. If passed, this bill would allow vehicle owners in Ontario to see a significant and direct savings from the proposed gas tax cut and the recently announced elimination of the licence plate renewal fees and refunds of fees paid since March 2022. To share an example, a family in southern Ontario who owns two cars and drives regularly would save about \$815 in 2022. Households that do not own vehicles are also expected to benefit from the impact of the proposed gas tax cut in the prices for the things that they pay for, like taxis, food delivery and consumer products. Overall, households would benefit from an average combined savings of about \$465 in 2022.

For a person who drives to work every day, filling up their gas tank is not optional. For a delivery driver who spends each day on the road, they must keep on moving despite the price of gas. And for the heavy-duty transportation industry, supply chains cannot wait for a more moderate price of diesel fuel. These families and these businesses need help to withstand these challenging inflationary pressures. That's exactly why our government has brought forward this bill: to help families and businesses bring down their costs so that they can focus on what's most important.

Another aspect of this bill that many businesses all over this great province will benefit from is Ontario's vibrant tourism industry. Because, as you know, Speaker, Ontario is a big place, and this is a perfect example of how

something as simple as a tax cut on fuel and gas will have so many domino effects to other areas of the province.

Speaker, I know that this bill is titled the Tax Relief at the Pumps Act, but the savings won't just be savings at the pumps. Ontarians will see savings in transportation of goods and consumer products. In my community, many workers have to commute to be able to provide for their families. Every single one of my constituents who needs to drive to work will benefit from this legislation.

Again, Speaker, we've been calling on the federal government to join us in helping keep costs low for families and businesses in the province of Ontario. In 2018, we implemented legislation to eliminate the previous government's cap-and-trade carbon tax, reducing prices then by 4.3 cents per litre, and home heating costs, saving households an average of \$260 in fuel and other costs and removing a costly burden from Ontario businesses, allowing them to grow, create jobs and compete around the world. However, as we've already mentioned, the federal government implemented a rapidly escalating carbon tax, starting on April 1, 2019. It rose to 6.63 cents per litre of gasoline in 2020 and to 8.84 cents per litre of gasoline in 2021.

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At the beginning of March, families and businesses were shocked by never-before-seen gas prices, but the federal government moved ahead with another carbon tax increase on April 1 of this year, just a few days ago, bringing this tax now to 11.05 cents per litre of gasoline. That's why we are continuing to call on the federal government to help families and businesses in the face of rising costs by cutting the carbon tax. Our government is doing its part today by bringing forward this legislation to temporarily cut gas and fuel tax rates, and we are imploring the federal government to join us, work with us, to bring further relief to Ontario families and businesses.

Speaker, we know that urgent action is needed to help families and businesses weather this challenging inflationary period, and that is why we are bringing this much-needed legislation forward, the Tax Relief at the Pumps Act, 2022.

We also have a clear, long-term vision to transform the province's automotive supply chain to build the cars of the future. Our province is poised to become a North American leader in electric and hybrid vehicle manufacturing. We will do this by combining our strengths in the auto and tech sectors with our wealth of critical minerals, which are essential to the manufacture of electrical vehicle batteries, and by harnessing the strengths of our province's clean tech sector, the largest in Canada. Driving Prosperity: The Future of Ontario's Automotive Sector is our plan, and it's doing just that.

Last month, we announced two game-changing investments in Ontario's auto industry: the first, a major investment by Honda Canada to upgrade and retool its plants in Alliston, ensuring the production of its next-generation vehicle models; the second, that Ontario has secured the largest auto investment in the province's history as part of a joint venture between Ontario, federal and municipal

governments, LG Energy Solution and automaker Stellantis, to build the province's first large-scale electric battery manufacturing plant right in Windsor, Ontario.

These historic investments put our province on a path to becoming one of the most vertically integrated automotive jurisdictions in the emerging North American electrical vehicle market. As you can see, Speaker, we have a plan to provide urgent and much-needed relief at the pumps today while building a bright and exciting future for the auto industry tomorrow.

The legislation we're discussing here today is one part of our plan to keep costs down for families and for businesses, to make life more affordable, because we know that families and businesses want to use their hard-earned dollars for the priorities of their families or to invest in the success of their businesses, but inflationary pressures are making this increasingly difficult.

Perhaps in years past, discussion and debate about inflation largely happened among economists and in banks. But today, it is being discussed by friends and families around our dinner tables. Families and businesses want to know that governments are taking meaningful action to keep costs low and battle inflationary pressures. Our government is doing just that.

The bill we're discussing today is one part of our plan to keep costs down for families and for businesses. We've cut costs for millions of Ontario vehicle owners by refunding licence plate sticker renewal fees paid since March 2020 and eliminating licence plate renewal fees and plate stickers on a go-forward basis, saving vehicle owners that \$120 a year in southern Ontario and \$60 a year in northern Ontario for passenger and light commercial vehicles.

Speaker, we have permanently removed the tolls on Highways 412 and 418, effective April 5. This will help restore fairness and address gridlock for the Durham region. People and businesses told us, loud and clear, they thought that these tolls were wrong and unfair, and that is why we are removing them, so that people and businesses have more travel options and hard-earned money back in their pockets.

Again, Speaker, on the topic of keeping costs low for families, we also recently reached an agreement with the federal government for \$13.2 billion in funding for a Canada-wide early learning and child care system, providing Ontario families with children five years old and younger in participating licensed child care centres with up to 25% in savings to a minimum of \$12 a day, retroactive to April 1, 2022. This agreement will deliver an average of \$10-a-day child care for eligible children by September 2025.

We're also giving people a break this tax season through Ontario tax credits and benefits such as the Ontario Child Care Tax Credit, through which families can claim up to 75% of their eligible child care expenses, including for child care provided by child care centres, homes and camps. The Low-Income Workers Tax Credit is also helping keep taxes low for Ontarians by providing up to \$850 each year in Ontario personal income tax relief for lower-income workers.

Our jobs training tax credit is helping workers get training that may be needed for a career shift, retraining or to sharpen their skills. Our Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit is helping make seniors' homes safer and more accessible so they can stay in their homes longer. Through the Ontario Staycation Tax Credit for 2022, Ontario residents can claim 20% of their eligible 2022 accommodation expenses when they file their tax returns next year. The Tax Relief at the Pumps Act, 2022, which we are discussing today, builds on this plan to provide relief for families and for businesses.

Speaker, when it comes to affordability, we know that in addition to paying more at the pumps, housing affordability is something that is also top of mind for many people. Young families, seniors and workers are desperate for housing that meets their needs, but a lack of supply and rising costs have put the dream of home ownership out of reach for too many families in the province. That's why we have recently brought forward measures to crack down on foreign real estate speculation, with the most comprehensive non-resident speculation tax in Canada. We have increased the non-resident speculation tax rate to 20% and expanded the tax to apply province-wide to strengthen efforts to deter non-resident investors from speculating in Ontario's housing market. We also eliminated loopholes to support Ontarians who are trying to buy their first home, by focusing tax relief eligibility to only newcomers who commit to laying down roots in our province long-term.

This is one part of our government's plan to make it easier to buy a home, a plan that also includes protecting homebuyers and increasing housing supply. The More Homes for Everyone Act is built on recommendations from the Housing Affordability Task Force and the first-ever provincial-municipal housing summit. It includes both near-term solutions and long-term commitments to provide more attainable housing options for Ontario families.

Again, Speaker, in addition to keeping costs low for families, our bill to cut the gas and fuel tax will also help businesses such as delivery drivers and the heavy-duty transportation industry by providing tax relief on gas and fuel. This is part of a broader package of measures to keep costs low for businesses that includes, for example, supporting a reduction in Workplace Safety and Insurance Board premiums, allowing businesses to accelerate write-offs of capital investments for tax purposes, reducing the small business corporate income tax rate to 3.2%, lowering high business education tax rates for job creators and increasing the employer health tax exemption. Through these actions and more, the Ontario government is working to keep costs low for people and businesses.

Speaker, as I said, the Tax Relief at the Pumps Act, 2022, is part of our plan to keep costs low for families and businesses. It's going to cut the gas tax by 5.7 cents per litre and the fuel tax by 5.3 cents per litre for six months starting on July 1, putting money back into the pockets of people and businesses.

Having worked closely with the Premier, I know how seriously he takes the issues that affect people's pocket-books. I know how he feels about putting dollars back into

people's pockets to give them the options that they need so that they can spend that money on the priorities that are important to them and to their families. This is just another small part of that, just trying to do our part to make life more affordable for the people of Ontario.

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I'm so thankful for my colleagues at the Ministry of Finance, the minister himself and PA Michael Parsa from Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I've listened to the parliamentary assistants try to put lipstick on this bill. They've been extolling the virtues of a post-election tax cut at the pumps for six months—short-term gain, but still long-term pain at the pumps. Traditionally, a new government enters the honeymoon period after an election. If the government wins the next election, they'd like to take us on a honeymoon cruise with a small short-term cut in the price of a litre of gas.

But where's the beef, Speaker? What about the promise the Premier made in 2018 of a permanent cut of at least 10 cents a litre? Who's kidding who? Put lipstick on this bill, but it's still a pig in a poke—promises made; promises broken. Who do the PAs really believe will be fooled by this bait-and-switch approach to Ontario drivers?

Mr. Michael Parsa: I thank my honourable colleague for the question. Let me just start off by saying that gas taxes have not been cut in Ontario in 35 years. I just want to point out to my colleague, and all my colleagues sitting across, that for 15 years when the previous government sat here and they held the balance of power, they did absolutely nothing. They did nothing.

It took the Premier—through his actions, we have already reduced the gas tax and reduced the price by 4.3 cents a litre. This will further reduce the price by 5.7 cents a litre for six months, starting July 1 until the end of the year, on top of all the other initiatives—the removal of the licence plate renewal fee that the Minister of Transportation has already introduced.

Mr. Speaker, there is so much that our government is doing to make sure that life is more affordable for Ontarians. I hope that my honourable colleague and everybody in opposition supports it.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: I wanted to thank the members from Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill and Brantford–Brant for their presentations. We're all now, prior to the election, knocking on doors, and what I'm hearing at the door when I'm discussing this particular initiative is, "How does it fit into the government's overall plan to cut costs and keep life in the town of Whitby and the region of Durham affordable?"

I would like either the member from Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill or Brantford–Brant to talk more about the government's plan to make life more affordable, not only for the residents of the town of Whitby and the region of Durham but other parts of Ontario.

Mr. Will Bouma: First of all, I have to thank the member from Whitby for his tireless advocacy to get those tolls removed on Highways 412 and 418, because even though I live on the other side of the GTHA, it's a story that I heard about from him: just the unfairness of that. We realized that affordability is a crisis in the province of Ontario. It's a crisis across the entire country. We're seeing high inflation rates right now, and the time is now for governments to do those things that put money back into people's pockets.

We've listed off all the actions that we've taken, and this is just another tool in that toolbox of how we can make life more affordable for the people of Ontario. This will have a real and dramatic impact on the price that people are paying for fuel so that they can spend more to make a decision to put food in their fridge or to enjoy a vacation with their family, and I just think it's so important that we carry forward on that. Thank you for the question.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It has definitely been interesting sitting in the House listening to debate today, with the government talking about how they feel that they're making life better for people, but yet when we're talking to folks, we know that it's just the opposite and they're not feeling the benefits of the government's language.

They're rebating sticker money of \$120 per vehicle that people are starting to see hit their mailboxes, and they're really angry. They know that this is an election ploy, and now we're seeing another one that is in exactly the same format: a promise that is to come into place in July, only to last six months.

Why do they think they can pull the wool over Ontarians' eyes and that they don't know better? They really should, if they're going to do measures, make them real measures that are lasting and impactful.

Mr. Michael Parsa: I thank my honourable colleague for the question. You know what makes a real, tangible result in the lives of Ontarians, Mr. Speaker? When they go to the grocery store and they look at the shelf, and the cost of every single item does not increase because—

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Parsa: Absolutely, it will, once it reduces gas prices. Remember, the goods that are on the shelves are transported, right? As a business owner, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, the goods that are on the shelves are transported. It's just very simple that when you reduce costs, it has an impact on all Ontarians: individuals, families, businesses, our seniors. We are going to do everything we can to make sure that we make life more affordable for every single Ontarian, and this initiative is one that will have an effect on everybody in the province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): It's a little bit late, but I recall that one of the members said "pulling the wool over their eyes"—it's unparliamentary. I would ask the member to withdraw.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'll withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Thank you. I remind all members that you can't say anything that you shouldn't say, or we will try to catch it.

I will recognize the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: My wife has often said to me that when I leave this place I should write a book. Well, I'm very glad that I'm not a New Democrat, because the title of my book would have to be something like "my life as a pretzel" or something like that. They've got themselves so twisted up over there because on one hand they want us to raise the gas taxes and raise the carbon taxes, and we're bringing out real relief for families and businesses and people in the province of Ontario, and they're not sure what they want to do about it. So I say to my colleague from Oak Ridges—

Mr. Michael Parsa: Aurora, yes.

Mr. John Yakabuski:—Oak Ridges-Aurora, can you help me try to understand how the poor opposition is twisting themselves into knots in this? And maybe you could find out what they intend to do. Do they intend to vote for this bill or campaign against relief for Ontarians?

Mr. Michael Parsa: I thank my honourable colleague for the great question. I've got to tell you first, Mr. Speaker, if I ever do write a book about my life here in politics, he will definitely be picking the title of the book.

I tell you, when it comes to the opposition, he's right. Look, I know that the opposition has a role to play. There is no doubt about that. That's what makes the system so great. But at a time after two years when we have gone through some challenges in this province, our party and our government is doing everything we can to make life more affordable for the people of Ontario. This is the one time I think the opposition could dig deep to say, "We will support good initiatives like this." An initiative that makes life more affordable for every Ontarian is an easy one for the opposition to be able to support, Mr. Speaker. So I'm looking to my colleagues in the opposition to say: Will you be supporting or will you be voting against this bill that will make life affordable for every single Ontarian?

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

Miss Monique Taylor: I definitely drew the short stick on this one. There are many ways that they could be helping Ontarians, and we know this. Raising Ontario Works, Ontario disability—most of those folks will not see any of these savings. If the government wanted to give money back, if the government wanted to help Ontarians, they could have written a cheque to every resident under \$100,000, a \$200 cheque, and that would have truly helped Ontarians. But once again, they're helping their friends and they're ensuring that it is a very small group of folks who are going to receive that same savings as your sticker savings, because that's the way you believe is right—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Thank you. The member for Brantford–Brant.

Mr. Will Bouma: We're switching it up this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, but I'm pleased to be able to answer that question. What the member doesn't seem to be able to

understand in her question is that when you lower the price of fuel, when you lower the price of transportation, you make the price of everything lower, which means that the most vulnerable people in the province of Ontario will see a trickle-down decrease in the costs that they have to pay for things also—which will make a difference at the grocery store, which will make a difference at the drug store. It will make a difference when they're picking up clothes and when they're doing all of those things.

1550

This is just one of the pieces that we are bringing across. I appreciate the fact that the member said that there are many things that we are doing for the people of Ontario. I appreciate the question and the debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize a point of order from the member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Yes, I'd like to correct my record. Earlier in an across-the-aisle discussion with the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, I suggested the cheque I received for my rebate on my licence plate was from the President of the Treasury Board. He said it was from the Minister of Finance. Of course, cabinet members have shuffled and it is the member from Pickering–Uxbridge who is now the Minister of Finance. That is who signed my rebate. Of course, I can't vote for him because I don't live there.

Just further to that, Speaker—

Interjection.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you for that opportunity to correct my record. Although I won't be writing a book, I know the lyrics to a song:

Promises, promises
You knew you'd never keep
Promises, promises
Why do I believe.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): All members are entitled to correct their record. Thank you.

Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's certainly a pleasure to join the debate on Bill 111 today, the so-called Tax Relief at the Pumps Act. I think the member from Windsor–Tecumseh actually has given us a new title to really speak to the nature of this bill, and when he said it was lipstick on a pig, no offence to pigs.

This is really a very—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I wasn't talking to you, Yak.

I just also want to take this moment to tell you how much we are going to really miss the member from Windsor–Tecumseh. He brings such gravitas to this House. He brings really very positive relationships across the aisle and within our own caucus, which is worth noting, and we are definitely going to miss him. I just want to say how much we're going to miss you.

It's been interesting. I just commuted this morning from North Bay; got on a plane at 10 o'clock, got on the UP

Express and then got on the TTC. There are some public transit options that exist in this province. It also is worth noting that that commute from North Bay took me less than it sometimes takes from Kitchener–Waterloo to Toronto. It took about three hours and 15 minutes. My longest commute from KW to Toronto is four hours and 37 minutes. Quite honestly, the roads and the traffic and the congestion prior to the pandemic was certainly significant.

There are people who have public transit options in this province, and then there are people who don't. It is worth noting what this bill actually does, because there were some really grand statements made by the members of the government earlier today. I think it is worth noting that Bill 111 will temporarily lower the amount of tax the government collects per litre of gasoline from July to December 2022.

You will also note, Speaker, that this is the honeymoon time after the election. This is also a good point made by my colleague and friend from Windsor–Tecumseh. It is worth noting, as well, that the Premier was questioned about the timing of this, and he said he just couldn't get it done now. Which actually is not entirely correct, because what this province is able to do around reclaiming costs and changing the finances through the Treasury Board and the finance ministry is quite astounding.

For instance, if you are on ODSP, you're allowed to work a certain amount of hours just to subsidize your pitiful amount that the province gives you as someone who is disabled and has limited abilities to work. The government will claw back that extra hour, that extra two hours. They can claw back \$10, claw back \$15. It is amazing what a government can do when there is no power, when that power imbalance is actually acknowledged.

Even at committee last week on Bill 106, when we found we had the ability to question the Deputy Minister of Finance and the various other deputy ministers, I made the point that this government gave out \$210 million to companies and businesses that did not qualify for the small business grant. That money went to businesses that were doing quite well. That money went to businesses that weren't even located in Ontario. In fact, some of those businesses were not even in Canada. Yet the deputy minister said to me, "It would be unfair, really, to try to get back that money." Well, \$210 million is still a lot of money.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs has actually had to say to municipalities, who, I must say—after Bill 109, there's a little tension between the minister and the municipalities, especially after himself and the member from Hamilton—

Interjection: Flamborough–Glanbrook.

Ms. Catherine Fife: —Flamborough–Glanbrook said that municipalities haven't been doing their jobs on housing. So there is a lot of tension now between the Minister of Municipal Affairs and members who stand in their place and cast blame on the lower-tier governments.

But I will say, the minister has had to say that he is going to have to subsidize the loss of revenue through Bill

111 to the tune of \$120 million. So it is amazing what can happen in this House and what cannot happen.

Just so that the very few people who are watching right now, which includes my parents from Peterborough—according to the government officials—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Put a sock in it. Really, come on. Let me speak. I'm not heckling you. Just let me get my point on—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Order.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's \$45 directly to the gas pumps, \$15 indirect from lower consumer prices, \$5 in reduced tax takings from the HST. This will actually result in \$65.

You will remember, people who have been paying attention to what has come out of the Premier's mouth on various occasions—promises made, promises not kept—that he did promise to reduce gas prices by 10 cents a litre at the very beginning in the last election.

Many of us are very aware, Mr. Speaker, that the election is in 28 days. You, of course, are not going to be running for re-election, and I just want to wish you the best in your retirement. I know that you're going to miss this place, and I also know that you've done a great deal of work. I know that you have a great relationship with Windsor–Tecumseh, and you've done some charity work. I want to commend you for doing that. You'll actually have more time to do that after this election.

At the time of this announcement, though, with regard to Bill 111, the government officials would not reveal how much the six-month gas and fuel tax reduction will cost, saying that the costs will be in the upcoming budget—which, of course, leaves me to ask: When will the province of Ontario table the 2022 budget? Because, as you know, Mr. Speaker, we were promised in the transparency and accountability act that a budget would be tabled each and every year in this Legislature by March 31, which makes a lot of sense. It was a guarantee; it was this government's promise to the people of Ontario that they would not be like the Liberals. As the former finance critic, when the Liberals were in power, it was literally like chasing money down a deep black hole.

The transparency piece was welcomed. It was welcomed by government agencies. It was welcomed by the not-for-profit sector. In fact, even in North Bay yesterday, I had the opportunity to meet with Amelia Rising, which is a women's sexual assault centre. They have had to lay off nine workers because they do not have a budget from this government. So when the government puts forward a promise like, "We will honour the financial transparency and fiscal responsibility that we actually put in legislation"—and as you'll know, Mr. Speaker, they also made a promise that if they did not table that budget by March 31, they would pay a portion of their salary and pay a fine. But they put out in a piece of legislation just three weeks ago that removed that responsibility from them as the Premier and as the finance minister, who I hope is recovering nicely from COVID, and they alleviated their responsibility as ministers of the crown. They no longer paid a fine

for not putting forward a budget. They no longer made a promise that that budget would even be tabled in due course.

1600

Now, the finance minister will be speaking, I believe, at the Empire Club, perhaps this upcoming week. Perhaps we will find out when budget 2022 will be tabled at that point. But I want all of you to know on that side of the House that budgets matter, and by delaying your budget, you are negatively impacting some of the more vulnerable people in this province who, by now, after almost four years of this Ford government, have become accustomed to being disrespected and being discarded. And that is exactly what is happening by not tabling a budget in a responsible manner and honouring your responsibilities as cabinet ministers to the people of this province and to ensure that those agencies, that those not-for-profits who do the front-line work in this province, have the resources to do so.

You want to talk about affordability; you want to talk about accountability, but it actually takes action to make that happen. The fact that Amelia Rising, which I'm sure is actually happening in all of our ridings across this province—and we do know. North Bay is no exception. Domestic violence is up; resources for those very agencies are down. We learned yesterday that that Amelia Rising has only seen a \$20,000 increase since 1994—1994. They have stretched the dollars as far as they can stretch them. In fact, because of COVID and because they don't have eyes on the ground, they've actually had to move online because of the pandemic. Much work has to be done in this regard, Mr. Speaker.

Schedule 1 amends the Fuel Tax Act. Schedule 2 amends the Gasoline Tax Act. Ontario does have a gas tax program that supports public transit in Ontario municipalities. Two cents of every litre, as you know, of the gas tax goes directly to municipalities via the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. There was no consultation, also. This is a really big thing. I've said it many times to Liberals over the last 10 years that I've been here, but process matters. If you're designing a piece of legislation, at the very least you should talk to the people who are directly impacted by that legislation. This piece of legislation blindsided municipalities.

What is missing actually, as well, is the timing of Bill 111 demonstrates that it is just one more attempt on this government to cynically try to say to the people of the province now, "We care about you," after four years. The cost of everything has gone up, not just gasoline. In February 2022, the cost of all items had increased by 6.1%. Food increased by 7.4% and shelter costs increased by 7.2%. There are mechanisms where this government could truly alleviate the cost pressures that Ontarians are facing.

Just yesterday, I was walking in downtown North Bay and I went into this lovely place, the oldest shoe store in Ontario. I talked to Liza, and she said that she spent \$7.99 on a pack of three romaine lettuces—\$7.99 for three lettuces. She was outraged, and she wasn't really impressed as well with \$65 some time between July and

December, getting that cost relief for her gas. You know what she would really like? She'd really like that Northlander. She really would. She is elderly. Her family is in southwestern Ontario. She'd love to not have to drive. She would love to be able to get on a train and make her way down to southern Ontario to visit her family, and she should have that.

The Liberals took it away. And I'll never forget—you all were sitting on this side of the House with us as well and we were all equally outraged that the Northlander had been cancelled. I remember the former Attorney General—do you remember—she made a little face and she said, “They can all take cars.” Just like Marie Antoinette: They can all eat cake. “Let them eat cake”—forget the bread.

That sort of disconnect, I think, is truly alarming because it demonstrates that the government is operating in isolation. It's really focused on these sort of gimmicky little promises like the cancellation of the licence stickers. My folks got this. My friend Annie got it. They have four cars. They have four cars because their kids are still there, because the kids can't find housing. I think she got over \$500. She's like, “This is ridiculous. I would rather have a doctor in Waterloo. I would rather be able to access PCR testing in a pandemic.” She's a teacher: “I would rather my classroom have a HEPA filter.”

Really, what we are seeing is a neglect of responsibility of the government, because the choices that you are making are not parallel or not aligned with the priorities of the people of this province.

If you were really focused on some of the costs that Ontarians are facing, you would have really approached the issue of auto insurance with some integrity. It's really quite something that the article “Brampton Council Renews Calls on Ford Government for ‘Fair Deal’ on Auto Insurance Rates for Residents”—this is just from February 24, 2022. It goes on to say that—this is a Toronto Star article—“However, Brampton council believes rates are still way too high and have renewed their call on the Ontario government under current Premier Doug Ford to end so-called ‘postal code discrimination.’” We have been hearing this in this Legislature for years. I know it's close to a decade for me but I know some of my colleagues have been here longer.

“Brampton city council asks that the government of Ontario bring Bill 42, the Ending Discrimination in Automobile Insurance Act forward, to make life equitable and more affordable for Brampton residents”—Bill 42 had been tabled actually by a Conservative federal MP. So even a federal MP, who is a Conservative, recognizes that auto insurance rates are debilitating, that they are impacting that consumer confidence in investing in Ontario, that it is cost-prohibitive for businesses to continue, especially if they are in the trucking industry. The trucking sector has said, “Listen. This is not sustainable.” Does the Ford government bring forward a bill that truly addresses the skyrocketing auto insurance rates? Of course they don't. They bring you \$65, after the election—here's the voting poll.

It really is cynical politics at its worse. It reminds me, quite honestly, of the former Liberal government. It truly does. Near the end of their term—you'll remember this, Mr. Speaker—the former Premier Kathleen Wynne was promising free child care—free. I remember meeting with some advocates and they said, “We never, ever thought someone would say ‘free child care.’” I was, like, “They can say whatever they want right now.” There's a reason why the Liberals are down to seven seats. They said things like that and they compromised the trust and confidence in the government of the day.

And so \$65—I'll say, when I was walking down the streets of North Bay and I met with a group called Boots on the Ground in the parking lot of Tim Hortons, we just stayed there and we listened to what they're doing. They are getting food, they're getting medicine, sometimes they're getting clothing for people who are homeless. There's no room in any shelter. There was not even a warming centre in North Bay. People are hurting through frostbite. They lost fingers. This is not the best that we can do, Mr. Speaker. I raise that because, when you see that kind of pain and you see that kind of real neglect of a citizenry—there are people who were sleeping in the doorsteps of businesses, and, of course, the businesses don't want that. But the small businesses have recognized that when you do not care or take care of the health and well-being of citizens, it impacts their business.

1610

The police survey: I met with a professor at Nipissing University, a great institution. She said, “Listen, you can't ignore a problem away.” It was really profound. You just can't stop—you can pretend not to see people who are hurting, people who don't have houses, people who can't find jobs, people who have mental health and addiction issues. You can pretend that they're not there. But when you're going into your business and you have to step over somebody who is sleeping there, I guess that's the turning point.

But the Boots on the Ground folks really said housing—affordable housing. Now, certainly Bill 109 is not the answer on this, Mr. Speaker, but this government has talked a lot about housing starts, about “the most housing starts ever.” If you are building unaffordable housing, if those housing starts are still unaffordable, then it is not the solution. It is not the solution.

This was never a government that would ever contemplate purpose-built, affordable housing or housing geared to income or, as we had proposed, options for seniors so that they can actually stay in the home with some dignity, with some integrity, by having a nationalized home care program whereby the profit margin is removed, and the people who do the caring are actually cared for and respected through their wages and through their working conditions, recognized for the professionals that they are.

So I have to say I learned a lot in North Bay. I feel very fortunate to have met with the chamber, to have met with the BIA. I met with some small business folks. Sometimes you have to get out of your own community. We all have

different issues in our communities, and I think our northern members have done a very good job of educating us, as MPPs, about the unique challenges they face. But interconnectivity is really off the radar for some northern and rural communities and, certainly, off the radar of this Ford government.

The fact that Brampton council has renewed their calls on this government to address the auto insurance rates for residents, asking for a fair deal, is not an insignificant thing. They are asking you, as provincial legislators, to honour your federal Conservative MP who has brought forward a bill, and it's really a call to action. It's a call to action. You've just continued on the same path that the Liberals have done. So that's where that is.

Our members have brought forward many options. I think at the beginning of the pandemic there was this sense that we're all in this together. Clearly we are not. We're not all in this together: Some of us fight for greater social services, affordable housing; some of us defend golf courses. The golf course in Oakville has been saved, awards were given, a party was thrown. This is not a priority for the people of this province, who have gone through two years of extreme challenges, both from a physical health perspective and from a mental health perspective—and, certainly, our small businesses.

If the government was serious about addressing some of these cost pressures that Ontarians are facing right now—the auto insurance sector was given a free pass by the Liberals, and then you doubled down on that free pass. You did. Certainly, our members—first, I'm going to quote. First of all, I'm going to say, “Some companies have been approved,” just in this year, “for rate increases as high as 11.05%, while other consumers may see a slight increase of 0.02%. Overall, 21 companies”—21 insurance companies—were approved by FSRA to increase, “which represents almost half of the auto insurance market.” And, “This comes a year after the Ford government surveyed the public for changes they hoped to see with their insurance companies.”

In fact, in your call-out to the insurance companies from the provincial government, you said, “Your feedback will help us identify ways to responsibly lower rates, cut red tape and put drivers first.” But then, of course, the Insurance Bureau of Canada says it's unrealistic to expect insurance companies to lower their rates without taking into account the costs of running their businesses. Well, for two years, there were so few cars on the roads—and on another issue, commercial insurance also went up during the pandemic when businesses were shut down. But cars were stuck in driveways. They weren't doing that two- or three-hour commute that I was talking about earlier. So their costs were not increasing, but the insurance rates went up, in some cases, by 11%.

Our member from Humber River–Black Creek, an outstanding member who has been relentless on this issue, MPP Rakocevic, says—and this is a quote from the same article: “There is actually no proof, and insurance companies have not provided enough evidence to the public to justify high insurance rates.” Do you know who

knows that this is true? Drivers in the province of Ontario, for sure. For 10 years, the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association have come to the finance committee and they have demonstrated with data, with evidence, and they have proven this point. It goes on to say, “Ontario residents are paying massive amounts despite having the lowest claims per capita. This system is unfair. It is clear that the other parties are on side of the insurers.”

So pick a side. I think that's the message from us: Pick a side. You're either on the side of the people of this province, the drivers in this instance, or you're not, because when car insurance goes up by 11%, that is so much more than \$65 versus the other options.

“Bill 90 would have reduced the cost of insurance for Ontario drivers, but was voted down by the Conservative government.

“The bill charged companies reached ‘levels of excessive profitability’—which is true—“and consumers almost certainly have paid too much for their insurance coverage,” which is true. This was from the Toronto Observer and I think gives us a good perspective, really. The government members are talking a lot about drivers, and if they were really on the side of drivers, they would address the highest cost that drivers face, which is their insurance.

I'm really encouraged to see that the media has weighed in on Bill 11. This is from Wednesday, April 6. Is that today? That's today, right? This is from the Hamilton Spectator and it reads as follows—I love this title: “Doug Ford's gas tax promise is the very definition of political chutzpah.” Just for Hansard, chutzpah is spelled c-h-u-t-z-p-a-h.

“Chutzpah, it has been said”—a very good question: What's the definition?—“is that quality of sheer shamelessness ...” Chutzpah translates or is often thought of as the quality of sheer shamelessness displayed by someone and, in this case, the government of Ontario. It goes on to say—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: You can't find the sock? I thought you were looking for the sock.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Order.

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: As of Monday—

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: You'll get your chance to have a go, but in the meantime look for the sock.

“As of Monday, we can now offer a new definition of political chutzpah: a politician who solemnly promises to cut a tax just before an election, and then claims he's fulfilled that promise by doing it four years later on the eve of yet another vote.” Once again, this is from the Hamilton Spectator from just earlier today.

Mr. John Yakabuski: A big supporter of ours.

Ms. Catherine Fife: “This is truly shameless, indeed.” Listen, the media doesn't need to be a supporter of any government or of any party. They just need to relay the facts to people and to the electorate, and this is—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I'll remind both to come through the Chair, please, with their comments.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Speaker, this is exactly what I'm talking about to you today.

"This is truly shameless, indeed. Yet it's exactly what Doug Ford is doing with Ontario's provincial election now less than two months away.

"The Ford government is promising to cut the province's tax on gasoline by 5.7 cents a litre—a move he says will fulfill its pledge back in 2018 to reduce the tax by 10 cents....

"The kicker is that the reduction won't take effect until July 1, four weeks after the election scheduled for June 2. And it will last only until December 31."

1620

So what people have wanted from this government is a long-term, sustainable, reliable strategy, not a pilot project on how to reduce the cost of gas. It goes on to say, "So the message could hardly be more cynical or more shameless: We told you four years ago that if you elected us we'd cut gas taxes by 10 cents. We didn't actually do that, but now we're promising that if you elect us again we'll do what we promised to do four years ago—but only for a while. Chutzpah, indeed."

This is right up there with the buck-a-beer, I think.

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you for the chuckle.

This is a very populous measure that you're taking. I'll give you that. You've got some marketing company or branding company that's coming up with these ideas.

It goes on to say, "Nice for some. But it's important to remember that all of these vote-buying gestures come with real costs." I'm going to circle back to that, because the Financial Accountability Officer today came out with some stunning data on the province of Ontario and our pitiful level of program spending.

It goes on to say, "Some of those are clear. Cancelling sticker fees will cost the province more than a billion dollars in lost revenue, and the CBC News reports that the gas tax cut will deprive the treasury of another \$645 million."

Now, just like that \$210 million I referenced earlier that went to companies and businesses that didn't qualify—I think \$210 million is a lot of money. I think that \$645 million is a lot of money.

The other thing that I think is important to note is that we don't even really know if this is going to happen. You see, because, in order for it to happen, it would actually, literally have to be embedded in the budget. It would have to be accounted for so it would show on the books that the province will not see \$645 million in revenue. We can't double-check that because we don't have a budget. If you want to tell me what the budget date is, I'm certainly looking forward to it, as are all of those not-for-profits and provincially funded agencies that are waiting on budget 2022.

It goes on to say, "That's not nothing, especially at a time when the demands on the public purse have never

been higher. The pandemic has exposed how threadbare many public services have become, especially in health care. Reducing revenues by upwards of \$1.6 billion"—this is a combination of the sticker fee and now this somewhat promise of tax relief—"makes it that much harder for the province to, for example, hire more nurses or open more intensive care beds."

I'm just going to pivot for a second, because that is the word of the year, but in today's press conference, which I always pay attention to, the Premier was asked a question, because today, on April 6, Ontario reported a 40% increase in COVID hospitalizations over the last seven days—a 40% increase over the last seven—

Mr. John Yakabuski: It went down today.

Ms. Catherine Fife: No, this is from four hours ago.

Asked to comment, Premier Ford stated, "Everyone can stay calm." Just stay calm. It's okay. "The province purchased thousands of hospital beds so I'm confident one will be available when you need it."

This talk about buying a bed: A bed is not open, a bed is not available to you—and I wish you all the best of health—if you don't have a nurse. And I can tell you, the nurses are coming here tomorrow, and they've got a few things to say to you, because you have disrespected them so greatly with Bill 124 that not only are you pushing them out of the sector, you're discouraging the nurses from entering the field.

I was speaking to some third-year community nursing students at Nipissing on Monday—I think it was Monday. Catherine Boudreau is a professor there; she was retiring. This was the first time the class was able to interact, because a lot of these classes, as you know, have been online. Some of them told me about the program where the government encouraged nursing students to come into the hospital. One nursing student told me that the PSW beside her was making \$23 an hour, while this student nurse was making \$16.50 an hour, and was not actually able to do anything. That's actually not the way, with some confidence, you build up a serious nursing shortage that we have in Ontario. They're very concerned as well, as nurses, as community care nurses, by some of the comments that the health minister has said.

I do wish the health minister well in her retirement as she moves out of this place, and I'm sure she'll stay involved in public service. But when the health minister did say, "Listen, we're going to create some private health care options over here, and that's going to alleviate the pressure on the hospital system over here"—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: You still can't find that sock.

So when she said very clearly—I mean, it's a matter of public record—"We're going to create this parallel health care system"—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke will come to order.

Ms. Catherine Fife:—"We're going to get this parallel health care system over here" that people can pay for and they can jump to the head of the line, do you know

who's very concerned about that? Nursing students, because there's a double standard here with the privatization of health care, which is clearly happening in Ontario, versus the public, so-called universal system.

I just wanted to relay, when the Premier says, "Everyone stay calm. The province purchased thousands of hospital beds"—those hospital beds will never be open without a nurse. So that third-year class at Nipissing—I think they have some legitimate concerns about your cuts to public health earlier in the pandemic, which obviously had a detrimental effect on the people of this province. Public health was cut prior to the pandemic. It definitely was. And actually being prepared for a cycle of viruses that epidemiologists have talked about—you know who hasn't talked about it, though, is the medical officer of health, Mr. Kieran Moore. We can't find him. He did say that he would come back and make—

Mr. John Yakabuski: I've been looking for Andrea.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Andrea? Don't you worry. She's doing her job.

But the medical officer of health for the province of Ontario said that if the cases rose to a certain level, he would come back and he would report back to the people of Ontario. So where is he? If we're seeing a 40% increase in COVID hospitalizations—because that is the measure of most concern—over the last seven days, where is Dr. Moore? I put that out there for your consideration, because I do think that the people of this province would benefit from hearing from Dr. Moore about these high rates.

I wanted to get that on the record, that if you're looking to address some of the primary concerns of the people of this province around affordability, around accessibility and around public services, a really good place to start would be to repeal Bill 124. I'm actually genuinely surprised, just to be quite honest with you, that you haven't repealed it. You've tinkered around the edges a little bit here and there. You've tweaked some things. But Bill 124 is so fundamentally offensive to the profession, and also, not just from the personal perspective of nurses—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm sorry?

Mr. John Yakabuski: June 2. Everybody gets their chance.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke will come to order.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Bill 124 is so fundamentally offensive, not only from the personal level of nurses, who genuinely feel disrespected, but also it's poor public health policy for a health care system which really requires a number of people to come in.

Just to return and finish off on the tax promise—and this is still from the article that says, "Doug Ford's Gas Tax Promise is the Very Definition of Political Chutzpah." The article goes on to say, "All these governments are making a choice: to give one group (drivers) a small but highly visible benefit"—after the election—"rather than focus public resources on strengthening services for everyone." So these are choices. I mean, this is not a

surprise for you. It is a choice. You're making bad choices, bad, bad choices.

"Singling out motorists for favourable treatment has the perverse effect of incentivizing driving and encouraging fuel consumption at a time when the warnings about climate change have never been louder. It undercuts all the fine words from governments about shifting to more efficient sources of energy.

1630

"That's bad enough"—it goes on to say—"But in Ontario the government is adding insult to injury by counting on voters to simply forget the broken promises of the past."

Once again, this is from today's Hamilton Spectator.

I raise some of these issues, because the government has talked a lot about the cost of living. And when I was talking to those good folks in North Bay yesterday—they obviously have huge concerns about the direction that the government is going, particularly, I will say, for seniors. The demographics in this election should be of some concern to some people on that side of the House. But seniors have really had a fire lit, if you will. They are now coming to our office and saying—the Till Death Do Us Part act, for instance, the petition to try to keep married couples together: This was an easy win for you, and you let it die in committee after prorogation, and you refused to deal with it. Married couples who are seniors don't want to be separated when they go into long-term care. In fact, they're not really big on going into long-term care, because do you know what they think about long-term care? They think they're going to get very poor care there, especially if it's a for-profit centre. What they really want, and what they said to me on the doorstep, is that they would love to be assured that they would have a minimum standard of care, for instance, so that they can stay in their home. Seniors don't want to go into an assisted-living situation, nor do they want to be locked in their rooms, basically in solitary confinement, for an extended period of time.

The issue, though, about gas prices has come up from our caucus by our member from Timmins and also our member from Sudbury. And I want to say that our member from Sudbury has been very vocal on this, because, really, when you look at the map and you see the disparity of what the cost of gas is in southern Ontario versus northern Ontario, it's incredible. The difference is incredible. The disparity is insulting. Our member from Sudbury says, "We have to do something about gas prices"—in a sustainable way—"and everyone in Sudbury knows that if you drive toward North Bay you're going to save 10 cents"—but—"when the government tells me competitiveness keeps the prices down, I don't see that and the people of Sudbury don't see that either."

Our Timmins MPP is heading the effort and told sudbury.com last year that people in northern Ontario are charged more for gas "simply because they can." So you have been permissive or complicit in these high gas prices for northern communities.

"The NDP's bill would fix the maximum price of fuels so they are the same across the province, with changes

made on a weekly basis by factoring crude oil value, the cost of refining, transportation and room for profit.

“By having the Ontario Energy Board regulate the retail price and wholesale mark-up of petroleum products ... the price discrepancies northern Ontarians experience on a regular basis would be eliminated.”

Now, did you do this? No, you didn't. You brought in a pilot project for \$65 after the election. People in Sudbury, in Thunder Bay, in North Bay would love to see a sustainable strategy on a go-forward basis, and people are seeing this day in and day out.

I have to say, aside from our call to repeal Bill 124, to address the buying of the beds, it's genuinely surprising that this government just dropped this—I think it was just yesterday or the day before—and it will be done. You have a majority government, which is always very amusing to me. You won't have it after June 2, I have to tell you. In fact, do you know what it feels like? It feels very much like the Liberals last time. I remember walking over to Steven Del Duca, and I said, “Listen, can we get this vulnerable road users legislation passed, because you guys have only got three more weeks.” He said to me, “Don't worry, Catherine. We'll take care of it after the election.” Well, he was gone, and Eleanor McMahon was gone—actually, everybody was gone, except for seven people. When you lose the trust of people we serve, when you talk more about their pockets than people, they don't like it.

And do you know what else they don't like—and they know this for sure—is that Ontario's total revenue per capita was the second lowest in Canada. The last thing we need, especially given the state of the health care system, is a gas tax reduction that would decrease revenue. You haven't shown us what the decrease—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I see your money. You've got lots of money; you don't need to be here.

“Total revenues per capita in Ontario were \$11,030 in 2020, well below the average of \$13,000 in the rest of Canada.” That's not a small amount, I have to say.

But more significantly, if you will—and you'll remember that the Financial Accountability Officer of the Legislature is an independent officer of the Legislature and not influenced by any political party. His sole job is to review the books and to project where the spending has gone, or where it hasn't gone. And, boy, we have discovered so many issues where the money has not gone—those federal tax credits, especially during the pandemic, that were supposed to go to alleviate the pressure on the health care system, that were supposed to go to long-term care, which were supposed to address the child care crisis, which you finally got around to about a week ago. But, in the slide deck from the FAO, “Ontario's program spending per capita is consistently among the lowest in the country.”

You used to talk about this in the House. I remember it. You used to address then-Finance Minister Charles Sousa, and you used to say, “Why are we so far behind? Why is Ontario failing to meet the needs of the people of this province?”

But what did this government do? What did the Ford government do? They doubled down on those Liberal

strategies of not addressing the real cost of delivering public services, like health care, like long-term care, like children and community services and our public education system in Ontario, which was, I will note—Ontario's education system was shut down for the longest period of time in the entire country. Those four months—four months, Mr. Speaker, of finance committee meetings that we held at the very beginning of the pandemic, when the HVAC sector and the environmental health science sector said to us, “Listen, if you want to ensure that local economies stay strong, if you want to ensure that our classrooms are healthy and that air quality is factored into the health and safety of all students so that schools don't have to shut down, we're ready, we're willing and we're able to meet that need.” The HEPA filter system in this province in our school system is one of the worst in Canada. I think the Minister of Education throws out 44,000 or somewhat; only one in five classrooms in the Waterloo Region District School Board has a HEPA filter in the year 2022.

“Ontario per capita program spending was at \$11,794 in 2020, lower than the rest of Canada average of \$13,754.” This is a long-standing pattern of underspending on public health. You've just really followed through in the Liberal footsteps. You followed their path, you continued on with the Liberals for a good deal of time.

“Ontario has above average education spending per capita and the lowest health and ‘other’ spending.” It's important to note that Ontario's education spending average is only slightly higher than the rest of Canada, and that just happened through the pandemic.

“Ontario's budget deficit was modestly below the rest of Canada average.”

So, really, some huge concerns about where the money is going but also, possibly more importantly, where the money is not going.

I think it's worth noting that this is a government who—one of the first things you ever did in this House was freeze the minimum wage. Economists, including a Nobel Prize-winning economist, cited that offering a fair minimum wage to low-wage workers is actually one of the best ways to stimulate the economy, not, as the Premier claimed, that it would be a job killer. The Premier has some very selective quotes to come out at certain times.

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Bill 111: I have some faith that the people of this province will see through it. They need support; they have some support. They will see, with clear eyes, what this is. In my estimation, this is cynical politics at its worst. I should have actually called this “the good, the bad and the ugly.” The good was very little, as you know, Mr. Speaker. But there's an ugliness to dropping a piece of legislation like this 28 days before an election starts, promising relief after the election and not addressing some of the core cost pressure points that drivers are facing, which would be auto insurance in Ontario—ignoring that problem and shining a little \$65 cheque over here and saying, “We're going to give you this after the election.” I think that is something that I would have expected, really, from the Liberals, Mr. Speaker, if I'm being honest.

There certainly is a lot to be said about the delay in the budget. I'm surprised, actually, that people are so engaged in this question about why the budget is delayed. I think that people understand how important those—your average family, my parents, Monique's parents—they have to sort of budget. They look at how much money they have. They look at where they're going to invest. They look at what they're going to spend. Then they look at the money that's coming in and they make decisions.

What this government has said is, "We're going to spend \$100 million just writing cheques for people for the rebate on the sticker fee"—\$100 million you spent, just writing the cheques on that promise. Of course people are happy to get a little bit of money, but at the end of the day they also want to find a doctor. They also want to find a bed that actually has a nurse attached to it. Parents want to make sure that their children have an air filtration system in their classroom, a HEPA filter.

Mr. John Yakabuski: They do.

Ms. Catherine Fife: No, they don't. One in five—I already told you. Pay attention. Only one in five classrooms in the Waterloo Region District School Board have that. So I think, combined with the high cost of housing, the high cost of food and the high cost of auto insurance—if you truly understood and paid attention to what people are saying to you on the ground, then you would have brought forward a piece of legislation that was more respectful, actually, of the cost of living.

Your promises on hydro rates—and this was obviously a pivotal issue in the last election. I remember talking to a lady who was getting up at midnight to do laundry for her children.

This is from February 16, 2022: The PCs "insist they have already kept their cornerstone campaign pledge to lower electricity bills by 12%—even though rates have risen"—once again, good information coming from the Financial Accountability Office on some of these plans.

It was interesting for me to read because I actually had missed this part: "The FAO spoke with staff at the Ministry of Energy and was informed that the government does not intend to lower electricity bills by 12% from 2018 levels." This is really key. "That means the Progressive Conservatives are using as a benchmark the previous Liberal government's Fair Hydro Plan"—which you raged against, but now that's your benchmark—"projections of where rates were headed."

Obviously, with a provincial election very close, the Tories are mindful that rising hydro rates played a significant role in their toppling of the former Liberals. So now this is a very sensitive touch point for this government, the hydro rates, because you can spend \$100 million cutting a lot of cheques for licence sticker fees and you can promise \$65 for gas relief after the election, but at the end of the day, everybody gets their hydro bill, and that hydro bill has not gone down. It has not. For folks who are on fixed income, the residential electricity bill rose by 4.3% from 2018 to 2021. This is yet another promise that was not kept.

My friend and colleague from Toronto–Danforth, who was quoted in this very good article from the Toronto Star,

said that this is an "indictment of both the Tories and the Liberals," and I agree with the member from Toronto–Danforth. This is a direct quote: "The FAO makes it clear that the scheme Ford put forward was always magic beans, smoke and mirrors and a shell game. It was built to be a façade, not to lower hydro bills."

Topping this as well is that the government has not realized that the smart money, the good investment is on conservation programs, like REEP, for instance. If the government had embraced conservation, we would not have these high rates right now. If you incentivize the REEP program—and just to remind you, Mr. Speaker, the REEP program does an assessment of your costs in your house or your business. In order to enter this program, which you don't have, you would get a tax incentive to move forward and hire a local contractor to address your furnace, to address your roof, to address your windows. This is good on so many levels. Do you know? Because you can't contract out those jobs to China. These are good local jobs by skilled workers, and there's a consumer protection piece in there because you're not paying money under the table. You're paying over the table, so you must be using a certified worker.

You know what else is good about it? That worker pays taxes and so there is revenue that comes into the Ontario coffers. The consumer is protected, the government does well by this incentive and less energy is used. It's like a win-win-win. Does the Ford government think about those options? No, they don't. They want to spend \$100 million writing cheques to the people of this province ahead of an election so that they can buy votes. That's how people have said they feel. They feel disrespected by it, I have to say.

So this article goes on to say, "Instead of lowering hydro bills, Ford hiked them. Ontarians are still paying the unfairly high prices caused by the"—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Excuse me. Sorry to interrupt the member, but the term "buy votes" is not parliamentary, so I would ask you to withdraw.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I withdraw.

It goes on to say that, "Instead of lowering hydro bills, Ford hiked them. Ontarians are still paying the unfairly high prices caused by the Steven Del Duca government and the selling off Hydro One, and" the Ford government "has done nothing to fix that."

There is a sense, I think, that people are starting to wake up. They really are, especially when you knock on doors. You have taken a tough situation for the people of this province and you have dramatically made it worse. You had a majority government. You could have done the right thing right from the very beginning. You had carte blanche to transform the energy sector, and you made a choice not to do that. Given your bluster and your lamenting when you were on this side of the House about what you would do, you did not. It absolutely comes down to choices.

I think at the end of the day, when you look at the pitiful program spending on public services, and when you look at the track record of this government of freezing the minimum wage, removing \$6,000 from front-line workers

during a pandemic, and when you look at where you have invested your time and energy, I think the people of this province have very good reason to cast doubt when they cast their votes.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: After a sock-ectomy, I'm ready to go here. I did want to thank the member from Waterloo for her speech today. She's covered just about—I might need three of these rounds because, my God, she was everywhere.

She started to talk about food prices. Now, the member from Waterloo has been around long enough to know how economics works. So the price of food on your plate is so much impacted by the price of fuel, whether it's the work on the farm, the tractors, the transportation to get the workers to the farm, the transportation to harvest the products and then get the products to market, or the transportation to get them to the stores. Speaker, we're lowering gas prices, which is going to have 5.7 cents on your fuel and 5.3 cents on diesel. That is absolutely connected to the price of food.

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I ask the member: Do you not understand that simple economics?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I thank the member for mansplaining how economics works in the province of Ontario. "Mansplaining" is when you talk down to a member who has actually been here a long time, and who actually understands the cost drivers of how the economy works.

Fuel—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Then show it, then.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Well, I would urge you, as the member, to actually look at Mississauga city council, which has actually asked this government—they've officially requested, Speaker—that you remove the trucks off the 401 and put them on the 407. So don't give the 407 another billion-dollar buy-off. Let's make use of our current infrastructure, instead of wasting \$10.6 billion on Highway 413.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I've been listening to the member from Waterloo—when she wasn't being interrupted by the over-caffeinated member from the Ottawa Valley, who continues to interject. She talked about the budget being delayed; she talked about being in North Bay, going to crisis centres and other non-profits and seeing what's really happening up there. I heard the horror stories—I think, Minister, the unemployment rate in North Bay is at about 9.5% now, compared to the average in Ontario, about 8%.

My question: With another 3,444 COVID cases today, why would this government be giving up on \$645 million through this post-election, short-term cut in the price at the pump, instead of allocating those \$645 million for other reasons, other purposes that are more beneficial to everyone in Ontario?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh. This is a very good question. It comes down to—the pure optics of it—that the government has said, "After the election, for six months we're going to pilot this cost-savings measure. It's going to result in \$45 directly at the gas pumps, \$15, indirect, from lower consumer prices and \$5 in reduced takings from the HST"—but they're not doing it now. Quite honestly, the Premier of this province did not have a very good answer why when he was asked.

Does the Ford government—do you, as MPPs across this province, does the Premier—understand how desperate people are for relief right now? They don't need relief in July until December; they need relief right now. That could be hydro, that could be auto insurance—name any of your broken promises. That's what they're looking for.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I asked a simple question, and I got this convoluted answer about trucks on the 407 and the city of Mississauga. So maybe the member could help me understand. If she could explain to me how the lowering of gas prices—she talked about the most vulnerable and the low-income; everybody has to eat, no matter what your income level is.

So when gas prices are lowered, could you please explain to me how that is not going to have a positive impact for the price of food for those most vulnerable low-income people?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Let me explain to you how a pilot project works: It is a short-term, low solution to a huge issue around controlling gas prices in the province of Ontario. So you have not offered the people of this province a sustainable, long-term solution. You've offered them a small Band-Aid—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I remind both members to talk through the Chair, please.

Ms. Catherine Fife: —and a cheap Band-Aid at that, Mr. Speaker.

When I was talking about the 407 and the 401: If you're talking about fuel consumption, then you're talking about congestion, so you make use of your current resources. You move that congestion onto the 407, and don't give them another \$1-billion get-out-of-the-bill payment. Because that's what you did—that is what you did.

So make use of your current resources and actually embrace that traditional Conservative mantra, where you stretch those dollars as far as you can do so.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Before we continue, I'm just going to remind everyone in this bantering back and forth that you direct your questions and responses through the Chair, and remain respectful throughout debate.

Next question and response?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to commend my colleague the member for Waterloo on her remarks today on this bill. I'm interested in her perspective on these recent moves by the Conservative government, first to rebate vehicle stickers, now to provide this \$65 temporary rebate on gas prices. It's almost as if this government thinks that the only

people who are suffering from affordability are people who own cars. Does this member think that's the case? Are there more Ontarians than simply those who own cars who are also struggling with the cost of living, housing, food etc.?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member from London West for drawing us back to some of the core issues that we're all facing—or that we should be facing—in Ontario. I will cite that her work, certainly on pay equity and women's equity rights, is timely, because women have been more negatively impacted during this pandemic, and yet there has been no gender lens whatsoever on support and resources for women-led businesses, for instance. You voted against diversifying the procurement chain so that women-led businesses actually could access and find confidence and a partner in government as they move forward.

The poverty rates in our core centres—as I said, when I walked down the main street in North Bay, I saw people hurting, and those people don't drive cars, and they're not going to get any relief whatsoever from a \$65 cheque from this government, maybe, in July.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I recognize the member from Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill.

Mr. Michael Parsa: I thank my honourable colleague for her presentation. Mr. Speaker, the opposition has been against pretty much every initiative that has come forward that's about drivers and commuters in the province of Ontario. They're against highways. They're against building highways. They're against building roads. Really, it's hard to understand where the opposition is.

But I'm wondering if my honourable colleague can perhaps answer why they won't support a cut that directly provides supports for every single Ontarian. Cutting fuel will help, as the member alluded to earlier, every single item that you see on a shelf when you go and buy in a grocery store. That has a cost attached to it, when you don't lower their costs.

So I'm wondering if my honourable colleague can mention if she is going to support this. Or are they going to continue doing what they've done in the past, and that's to oppose every single good initiative?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's interesting. I have a fairly good working relationship with the member from our public accounts days, where we actually reviewed where money was going and where it didn't go. There are strategic places to invest tax dollars, to offer relief to people across the province.

What we would say, though, about Bill 111 is that (1) it's a cynical piece of legislation; and (2) there's no guarantee that it's going to happen, because we actually don't have a budget. The fact that the government has post-dated this legislation, so the cheque is not even in the mail, gives us concern, quite honestly.

When the Hamilton Spectator says “Doug Ford's Gas Tax Promise Is the Very Definition of Political Chutzpah,” I think that we would agree, Mr. Speaker. We don't believe it's going to happen. We believe it's cynical in nature, I would say.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): There's not enough time for further questions and response.

Report continues in volume B.

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Andrew, Jill (NDP)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London—Fanshawe	
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Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
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Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)	Markham—Stouffville	Minister of Legislative Affairs / Ministre des Affaires législatives Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC)	Scarborough North / Scarborough-Nord	Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)	Willowdale	Associate Minister of Transportation (GTA) / Ministre associé des Transports (RGT)
Clark, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
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Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce
Fee, Amy (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
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Gravelle, Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
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Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
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Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor—Tecumseh	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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Karpoche, Bhutilla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Ke, Vincent (PC)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
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Kusendova, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre	
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Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
MacLeod, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa (PC)	Nepean	Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries / ministre des Industries du patrimoine, du sport, du tourisme et de la culture
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Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
McKenna, Hon. / L'hon. Jane (PC)	Burlington	Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues / Ministre associée déléguée au dossier de l'Enfance et à la Condition féminine
McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Miller, Norman (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (IND)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Mitas, Christina Maria (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough- Centre	
Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Morrison, Suze (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	

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Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Park, Lindsey (IND)	Durham	
Parsa, Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Hon. / L'hon. Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	Associate Minister of Digital Government / Ministre associé délégué de l'Action pour un gouvernement numérique
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Minister of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre du Développement du Nord, des Mines, des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Roberts, Jeremy (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	President of the Treasury Board / Président du Conseil du Trésor
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associée déléguée aux Petites Entreprises et à la Réduction des formalités administratives
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
Vacant	Ajax / Ajax	
Vacant	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Vacant	Elgin—Middlesex—London	

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

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Randy Pettapiece
Teresa J. Armstrong, Toby Barrett
Lorne Coe, Rudy Cuzzetto
Goldie Ghamari, Randy Hillier
Christina Maria Mitas, Judith Monteith-Farrell
Michael Parsa, Randy Pettapiece
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

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

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Ian Arthur
Ian Arthur, Will Bouma
Stephen Crawford, Catherine Fife
Ernie Hardeman, Mitzie Hunter
Logan Kanapathi, Sol Mamakwa
Jeremy Roberts, Dave Smith
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Michael Bushara

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

Chair / Président: Logan Kanapathi
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Mike Schreiner
Jill Andrew, Robert Bailey
Will Bouma, Guy Bourgouin
Chris Glover, Mike Harris
Logan Kanapathi, Sheref Sabawy
Amarjot Sandhu, Mike Schreiner
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

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

Chair / Président: Gilles Bisson
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Aris Babikian
Deepak Anand, Aris Babikian
Gilles Bisson, Lorne Coe
Wayne Gates, Robin Martin
Norman Miller, Billy Pang
Amanda Simard, Marit Stiles
John Yakabuski
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tanzima Khan

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

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lucille Collard
Lucille Collard, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Natalia Kusendova
Jim McDonell, Suze Morrison
Randy Pettapiece, Gurratan Singh
Donna Skelly, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Kevin Yarde
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

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

Chair / Présidente: Laurie Scott
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Rima Berns-McGown, France Gélinas
Goldie Ghamari, Mike Harris
Faisal Hassan, Jim McDonell
Sam Oosterhoff, Laurie Scott
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tanzima Khan

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

Chair / Président: Taras Natyshak
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Christine Hogarth
Deepak Anand, Toby Barrett
Jessica Bell, Stephen Blais
Stephen Crawford, Rudy Cuzzetto
Christine Hogarth, Michael Mantha
Taras Natyshak, Michael Parsa
Amarjot Sandhu
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Aris Babikian
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Fraser
Aris Babikian, Lorne Coe
John Fraser, Vincent Ke
Laura Mae Lindo, Paul Miller
Billy Pang, Jeremy Roberts
Dave Smith, Daisy Wai
Jamie West
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

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

Chair / Présidente: Natalia Kusendova
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Bhutila Karpoche
Aris Babikian, Jeff Burch
Amy Fee, Michael Gravelle
Joel Harden, Mike Harris
Bhutila Karpoche, Natalia Kusendova
Robin Martin, Jim McDonell
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Vanessa Kattar

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

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