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Mardi
6 septembre 2022

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Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 6 September 2022

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 6 septembre 2022

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRONG MAYORS,
BUILDING HOMES ACT, 2022
LOI DE 2022 POUR DES MAIRES FORTS
ET POUR LA CONSTRUCTION
DE LOGEMENTS

Mr. Clark moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 3, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to special powers and duties of heads of council / Projet de loi 3, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les pouvoirs et fonctions spéciaux des présidents du conseil.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the minister care to lead off the debate?

Hon. Steve Clark: Absolutely, Speaker.

Good morning, everyone. It's a great pleasure for me to rise for third reading of our government's proposed Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act. At the start, Speaker, I want to note that I'll be sharing the government's time with the Associate Minister of Housing and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Speaker, before I get into the meat of Bill 3, I want to take this opportunity, on behalf of the government, to express to all of the candidates for municipal office, who are vying for office on October 24, the government's most sincere thanks for putting your name on the ballot. This is a tremendous time, and I want to thank each and every person for being a candidate in this year's municipal election.

I also, Speaker—because in addition to being a former mayor, I'm a former CAO—want to take this time to thank all of the municipal staff. An election time is an incredibly busy time at municipal halls right across Ontario, and I know that the staff in all 444 municipalities have been working very diligently to ensure that October 24 goes off without a hitch. I want to thank them as well for their great work in making sure the election takes place.

If passed, our proposed legislation, Bill 3, along with the associated regulations, would give more tools to the mayors of Toronto and Ottawa to move provincial priority projects forward.

Speaker, I just want to say, it's great to see you in the chair this morning. Thank you so much for the work that you do. Congratulations.

Foremost, Bill 3—among these priorities is our government's commitment to build 1.5 million homes over the next 10 years. This bill is both timely and necessary. Ontarians re-elected our government at a time when they are facing rising costs of living and a shortage of homes. They sent us back to work with a strong mandate because we promised to get more housing built faster, and also because they knew we could get the job done.

It's no secret—and I think all my colleagues agree that it's no secret—that Ontario is in the middle of a housing supply crisis. People are desperately looking for housing that meets both their needs and their budget, yet too many Ontarians are frozen out of the housing market. Young people are searching for their first home—a home where they'll have room to have children, to grow their family, while being close to schools, work and essential services. It's so very important.

Newcomers to Ontario are looking for a home that meets their needs as they strive to build a new life in this growing, vibrant province of Ontario. Seniors are looking to downsize, and they want homes that meet their needs as they age. Everyone is looking for something different, and that's why we're here today: because we believe this legislation is a piece of a larger puzzle that will help get more housing built faster for Ontarians.

We aren't alone in thinking this legislation is a step in the right direction. I'd like to take a moment to highlight what we've heard about this proposal at committee. Before I remind my colleagues of the details of this proposed legislation, I think we have to have a conversation about how we got here. Since introduction just a few weeks ago, we've had some very clear support for this proposal.

Mayor John Tory, who has long supported a strong mayor system, noted that: "I always want to make sure city hall is working more efficiently and effectively for Toronto residents and businesses and that we make it as easy as possible to get things done...." I believe this proposed legislation does exactly that.

The Ontario Real Estate Association called this proposed legislation a "critical and an overdue step toward solving the housing affordability and supply crisis." They go on to agree that the Strong Mayors Buildings Homes Act would "help cut red tape and speed up the local planning process by giving municipal leaders new tools and powers to help reduce timelines for development, standardize processes and address local barriers to increasing housing supply."

Speaking to the committee of this House last week, the association's vice-chair concluded that, "These new municipal powers will go a long way in addressing

affordability, getting more shovels in the ground, incentivizing developers” to come and build in Ontario’s largest cities.

Meanwhile the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario said in written submission, “The proposed legislation provides a solid foundation to ensure that mayors have tools to combat the systemic barriers that exist at the municipal level that prevent housing from being built.”

I’d like to also share a quote, colleagues, from the Toronto Region Board of Trade from the summer: “Toronto faces numerous urgent city-wide challenges, from housing, land use, transit, transportation, budget, economic development and climate.... Effective, timely solutions require a city chief executive with clear authority to set an agenda, appoint senior city staff, and bring forward policy solutions to council....”

The board of trade goes on to say that for almost two decades, they’ve advocated for stronger powers for Toronto’s mayor, and they say, “Now is the time to act.”

0910

Someone I don’t quote too often in this House—though I have played hockey with him from time to time; he’s a natural left-winger—is Martin Regg Cohn of the Toronto Star. He wrote that this government “got it right” with our proposed legislation, noting “it empowers the elected mayor to put forward his or her own vision for the annual budget, rather than remaining captive to a budgetary document written by committee....” That’s why we’re putting our trust in local leadership in Toronto and Ottawa. We’re proposing to give these mayors more responsibility to help deliver on our shared provincial-municipal priorities. Our government believes that a strong-mayor system would help address the housing supply crisis in these cities, and by highlighting just a few examples of the support that we have received on this matter, it is clear that we are not alone in our belief.

Madam Speaker, I want to talk about the Premier. He said again and again—and I’m using a direct quote: Mayors are “accountable for everything, but they have the same single vote as a single councillor.” That means that mayors, who have been elected by voters across an entire city, often have no more say on an issue than a lone councillor representing just one ward. Yet Ontarians want their mayors to be able to do more. They want their mayors to cut red tape, to get shovels in the ground and end the housing supply crisis. They expect them to be responsible for all of the other major projects and priorities in their city. They’re counting on their mayors to get the job done.

What is concerning is that we’re seeing too many priority projects fall behind. Some of them have been decided to be cancelled altogether. To be truly effective for their communities, mayors need our support. They need specific tools to bring these priority projects to the forefront and to get them complete. That’s why I’m proud to lead off third reading debate on our proposed Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act. The changes included here would, if passed, give the mayors of Toronto and Ottawa the ability to drive policy changes. It would give them the

power to select municipal department heads and, perhaps most importantly, the power to present a budget. These abilities would help our municipal partners deliver on our shared priorities such as housing.

We know that empowered mayors could better help the province and municipalities to work together on housing and other initiatives that are critical for their communities. It’s something we need as we face record growth in the province of Ontario. Our population is going to continue to increase, and housing needs to keep up with demand. And what’s more, growth isn’t slowing down. In a way, Ontario is grappling with its own success. The high quality of life here and our future prospects have drawn many, many people to the province of Ontario. As our province continues to flourish and as we welcome more newcomers in search of economic opportunity, there will be even more pressure on our housing system. That’s why we need to take bold action, and we need to take it now.

Forecasts show that over one third of Ontario’s growth in the next decade is going to take place in Toronto and Ottawa. The good news is that these cities have shown us they’re shovel-ready for increased population and they’re committed to cutting red tape.

Madam Speaker, before I go further and explain the details of our proposed legislation, I want to answer an important question: How did Ontario get here? How did our province get to a point where we now have to make these steps as a government? Well, there was, and there still is, glaring evidence that municipal planning approvals, including appropriate zoning, have often delayed or hindered opposition from some members of local councils. Some projects have even been abandoned. Even if the project finally gets the go-ahead, a lot of damage has already been done in communities across this province.

The C.D. Howe Institute found restrictions and extra costs on building new housing has dramatically increased the price of housing. These restrictions include delays on project approvals. The institute found these barriers add approximately \$168,000, or 22%, to the average cost of a single detached home in Toronto.

The Ontario Association of Architects also looked into the cost of delays. Taking a 100-unit condominium building in Toronto as an example, the association concluded that delayed approvals cost home builders approximately \$2,000 per unit, per month.

In 2020, the Building Industry and Land Development Association, or BILD, reported that each month of delay—and this is just in permit approvals—adds \$1.46 per square foot to the price of a low-rise project—\$1.46 per square foot, and an additional \$2.21 per square foot at the end cost of a high-rise development. That kind of cost increase, caused by unnecessary delays, has a significant impact on the lifetime of a project.

These delays are not just felt by developers. They’re felt by homebuyers, new condo owners and renters who are forced to push back move-in plans and, at the very worst, find temporary housing to fill in the gap between the previous lease and the new one. These are not problems

that hard-working Ontarians should face, especially when the delays are avoidable.

RESCON, which is Ontario's leading association of residential builders, also looked into the cost of delays. RESCON says we are now under-producing housing by 12,000 units per year here in Ontario because of delays.

Clearly the evidence and the alarms are there. We need to do everything we can to reduce delays and help ensure that new homes get built as quickly as possible.

I'd like to take a few moments, Madam Speaker, to explain specific ways in which our proposed legislation would support this growth in both Toronto and Ottawa. Our bill proposes changes to the Municipal Act, to the City of Toronto Act and to the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act. If passed, these changes, along with the associated regulations, would provide the heads of council in both the city of Toronto and the city of Ottawa with additional governance tools and increased powers to align municipal decision-making with provincial priorities.

The increased executive powers proposed under this legislation would allow the mayors of these two cities to better organize city hall. These mayors would be able to hire and fire a chief administrative officer as well as certain department heads. This would exclude, however, statutory positions like the clerk, the treasurer, the chief of police, the chief building official, the medical officer of health—there are a number of others that are used as examples. But they would be able to create or reorganize departments. Madam Speaker, they would also have the authority to appoint chairs or vice-chairs for committees and local boards, which we could identify in the regulations, and they would have the power to establish certain new committees.

The mayors would also be able to introduce items for council's consideration if the item, in the mayor's opinion, would advance a provincial priority. That means, if passed, these changes would enable the mayors of Ottawa and Toronto to direct items related to provincial priorities, as identified in regulation, for council consideration. This includes the ability for the mayor to direct staff to prepare proposals for council's consideration.

I want to take this opportunity to pause and stress that the mayors of Toronto and Ottawa could support priority items, as well as their vision for their communities, through the ability to develop their municipality budget and then table it for council consideration.

Now, I know some on the other side are going to argue that this limits the role of city councillors. I want to stress to you, Madam Speaker, that there is still a lot of room to debate the budget on the council floor, something that I think we all feel is a very positive step. Council would be able to propose amendments to the budget; those amendments could be subject to a mayor's veto. Again, Speaker, we believe the changes that we're proposing still maintain a solid working relationship between council and the mayor.

Our proposed changes would also give those two mayors the ability to veto bylaws passed by council. However, and this is a very important point, the mayors

could use their veto power on these bylaws only if—and I want to stress only if—all or part of the bylaw could potentially interfere with a provincial priority as identified by a regulation. So at the same time, mayors would still have just one vote at council.

0920

Of course, Speaker, there has to be a system of checks and balances, and my parliamentary assistant, PA Holland, will speak to these checks and balances in more detail a little later on.

I wanted to share my time with my two colleagues, so I'm going to take this opportunity to pass the torch over to the Associate Minister of Housing. I look forward to both of my colleagues providing more details on this particular bill.

I'm just very pleased that we're here today. This is critical for our government's priority of building 1.5 million homes over the next 10 years. It's also critical that we work with the mayors of our two largest cities. As I said, over the next 10 years, we believe that over a third of Ontario's growth will take place in Ottawa and Toronto. We need to give the mayors the tools to get the job done. This is something that the Premier and I heard loud and clear from the big city mayors when we met with them in January. They indicated that it wasn't just municipal processes; the province needed to give them the tools to get the job done. This is one tool that our government is working on to ensure that that happens.

Madam Speaker, again, it's great to see you in the chair this morning. I'll turn it over now to the Associate Minister of Housing.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The Associate Minister of Housing.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thank you very much, Speaker, and congratulations to you. It's good to see you in that chair. I also want to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for sharing his time with me today and, of course, the amazing parliamentary assistant, who we'll hear from later on.

It really is a pleasure to stand here in this House to talk about the Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act, an act designed to empower our municipal partners with the tools they need to get more homes built faster.

Ontario is in a housing crisis. Too many families are being priced out of the housing market, and too many Ontarians have given up on the dream of home ownership. Core to the Ontario dream is having the opportunity to work hard, build your career, and raise your family in the community of your choice. We must renew the promise of unbounded potential each person has in this province. We must ensure that Ontario remains a place of opportunity and prosperity, and to do that, we must ensure everyone has a place to call home.

The Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act is one of the many bold actions the government of Ontario is taking to address the housing supply crisis, and we're not slowing down. There is no idea too ambitious, no solutions to the housing shortage too daring, because in Ontario, it is all hands on deck to get more homes built.

In May 2019, our government announced More Homes, More Choice, our first housing supply action plan. The plan included a full spectrum of legislative changes designed to increase the supply of housing: affordable housing, attainable housing and housing that provides buyers and renters with more meaningful choices on where to work, where to live and where they can raise their families. This plan cut red tape and made it easier to build the right types of homes in the right places.

The More Homes, More Choice Act was a far-reaching omnibus piece of legislation that changed the Conservation Authorities Act, the Development Charges Act, the Education Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Environmental Assessment Act, Environmental Protection Act, the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal Act, the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the Ontario Heritage Act and the Planning Act. It took a multi-layered approach so we could help get much-needed homes built more quickly. From home ownership to rental housing, whether built by private developers or non-profits, our first action plan and its accompanying legislation helped to give people more choice. It aimed to make housing more affordable and helped taxpayers keep more of their hard-earned dollars in their pockets.

Speaker, we reviewed every step of the development process, every policy and every regulation. We did that to eliminate any unnecessary steps, any duplication and any barriers. We cut red tape while at the same time delivering on our commitment to ensure the health and safety of Ontario. We stayed true to our commitment to protect the environment, we remained a steadfast guardian of Ontario's agricultural lands and we continue to be the steward of the province's rich natural heritage.

Our work is producing results. The province's first-ever housing supply action plan has been an overwhelming success. In 2021, Ontario broke ground on a record number of new homes being built, with more than 100,000 new homes in only 12 months. That's the highest level of new housing starts in a single year since 1987. And there's more: Last year, Ontario reached a 30-year record for rental housing construction starts in the province—again, the most units being built in a single year since 1991.

We knew that addressing the housing crisis needs a long-term strategy; it needs a long-term commitment and collaboration at all levels of government. With that in mind, our government continued to take action. In December, our government created the Housing Affordability Task Force, which was made up of industry leaders and experts, to recommend additional measures to increase the supply of market housing. As the task force stated at the beginning of its report, "For many years, the province has not built enough housing to meet the needs of our growing population." The task force noted that many "efforts to cool the housing market have only provided temporary relief to home buyers." They said, "The long-term trend is clear: House prices are increasing much faster than Ontarians' incomes." They stated that "the time for action is now," that there's no time for delays and that the province simply cannot afford to get it wrong.

We firmly agree, which is why, at around the same time, we convened with our municipal partners at both the Ontario-Municipal Summit and at the rural housing round table to gather their expert advice. We listened to Ontarians through over 2,000 public consultation submissions. We knew that through collaborating with our partners and the housing sector, we'd be on track to get more homes built.

However, despite the gains that we have made over the past four years, we know that there's still a shortage of housing. Rental housing and affordable home ownership are even further out of reach for hard-working Ontarians. Just to illustrate the problem, for every month that approvals are delayed, anywhere between \$2,000 and \$3,000 is added to the cost to build a single-family home or a condominium unit in the greater Toronto area. It became clear that without an increase in housing supply to match the rising demand, housing prices will keep going up and affordability will worsen.

We took all the information we gained from our many consultations and created our second housing supply action plan, called More Homes for Everyone, which was launched earlier this year, thanks to the great work of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. More Homes for Everyone outlines the next steps we're taking to address Ontario's housing crisis—steps such as accelerating approval timelines, reducing red tape and protecting homebuyers from unethical business practices. For example, we made changes to provide incentives for municipalities to make decisions in an expeditious manner on zoning and site plan applications. Effective January 1 of next year, if a municipality does not make a decision within the legislated timelines, the municipality will be required to gradually refund the application fee to the applicant.

We also made changes to the Development Charges Act and the Planning Act to increase the transparency and certainty of development-related costs. The changes we made to the Development Charges Act now require municipalities with a development charge bylaw to make their annual reporting on these charges available to the public on the municipality's website. While many municipalities already make reporting publicly accessible, these changes will increase transparency across the municipal sector.

0930

We also changed the Planning Act to require any municipality with a community benefits charge bylaw to publicly consult and complete a review of that bylaw at least once every five years. After the review, the municipality must pass a council resolution to indicate whether any changes are needed to that bylaw. If this is not done, the community benefit charge bylaw in that municipality expires.

We also took further steps to make it easier to build transit-oriented communities. As many members of this House will recall, transit-oriented communities are our government's vision for higher-density, mixed-use

developments that are next to, or within a short walk of, transit stations and stops.

We have set out and standardized, under the Planning Act, how much parkland, or cash in lieu of land, municipalities can collect for developments in transit-oriented communities. We see this change as balancing the priority for building new housing and transit-oriented communities quickly, while continuing to create more parks. Our government is moving quickly to take every step we can to help support the construction of more homes in the province for hard-working Ontarians.

Minister Clark has mentioned that there are regulations to help bring this piece of legislation into force. For example, while our proposed legislative changes to the City of Toronto Act would empower the mayor of Toronto, the changes to the Municipal Act would need to be supported by a regulation to also empower the mayor of Ottawa.

When our government looks at potential similar changes for other growing municipalities that are also shovel-ready, committed to growth and cutting red tape, we would also use this regulation to designate what municipalities these new mayoral powers would also apply to.

Minister Clark has spoken to how, if passed, these changes would allow mayors to create new committees and appoint the chairs and vice-chairs of identified committees and local boards. Based on the unique needs of individual municipalities, our government would again use these regulations to identify what committees and local boards these powers would pertain to.

We also plan on making accompanying regulations to set out current provincial priorities. These priorities would include our commitment to help build 1.5 million new homes in 10 years to address the housing supply crisis. But homes, as I've said many, many times, aren't just four walls and a roof. They're where we raise our families; they're where we create our fondest memories. For that to happen, we need to build our homes in strong communities. That's why another provincial priority will focus on the planning, approval, construction and maintenance of key infrastructure, infrastructure such as transit and roads so residents don't have to wait in gridlock, and for utilities such as water and waste water—all to support both new and existing residential development.

I also want to note that if there is any perceived abuse of these new governance tools, the regulation-making authority could be used to impose limits and conditions on the use of the proposed mayoral powers to hold heads of council accountable.

We did not take the development of our strong-mayors proposal lightly. We did our homework; we studied best practices from around the world and ensured the legislation will meet the test of time. We have looked at other cities that provide mayors with executive powers. We looked at cities like New York, Chicago, London, Los Angeles and Paris where strong-mayor systems work and are successful. The mayors of these cities have strengthened roles and additional administrative and

executive powers. They have extra powers in developing budgets, and some have the opportunity to veto certain items.

Let's take a look at what some of these cities are doing. In New York City, the mayor acts as a chief executive officer and does not sit as a member of council. It's important to note here that if our proposed legislation is passed, a mayor would still sit on council and every council member would still have one vote.

However, similar to what we are proposing, the mayor of New York City may appoint and remove heads of administrations, departments and commissioners and all other non-elected officers except as otherwise provided in law. Also, the mayor of New York City has the power to create or abolish departments or positions within the mayor's office. The mayor of New York City develops the budget and any accompanying financial plans and submits them to council for consideration and approval. And the mayor of New York City can veto any council decision to add to, increase or place terms on budget items. There is, of course, the check and balance that council can override a mayoral veto related to the budget with a two-thirds majority vote.

Now let's look at Chicago. Just like in New York City, the mayor of Chicago is the chief executive officer of the city and does not sit on the council. However, unlike New York City, the Chicago mayor must obtain council consent to appoint and remove heads of all city departments and officers of the municipality, all commissions, all boards and all agencies, except as otherwise provided in the law. As in New York City and as proposed by our bill, the mayor of Chicago directs the city's budget process and submits the city's annual budget to council for consideration and approval.

Now let's go out west and look at Los Angeles. Again, the mayor of Los Angeles is the chief executive officer of the city and does not have a seat on council. The mayor of Los Angeles has the power to create or abolish bureaus, divisions or positions within the executive office of the mayor, including having the power to remove certain city officials. Just like in New York, just like in Chicago and just like in our proposed legislation, the mayor of Los Angeles directs the budget and sends it to council for approval. The mayor can veto any changes or additions council makes, and, in turn, council can override a mayoral veto with a two-thirds majority vote.

These strong-mayor systems support the needs of these growing communities, just as similar systems can support the needs of the growing communities in Toronto and in Ottawa.

We know that building more homes that people can afford is a priority for everyone right across the province. From the headlines of newspapers to the conversations we all hear at our hockey rinks, soccer fields or coffee shops, we know that Ontarians care about living in a province where they can find a place to live, where the dream of home ownership is alive and well for them and their children.

There is no doubt that housing affordability will be top of mind for voters in this fall's municipal election. We

have heard candidates underline what their municipality needs to do to increase housing supply. We have heard from voters, both with well-paying jobs and those who might be having difficulty making ends meet, talking about the fact that they are unable to find attainable housing. Whether they're looking for a place to call home in urban city centres or in suburban communities across the province, we hear about the struggles families are facing.

This is all because of a lack of housing in the housing market. This has to change. With this piece of legislation, combined with all the other bold solutions our government is taking action on, we're ensuring that it does.

Both the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and I have mentioned some of the other housing supply-related initiatives our government has put in place. From our action plans to convening experts to weigh in on the best ways to increase housing supply to engaging with both the public and municipalities on crucial matters, we stand before our honourable colleagues here today to share with you that the proposed Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act is one more step that our government is taking to help address the current housing shortfall.

As the minister has said before, solving the housing crisis is a long-term process that requires a long-term commitment and collaboration from all levels of government. It is a huge challenge that Ontario faces. It's a defining issue of our time. I know that there is a challenge here, but I know that we can overcome this challenge by working with all our partners, because how we as elected officials choose to tackle the housing crisis will dictate whether an entire next generation can break into the housing market. Ontarians are counting on us to get this right, and failure is simply not an option. We will meet this challenge and get homes built, and we will do it by working together with our municipal partners.

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The proposed Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act focuses on partnership. The proposed legislation is built on the fact that our government trusts Ontarians to elect the right local leaders. Strong-mayor systems are intended to empower municipal leaders to work more effectively with the province to reduce timelines for development, to standardize processes and address local barriers to increasing the housing supply. That's why Ontario will continue to provide the tools so that municipalities can, in fact, increase the housing supply—the tools they need to break through the logjams that have historically slowed the speed of housing construction, the tools that would enhance authorities for the mayors of Toronto and Ottawa. We propose to give these mayors more responsibility to help deliver on our shared provincial-municipal priorities, including our commitment to build 1.5 million new homes over the next 10 years.

The reality is that over one third of Ontario's growth in the next decade is expected to take place in Toronto and in Ottawa. Queen's Park cannot tackle the housing challenge on its own. It requires all our partners to pitch in and help us get the job done. We are counting on these mayors to

cut red tape and get housing built faster so more families can realize the dream of attainable home ownership. That's our mission. That's our job. That's why we're here. We're not going to leave anyone behind, Speaker. We're going to make sure everyone has a place to call home. Ontarians, as I said before, are counting on us, and we won't let them down.

I now hand the floor over to the parliamentary assistant of municipal affairs and housing, my honourable colleague from Thunder Bay–Atikokan, to further elaborate on this bill. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Kevin Holland: I want to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for sharing his time with me today. I would also like to thank the Associate Minister of Housing for his comments on this important legislation. When it comes to increasing the amount of housing in our province, our minister's leadership has been unwavering. This leadership has set the standard for how we can work together to build more housing that suits the needs and budgets of hard-working Ontarians.

I want to take this opportunity to echo the minister's point that this bill is both timely and necessary. Ontarians, young and old, need our support to get the right housing built for their families. The harsh reality is that housing construction has not kept up with our growing population. This has been the case for far too long. We know that more needs to be done. Most of this growth is happening in our big cities. In fact, as has been noted, over one third of Ontario's growth over the next decade is expected to happen in Toronto and Ottawa. We need to take action to ensure that there is no political logjam hindering the potential that these cities offer. We need these mayors to cut red tape and get housing built faster so more families can realize the dream of attainable home ownership. Both current residents and those who are choosing to make Ontario home are counting on us. They want us to take bold action to increase the housing supply.

As you have heard, Speaker, our proposed changes to the Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act and associated regulations would provide the mayors of Toronto and Ottawa with additional governance tools and increased powers to align municipal decision-making with provincial priorities. That is because, along with their projected population increases, Ottawa and Toronto are shovel-ready and committed to growth. We know that working together with municipalities on shared priorities will not only move things along faster but it will be tailored to the needs of local communities.

Municipalities are on the front lines of the housing crisis and they see the harmful impacts that a lack of homes has on their communities, from young professionals who can't find housing close to where they work to parents who can't afford a home for their growing families to seniors who can't afford to downsize. That is why we believe this collaboration will help us to make the dream of home ownership attainable for Ontarians.

Of course, this is not the only time we have reached out to our municipal partners to help address housing supply. Speaker, let me take you back to earlier this year: We held our virtual Ontario-municipal housing summit in January so we could find ways to coordinate our efforts with big city mayors and regional chairs. We discussed the bold recommendations of the Housing Affordability Task Force, including proposals on planning approvals and removing the politics from local planning processes in order to make housing easier and less expensive to build.

We have also rolled out programs such as the Streamline Development Approval Fund, which is providing more than \$45 million to help large municipalities streamline, digitize and modernize their approach to applications for residential developments.

We're also engaging with all municipalities to discuss ways they can unlock housing. That's why we also met with smaller, rural, northern and remote municipalities earlier this year at our rural housing round table. Understanding the full spectrum of experiences with the housing supply crisis, such as the cost of supplies, helps us to align housing and infrastructure needs based on the unique ways Ontario's population continues to grow and change. Since then, we have kept the lines of communication with municipalities open.

Of course, just a few weeks ago, I was honoured to be one of the members of our government who met with municipal leaders at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario conference. It is a perfect forum to share new ideas and best practices as well as to promote discussion around policy recommendations that support increasing our housing supply. We're happy to work with our municipal partners at conferences like this and also through proposed policy changes. That collaboration is what brings us here today.

If passed, the Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act would empower a mayor to build a team that would help to bring forward shared municipal and provincial priorities—that is, get shovels in the ground faster for more housing and for the infrastructure that supports residential development. I will go into a little more detail on both of these priorities shortly, but I want to first focus on the specifics of how the mayors of both Toronto and Ottawa would be able to do this.

Step 1 is forging the path to empower these mayors. This proposed legislation would make changes to the City of Toronto Act in order to empower the mayor of Toronto, and the proposed changes to the Municipal Act, along with supporting regulation, would empower the mayor of Ottawa.

Step 2 is outlining what tools these mayors could access to take decisive action on our shared priorities. As we heard from the minister, if passed, this legislation would give the mayors of Toronto and Ottawa the power to hire and fire the chief administrative officer of the municipality, as well as certain department heads. This would not include positions such as clerk, treasurer, integrity commissioner, chief of police, chief building official, medical officer of health and others.

The mayor would also have the power to create and reorganize departments to better address the needs of their communities. The mayor would also be able to appoint the chairs and vice-chairs of identified committees and local boards as well as establish identified committees.

They would have the power to direct matters that further provincial priorities to council for consideration, and they would be able to direct staff to prepare proposals to support these matters.

This bill would also give the mayor the ability to direct a municipality's budget and table it for council to consider. The council would then be able to propose amendments to the budget. These amendments would then be subjected to a mayor's veto.

Speaker, those critical of our legislation would have you believe that we are sidelining the city councillors of Ottawa and Toronto, but nothing could be further from the truth. The system of checks and balances that we have built into this bill would keep councillors engaged in the process of local government and provide an important restraint on mayors. Council would be able to override the mayor's veto of council amendments to the budget with a two-thirds majority vote. They would also have a certain amount of time to do so. Once that period of time is up, the municipality would have adopted the resulting budget.

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The bill proposes a similar veto-override system with regard to bylaws passed by council. A mayor could use their veto power if they are of the opinion that all or part of the bylaw passed by council could potentially interfere with a provincial priority as identified in regulation, like building more housing for Ontarians, or if it prevented related infrastructure from being built.

The council override process is a counterweight in this instance as well. Just like with budget amendments, council could override a mayoral veto of bylaws related to provincial priorities with a two-thirds majority vote. To be clear, the mayor's new ability to veto bylaws could only apply to matters that the mayor believed to potentially interfere with identified provincial priorities.

We trust Ontarians to elect the leaders that best reflect the needs and values of their communities. By extension, we trust these leaders to use these powers fairly when it comes to driving forward our shared priorities. That is why we're holding them accountable for their choices. As an extension of this, mayors would be required to provide written documentation when using any of these new powers, in accordance with any associated regulations.

We are also proposing changes to the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act that would require a mayor to declare any financial interests related to the use of their new powers. Speaker, they would not be able to use the new powers where any financial conflict exists. For example, if a mayor's spouse applied to be the head of a certain department, the mayor would not be able to hire them as a department head because this would be a conflict of interest. It is also important to remember that council members, including the mayor, are already subject to legislated accountability and transparency rules.

Another point I want to raise is that because of this increased authority that we are proposing for mayors, we want to ensure that voters have their say if a mayor leaves office earlier than expected. That is why we propose requiring a by-election to replace a mayor with these increased powers if the office becomes vacant. That is distinct from the current practice, which is to give council the choice of either a by-election or an appointment by council.

The existing rules for how by-elections are run would still apply: for example, rules like how a municipality is not required to fill the position if a mayor's seat becomes vacant within 90 days before voting day in the year of a regular election. And if a mayor's seat becomes vacant after March 31 in the year of a regular municipal election, the municipality would be required to appoint a mayor, who would not have these new powers.

This would not impact the flexibility that these municipalities currently have in deciding how to fill other vacant council seats. They would have the choice to appoint someone or have a by-election in that case. I'd like to note that our proposed changes are intended to come into effect on November 15, 2022, in Toronto and Ottawa, right as the new term of council begins.

As I mentioned previously, some of these proposed changes to empower the mayors of Toronto and Ottawa pertain to matters of provincial priority. These provincial priorities would be laid out in a supporting regulation. I would like to highlight what these proposed provincial priorities could be in more detail.

Our government is committed to keeping costs down and building 1.5 million homes in 10 years to address the housing supply crisis. As the minister has mentioned on several occasions, the Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act is not the first step we've taken to support this province-wide initiative, and it will not be the last. We're making good on our promise to increase the number of homes for all Ontarians since 2019, when we introduced our first housing supply action plan, More Homes, More Choice. That plan is producing results.

In 2021, Ontario broke ground on a record number of new homes being built, with more than 100,000 new homes in only 12 months. This is the highest level of new housing starts in a single year since 1987. Last year, Ontario reached a 30-year record for new rental housing construction, the most units built in a single year since 1991.

To build off this momentum, we introduced More Homes for Everyone this year. It focused on targeted policies for the immediate term that would make housing fairer for hard-working Ontarians and make it faster to build the homes that families need and deserve. But with our commitment to build 1.5 million homes in 10 years, we are thinking long-term. That is why we plan to develop a new housing supply action plan annually for the next four years.

When we build more homes, we also need to consider the infrastructure that will support it. Another provincial priority we could lay out in regulation would speed up the

planning, approval, construction and maintenance of infrastructure to support new and existing residential development. This is the infrastructure that you use every day, the things we don't often think about but that we require, like running water, the road you commute to work on, the electricity you use in your home. Actioning the expansion, construction and maintenance of these services is absolutely essential, and we need to work to eliminate any barriers on delays. This will help us lay the foundation for building homes now and into the future.

As is now abundantly clear, our government is steadfast in our commitment to build new housing. That is why we are moving forward with more collaborative efforts with a variety of housing experts. Our new housing supply action plan implementation team will provide advice on market housing initiatives, including building on the vision from the Ontario Housing Affordability Task Force, More Homes for Everyone and other government consultations that the minister referenced.

We recently appointed Windsor Mayor Drew Dilkens as the team's chair and Mayor Cheryl Fort of the township of Hornepayne as its vice-chair. They will lead a diverse group of experts in finding additional ways to build more market housing. The team will also be supported by additional stakeholders and industry experts who, if needed, may provide technical advice on specific topics, and they will be hitting the ground running. The team's first meeting is scheduled for early fall.

Speaker, our government is committed to supporting municipalities and remains focused on improving planning policies and cutting red tape to get more homes built faster. We need municipal leaders to work more effectively to help reduce timelines for development, standardize processes and address local barriers to increasing housing supply.

We have set out a clear goal of building 1.5 million homes in 10 years, and we are working tirelessly to meet it, but we cannot do this alone. We need the support of our local partners, and by empowering the mayors of Toronto and Ottawa to move forward on our shared priorities, we are doing just that. We are counting on these mayors to help get things done at a local level so more families can realize the dream of attainable home ownership.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We'll now move to questions.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: My question is to the Premier, to the minister and to the government. The strong mayors bill does not actually mention housing or affordability anywhere in the bill besides in the misleading title. It doesn't outlaw exclusionary zoning or address the cost of borrowing, labour shortages or disruptions to supply chains, which home builders are actually saying are the biggest barriers to delivering housing. The government bill does cite giving Ottawa and Toronto mayors significantly more powers to carry out so-called provincial priorities, but it goes into no disclosure about what those provincial priorities are.

My question to this government is: When the mayor's vision conflicts with provincial priorities, which will prevail?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): To respond, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Steve Clark: I've said many times in this House that there isn't one thing the government can do. There's no magical silver bullet when it comes to the housing supply crisis.

We committed to Ontarians in the election on June 2 that we would put a plan in place to build 1.5 million homes over the next 10 years. We provided a lot of legislation that my associate minister and the parliamentary assistant talked about. Every time we present something in this House, whether it be More Homes, More Choice, More Homes for Everyone or second reading of the Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act, the opposition votes against.

Speaker, the question I would ask, through you, back to the member is: When is the opposition going to actually support the dream of home ownership for Ontarians? The only person who's sitting over there this morning who even referenced the 1.5 million over 10 years is the member for London—Fanshawe, and I want to thank her for doing that in her member's statement the first couple of days of the Legislature. So there's at least one New Democrat who supports our plans to build 1.5 million homes.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Question?

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Mr. John Yakabuski: Minister, Associate Minister and PA, I want to thank you for your address this morning.

Since we were elected in 2018—the Ford government—we and you as the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing have incrementally and in a progressive way brought in legislation to try to address what we all see in this province as a housing crisis, where we need to build the homes to provide accommodation for the people we know are coming to the province of Ontario.

This latest bill, Bill 3—the opposition would have us believe that it is creating the emperor of mayors. And if they would read the bill, there's all kinds of checks and balances put into this bill to ensure that council carries on as it should, but that the mayor has the ability to get past that red tape and ensure that it supports—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Minister to respond.

Hon. Steve Clark: Madam Speaker, through you, I want to thank the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke. He's been a tremendous champion. I'm proud to have served with him in this Legislature.

He has also had some experience at the municipal level, and he knows that there has to be a coordinated plan by government to move forward. At the same time, we need to make sure there are checks and balances at the local level. As someone who served this province in municipal government, both as a mayor and as a CAO, I understand that there has to be that relationship.

But the one thing—and again I want to stress to the member—when we brought big city mayors and regional chairs together in January, when we followed it up with a

rural round table on housing, over and over and over again, mayors and municipal leaders asked us to ensure that they have tools to get the job done. Bill 3 does exactly that.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Question?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: In Niagara, we are in the midst of an affordable housing crisis. Residents in St. Catharines are living in fear. They are seeing the near-futurelessness of being homeless here in St. Catharines.

But giving mayors in Toronto and Ottawa more powers is not a solution to the affordable housing crisis in Niagara. In the Strong Mayors, Buildings Homes Act, there is no mention of the word “home” in the bill except the title, nor do I see a bold action plan to address affordable housing within the changes of the Municipal Act.

Will your government put in the provincial priorities and include affordable housing within Bill 3?

Hon. Steve Clark: Actually, very clearly—today in the House, during second reading, at committee—I indicated that the number one provincial priority that I believe Bill 3 will address is the housing crisis.

We need to ensure that mayors have the tools to get it done, and I've met with the member opposite's mayor. I've met with many municipal politicians in Niagara, and I know that housing is a huge priority. The regional chair and I have had many, many conversations about the chair's vision for ensuring that those that need housing have a plan in place.

We need to work with municipalities. Bill 3 builds upon the success of More Homes, More Choice and More Homes for Everyone.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Mississauga—Lakeshore.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I know that we have a commitment to build 1.5 million homes in Ontario over the next 10 years, and with the Golden Horseshoe increasing by a population of 10 million people over the next 10 years, it's going to be difficult to build these homes. But in Mississauga—Lakeshore, there is a term that we all hear all the time; it's called BANANA: build absolutely nothing anywhere near anyone.

How will this help us build more homes in areas like that?

Hon. Steve Clark: Speaker, through you to the member: He's absolutely right. We've migrated from “not in my backyard,” or NIMBY, to “build absolutely nothing anywhere near anyone,” BANANA.

What our government has tried to do in every regulation and all the legislation we've tabled is to provide that climate for housing to be built faster, for municipalities to cut through some of the red tape that blocks development, that forces excessive delays. And our policies have been working. Last year, we had the highest year of housing starts—over 100,000—in over 30 years, but we have to build upon that success. We have to do more, build—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you.

Question?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I listened intently to the debate on Bill 3, which is the Strong Mayors, Building

Homes Act. The government talked about more homes being built faster, more homes for more choices. How does all this legislation address the need for geared-to-income homes, for co-operative homes? Where is the government's plan to contribute funding to building housing to help people on fixed incomes, like seniors and people who are on ODSP and OW, to remain in their homes—families who are working, low-income families?

The government's plan to build 1.5 million homes in 10 years: What are the numbers that include geared-to-income, co-operative housing? Where are those numbers in your plan?

Hon. Steve Clark: Madam Speaker, through you to the honourable member, our policies have delivered historic results on getting more homes built faster. It complements our over \$4.3-billion investment over the last three years to grow and enhance community and supportive housing for vulnerable Ontarians and Indigenous people. Our Ontario Social Services Relief Fund is making real effort and real change in municipalities at a time when they need it most. We built upon that success with successive pieces of legislation that have helped municipalities and people from all sectors wanting to build homes as fast as possible.

This Bill 3 provides the mayors of our two largest cities with the tools that they need to fast-track these types of developments.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member from Beaches–East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: My question is to Minister Clark. The government has been insistent that this bill is meant to aid the housing crisis by giving mayors of Toronto and Ottawa more power to fast-track construction and accelerate housing approvals, among other powers, and we all understand and realize how strong the housing crisis is and that we need to deal with it.

My question is, why title the bill “Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act,” if the text of the bill never once mentions housing and my proposed amendments to the bill that were related to housing were deemed out of scope and principle at committee? Are there actual tangible housing construction goals that this bill is meant to achieve and, if yes, how will we track and report back on these goals?

Hon. Steve Clark: Thanks for the question. The amendments were five hours late, first of all. Regardless—*Interjection.*

Hon. Steve Clark: Well, it's the first lesson I learned in opposition.

Again, we have to realize that there is no silver bullet for housing. We have to continue to build upon the success of this government's legislation in the past Parliament. We need to ensure mayors of our two largest cities have the tools to get it done. This tool builds upon the success this government has had. There's much more work we need to—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you.

We're now going to move to further debate.

Mr. Jeff Burch: It's a pleasure to rise again and speak to Bill 3. Before my critique of the bill, I want to join the

minister in thanking all of the candidates who have put their names forward for municipal office across Ontario. There's a troubling trend out there. We saw record low voter turnout in our provincial election and we've seen a real decrease in the number of people coming forward to run for municipal office. After a long pandemic and some of the difficult issues that are out there, I really commend folks who have put their name forward for office.

I would also join him in thanking municipal staff across the province. I don't want to forget about the front-line staff who have worked so hard through the pandemic and municipal employees. My friends from St. Catharines and Niagara Falls joined me a couple of weeks ago at a rally in Niagara; over 1,000 workers with CUPE, with less than 2% on the table and trying to negotiate a collective agreement when there's 7%, 8% inflation out there. We have to make sure our municipalities are well funded and that we can keep up with our obligations to those hard-working municipal staff all across the province.

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I also want to thank the delegations that came forward to present. We had our committee last Monday, and despite the fact that there were only a couple of days for delegations to put their names forward for the committee, there was actually quite a bit of interest and a number of folks came forward. I want to thank people from the Ontario Home Builders' Association; Myer Siemiatycki, a professor of politics and public administration at Toronto Metropolitan University, who I'm going to be quoting a fair amount today; the Association of Municipalities of Ontario—of course, we appreciate all the work that they do and their presentation.

We heard from the Residential Construction Council of Ontario and the Ontario Professional Planners Institute, who we had a good conversation with regarding the government's plan to allow mayors to unilaterally hire planners, which I'm going to be talking about.

We heard from the Ontario Real Estate Association. The Ontario big city mayors' Cam Guthrie spoke, and I'm going to be talking a little bit about his presentation. We heard from the Toronto Region Board of Trade—we want to thank them for presenting—the Federation of Rental-Housing Providers of Ontario and the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario, who also talked to us about the government's plan to allow mayors to hire and fire CAOs and top managers in the municipality. We heard from the Federation of Urban Neighbourhoods, Indwell Community Homes, the Ontario Municipal Administrators' Association—again, on this troubling plan by the government to allow mayors to hire and fire unilaterally—and Compass Refugee Centre.

Thank you very much to all of those who came and presented, delegations, and also to my colleagues from Ottawa Centre and University–Rosedale, who I'm sure will have a lot to say about housing and about the resistance to this bill in Ottawa and the many, many concerns from the city of Ottawa, where virtually no one is in favour of it, that I've heard, from city council, including the mayor.

All of the delegations agreed that we need more homes—that's one thing that everyone agreed on—and we all agreed that we need more affordable homes.

Some of the things that we're not agreed upon that I'm going to be talking about are whether this bill will actually do anything to create homes, because I don't think that that connection has been made, and how a mayor will use these powers. It's interesting that the government assumes that mayors will automatically use these powers to build more homes, but it's up to the discretion of the mayor or their politics. What happens if we have a NIMBY mayor? With this legislation, you can have a strong NIMBY mayor who can unilaterally hire a NIMBY CAO and a NIMBY planner. Just giving someone powers doesn't determine how they're going to use those powers. That's something that many of the delegations raised, and this government, I don't think, has really explained how that's going to work.

No one seems to understand what the provincial priorities are specifically and how they would be promoted by a strong-mayor scheme. How does that translate from the province to getting the mayor to do what, presumably, the Premier or the minister want to happen?

There's also a great deal of confusion, I think, on the government's part in distinguishing between the Canadian and the American municipal government systems, which they should understand are fundamentally different. One does not necessarily translate to the other. City managers are not CAOs. City managers in the US are not CAOs in Canada—very different. And of course, the financial structure is different. American municipalities can go bankrupt, so the financial structure—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I apologize to interrupt the member. It is now time for members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

RIDING OF THUNDER BAY–ATIKOKAN

RUTH ANN HOLLAND

Mr. Kevin Holland: This is my first member's statement since being elected as MPP for Thunder Bay–Atikokan, and I want to start off by saying what an absolute honour and privilege it is for me to represent this beautiful northwestern Ontario riding. I want to thank the good people of Thunder Bay–Atikokan for placing their trust in me to represent them in this House. I respect the responsibility that comes with the privilege that has been given to me, and I will work hard every day to bring the issues and, more importantly, the opportunities that Thunder Bay–Atikokan has to be a major contributor to building and growing Ontario.

I'm very excited for the role that Thunder Bay–Atikokan and northwestern Ontario will play in supplying the EV industry with the critical minerals needed to make Ontario the leader in North America in EV manufacturing.

Speaker, all natural resource-based industries and the value-added industries related to those natural resources

will play a key role in making Ontario the economic powerhouse of Canada.

The business community in Thunder Bay–Atikokan has demonstrated time and time again their resilience to meet head-on the unique challenges that they face in conducting business in northwestern Ontario and to come up with solutions to meet those challenges. Their commitment and strong work ethic are second to none. The commitment from this government to continue to reduce red tape will give these businesses greater opportunity to grow, hire employees and build Ontario.

Speaker, I'd like to take a moment to thank the members in this House for the support and kindness they have extended to my family during the recent passing of my mother, Ruth Ann. Mom passed away on August 26, at home with her family. Mom was a leader, role model and community influencer. She was a successful business owner, a member of council and clerk-treasurer for the township of Conmee, and she served on numerous boards and committees during her life. She was much-loved, and her family and community are going to miss her.

EVELYN GREEN

Ms. Jill Andrew: Yesterday was the Labour Day parade, and I had the privilege of joining thousands of dedicated workers, including many from Toronto–St. Paul's—people who work day in and day out, committed to the betterment of themselves, their families and our communities. It got me thinking about Mrs. Green and her legacy.

Mrs. Evelyn Green was a hard worker, and she lived in her house on Arlington Avenue for over 50 years. She raised her family there. She passed away on May 23, 2020. In her life, she worked as a civil servant, and in 1993 she was recognized for 25 years of service with the government. As if that wasn't enough, she had been a tireless volunteer at the Castleview Wychwood Towers long-term-care home in our community and with St. Clair West Services for Seniors. She was also a homestay host for international students and was recognized as a cultural ambassador of Canada.

I didn't get to experience Mrs. Green's good humour or the many stories she would tell, but I see the fruits of her labour—her heart work—in the eyes of her son, Jason, a health care worker and educator, and his beautiful family. We're currently advocating through the city of Toronto to have a nearby laneway named the Evelyn Green Lane in her memory. I ask all of you, my peers in this Legislative Assembly of Ontario, to wish us success.

Our community of St. Paul's is full of angels, and I guarantee you Mrs. Green is surely one of them.

EDUCATION

Mr. Vincent Ke: Ontario students are going back to school this week. This is a very special school year that means a lot for the students and parents, who have encountered tremendous disruptions and challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Speaker, the impact of the pandemic on our students is endless. They were unable to hang out with friends, they had a lack of in-class interaction with teachers and peers, and they found it difficult to build new friendships—just to name a few.

Speaker, as the Minister of Education said, “Our commitment is clear: We will stand up for your child’s right to learn, from September right to June.”

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Today’s world is really different from what it has been. To succeed, our children must be well prepared to face competition from all corners of the world. We can no longer afford any strikes or withdrawal of services. We have to make sure our students can be back to a normal, stable and enjoyable learning experience.

I’m wishing all of our Ontarian students another exciting and productive school year. They are the future of our province.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. Wayne Gates: Today I rise to discuss an important holiday yesterday: Labour Day. For some of us in this Legislature, we began as workers and understand the importance of Labour Day. We understand that yesterday wasn’t just about a parade or a barbecue with friends and family. It was a reminder of the blood, sweat and tears that our brothers and sisters shed to build the basic protections workers have today. Some gave their lives. But Labour Day has never been about remembering the past for me; it’s about fighting for the future.

Some in this Legislature like to claim they are fighting for workers, but actions speak louder than words. You can’t honestly say you’re a champion for workers when you strip away collective bargaining rights and cap front-line workers’ wages. You can’t be working for workers when you refuse to address workplace safety in a serious way while allowing deaths to continue on job sites across the province. You can’t be standing shoulder to shoulder with our brothers and sisters while refusing to fix a broken WSIB system that leaves so many in poverty.

This Labour Day, I hope everyone had time to relax, but I also hope we all spent some time reflecting on what it means to really be on the side of workers.

This government could actually start working for workers by repealing Bill 124 and bargaining fairly with teachers, education workers and nurses. Create safe working conditions for all and permanent paid sick days. Reform WSIB. Make it easier, not harder, to join a union. If you’re not doing that, you’re no friend of labour.

DEEPAK RUPARELL

Mr. Deepak Anand: Canada is the land of opportunity, a place where many successful immigrants have built an amazing career and contributed to the community. As a first-generation immigrant myself, I’m truly inspired by those who came to a new country to build a life for themselves and ended up building an incredible community around them—immigrants like Deepak Ruparell,

born in Tanzania, who immigrated to Canada in the 1970s. He followed a career in hospitality and quickly became one of Canada’s leading hoteliers.

Through the Ruparell Foundation, Deepak offered scholarships for university students and collaborated with Habitat for Humanity and Dixon Hall for the betterment of society. Community was at the forefront of Deepak’s efforts, and he was never in favour of any recognition. This is a sign of his character. He possessed humility and a desire to build genuine connections with those around him.

During the challenging time of the pandemic, Deepak led the way in the hospitality industry and supported the industry and community. Deepak Ruparell was a sharp and successful businessman with a big heart, who consistently supported social and community charitable projects.

Deepak left us too early on August 7, 2022. Deepak Ji, you will be dearly missed. Your presence will remain immortal in the community, leaving behind an inspirational legacy of selfless service, modesty and warmth. Raj Bhai, Vikram and I have endless memories together with Deepak Ji. I offer my thoughts and prayers to family and friends during these challenging times. Deepak Ji, rest in peace. Om shanti.

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Yesterday was the perfect day to join the Labour Day celebrations in Sudbury. A big thank you to Jessica Montgomery and the whole team at the Sudbury and District Labour Council for a well-organized and fun event. Thank you to the hundreds and hundreds of people who came to join us with their families and friends. There were lots of education and health care workers that came out.

They had a clear, united message for this government: First, repeal Bill 124. It is illegal, discriminatory, disrespectful and it demoralizes our tired and burnt-out health care heroes. Make PSW a career, so we can ensure quality home care and long-term care, and stop the privatization of the Ontario health care system.

Many labour retirees were there, some of them quite elderly. They are scared. Bill 7 is causing seniors to second-guess whether they should go to the hospital when they’re sick for fear of being labelled ALC. As you know, Speaker, Bill 7 takes away the rights of frail, elderly people and allows the government to move them to a long-term-care home focused on profit, not on quality care. In northern Ontario, being transferred away from home means a lot of hardship.

Everyone at the Labour Day celebration agreed: Solidarity is the way forward, and the NDP will always stand in solidarity with workers. Solidarity forever.

EDUCATION

Mrs. Robin Martin: It’s my pleasure to rise today to say how much I enjoyed marching in the Labour Day parade yesterday with Minister McNaughton and some of my colleagues, and to speak about something on the minds

of a lot of people today—especially parents, educators and children—and that's back to school.

The first day of school is always a challenging time, a time to say goodbye to parents—at least for the day, anyway—and to say hello to friends old and new. This year is of particular importance, as we want all Ontario students to have a normal school year with the full school experience, including extracurriculars like sports, clubs, band and field trips.

Some children in my riding of Eglinton–Lawrence will have another surprise waiting for them. Thanks to an investment by the Ministry of Education, the children at Sir Sandford Fleming public school will enjoy a \$7.5-million completed renovation when they open the doors tomorrow. The project includes 88 new child care spaces and five child care rooms. This is part of our government's investment of \$14 billion over 10 years to build new schools, improve existing facilities and create good child care spaces. These investments, along with historic investments in mental health and in tutoring, will help to ensure that young people can get back on track and reach their full potential.

I want to wish all the students, educators and parents in Eglinton–Lawrence and across the province a great first day of school.

BOBBIE DREW

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure today to recognize an outstanding resident and dedicated public servant from my riding of Durham. After more than 30 years of public service to the township of Scugog in my riding, Her Worship Mayor Bobbie Drew has announced that she will be retiring from public service after the October 24 municipal election.

Bobbie Drew began her elected career in 1998, when she was elected to represent Scugog as trustee on the Durham District School Board, where she served for 12 years and retired as vice-chair of that board. She was elected to Scugog council as a local councillor in 2004, later moving up to regional council in 2010 and finally to the mayor's office in 2018.

Throughout her career, Mayor Drew sat on a variety of committees, such as the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority and the Durham region finance committee. Among her accomplishments, Mayor Drew successfully oversaw many successful initiatives like the Scugog waterfront action plan, the active transportation master plan, community improvement plans and the IT strategic plan.

Mayor Drew's time in elected office demonstrated commitment and perseverance, associated with a warm and welcoming leadership style based on listening, learning and exercising sound judgment. On behalf of the residents of Scugog, Durham riding and all Ontarians: Thank you, Mayor Bobbie Drew, for your service.

TOURISM

Mr. Billy Pang: Ontario has some of the best attractions available anywhere in the world. Here, you can

go on a world-class wine tour, attend exceptional festivals or go fishing and snowmobiling. Tourism is also a key economic driver in Ontario, supporting approximately 395,000 jobs and generating over \$38 billion in spending.

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In Markham–Unionville, we are renowned for many attractions, including Main Street Unionville, conservation parks and our diverse range of cuisine. We are also known for hosting some of the best festivals, including our well-known Markham Jazz Festival. I had the pleasure of attending the kickoff event, partaking in the energetic atmosphere, and congratulating Markham Jazz Festival for receiving funding from our government's Reconnect Ontario program and Ontario Arts Council grants program. Through these grants, it supported a great local initiative that supported local musicians and rekindled music lovers with jazz.

Speaker, another local festival I want to highlight is the Toronto Hong Kong film festival. As Ontario's first Hong Kong film festival, this event highlighted and celebrated Hong Kong's culture and successes of its internationally famous film industry. From food booths to remarkable movies directed by director Clifton Ko, this festival provided entertainment to all attendees and highlighted Ontario's strong multiculturalism.

Ontario is a world of experiences. As Ontarians experience the seasons ahead and rediscover Ontario, I want to encourage all to continue to explore safely and responsibly.

KINGSTON PAKISTANI COMMUNITY

Mr. Ted Hsu: I just want to say thank you to the local Pakistan-Canada association in Kingston and the Islands. This past weekend, at the intercultural festival in Kingston, we were very much active in trying to get people to learn about what's happening in Pakistan with the flooding, and to raise money that will be matched by our federal government to help all the flooding victims in Pakistan. This is something, unfortunately, that I think is going to be repeated in the years to come as our climate changes, and we will have more of these sorts of weather-related disasters. It's really important for people around the world to help each other, because when one part of the world will suffer some weather event, the other parts of the world have to step in and help.

I want to just express congratulations to the Pakistani community in Kingston who are working very hard to try to raise a little bit of money to help contribute to the flood relief efforts in Pakistan.

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

ATTACKS IN SASKATCHEWAN

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I understand the member for Kiiwetinoong has a point of order.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Today, our hearts and prayers are with those connected to James Smith Cree Nation, in what we now call

Saskatchewan, as we struggle with the loss of life to so many this past weekend and the accompanying community trauma.

I seek unanimous consent of the House for a moment of silence in honour of the victims of this tragedy.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Kiiwetinoong is seeking the unanimous consent of the House for a moment of silence in honour of the victims of the tragedy in James Smith Cree Nation, in what we now call Saskatchewan. Agreed? Agreed.

Members will please rise.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Members may take their seats.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Miss Monique Taylor: I'd like to welcome Andrea Hatala from the Ontario ODSP Action Coalition and to thank her for joining us in this morning's press conference.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Not exactly an introduction, but I want to wish our grandson—Julius Birch Colucci was two years old on September 4. Happy birthday, Julius.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I'm pleased to welcome a number of esteemed guests. I have Naadim-Khan Shamji. He's my cousin, a lawyer and a former staff member at the British House of Commons.

Additionally, for the last three months, I've been functioning without an executive and without a legislative assistant. Today, that problem is remedied. I'd like to welcome Sombo Saviye and Lorne Levy, who are joining my team, effective today. Thank you and welcome.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Our office staff carry a lot of weight for us, and we can't thank them enough. I'd like to welcome Kanika Mohaya as she's here for the first time in this House of responsibility. Welcome, Kanika.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: On behalf of the official opposition, I'd like to welcome Raida Chowdhury, our legislative learner, to Queen's Park.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Good morning, everyone. Welcome back. I have two special groups to introduce today. One is my terrific team at Queen's Park, so marvelous Marietta Fox, my executive assistant, right there; effusive Ellen Pisani, my very competent constituency assistant; and magnificent Maisie Harrison, my legislative assistant. I'm looking forward to building a better world with all of you.

My second special group is the west coast contingent, all the way here from beautiful BC: my super sister-in-law Pamela Mulek; my charismatic and sensational son, Liam McMahon, hopefully following in political footsteps; my dynamite, charming daughter, Rebecca McMahon, from BC as well; and last but not least, my oldest brother, Michael, the most positive and exuberant person on the planet. In my inaugural speech last week, which I'm sure you were all glued to, I said we need a safety warning with this guy, he's so exuberant. And it's his birthday—a big

birthday—today. I don't know if we sing in the chamber, but happy birthday.

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Today, I'd like to congratulate our page captain Liliana Commisso Chen, who hails from Vaughan–Woodbridge, and welcome her mom, Lisa Commisso, and her sister Sophia to the people's House. Welcome.

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: I'd also like to welcome Malcolm's mother and grandmother, who are here. Malcolm is one of our pages.

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QUESTION PERIOD

HOSPITAL SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé.

Can the Minister of Health provide an update on how many hospital emergency rooms were closed over the long weekend due to staff shortages?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: This is a great opportunity for me to once again highlight the plans that we have in place. Of course, we've already done a lot of things in terms of short-, medium- and long-term goals. First of all, we have 3,500 hospital beds that are operating in the province of Ontario that were not as short as three years ago. We have 10,900 new health care professionals working in the province of Ontario today.

We will continue to work with our hospital partners to make sure that when short-term emergency department closures happen, whether that is for an hour, four hours, a shift or a weekend—we ensure, with Ontario Health, that, when possible, locums come in. We make sure that those partners and the people in those communities have appropriate health care as quickly as we can.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Well, Speaker, across the province this weekend, hospital after hospital announced that they would be closing their emergency rooms: Kemptville District Hospital, Carleton Place and District Memorial Hospital, Glengarry Memorial Hospital, Chesley hospital—the list goes on.

To quote one ER doctor, “We are playing a game of Russian roulette with people's lives.” It is “an indictment of the Minister of Health” and her failure “to understand the breadth of the crisis.”

Does the minister admit it is a crisis and that her government's response to date has failed us?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, I think it's really important to remind the member opposite and, frankly, the people of Ontario, as they continue to fearmonger, that nine out of 10 high-urgency patients finish their emergency visit within target times and surgeries are happening at 88% of the pre-pandemic. The member opposite can breed fear, and we will continue to get the job done—and that includes working with the college of physicians and

surgeons and the college of nurses to make sure that internationally educated experts in the health care field are able to get their accreditation and licensing quickly in the province of Ontario.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Closed emergency rooms put people's lives at risk. This is a fact.

At a time when the government should be building our health care system, this government froze nurses' wages. They threatened seniors with massive fees if they refused to move to substandard, for-profit facilities far away from their families. Doctors and health care executives have come forward to call this plan "morally wrong," "deeply disturbing," and likely to "worsen our health care crisis."

Will the minister take action today—first, repeal Bill 124; then, Bill 7—and start respecting the nurses we so desperately need?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, with the greatest of respect, I don't need to start today, because our government started four-plus years ago to make sure we had capacity in the province of Ontario. We have done that. We will continue to do that work.

I highlight 400 physicians in the province of Ontario who are practising and supporting workers in northern and rural Ontario, like the member opposite's own communities. We're working with the college of physicians and surgeons and we're working with the college of nurses to make sure that those internationally educated graduates are able to practise in Ontario now, in our communities.

EDUCATION

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Minister of Education.

Speaker, students are heading back to school today across most of our province, and I think I speak for—

Interjections.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yes—and I think I speak for most of us in wishing them all the best, a fantastic first week and a really great year ahead.

Public health experts are warning of another fall wave of COVID-19, but this time, most of the health measures that were in place will not be there.

Speaker, the government's inaction led to schools being closed longer in Ontario than anywhere else.

Can the minister remind us of how many weeks schools were closed and assure families that things will be different this time?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Deputy Premier.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: When Dr. Kieran Moore came out and explained to the people of Ontario, and in particular, the parents, that we have a plan that will ensure that our young students are able to practise in schools—it is exactly what we need. It is exactly what parents have been asking for. It's exactly what students and educators want. We want to make sure that children in the province of Ontario are safely able to do what they want to do in school:

participate in extracurriculars, make sure that they have that opportunity to join with their peers and connect with their teachers. We're doing that in the province of Ontario because of the historic investments: 600 nurses who are working across the education sector, the addition of the mental health supports that are so critical to make sure that as children come in to the classroom, they have those supports where they need them. We'll continue to do that work; the member opposite can continue to fearmonger. We'll get the job done.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Twenty-eight weeks. That's the minister's record: 28 weeks of school closures.

Vaccination is absolutely critical to ensuring that kids can learn uninterrupted—

Interjections.

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

The member for Davenport has the right to place her question. I'd ask the government side to allow me to hear it.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Start the clock. The member for Davenport.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Mr. Speaker, they don't like to be reminded of their failures, but let me tell you, vaccination is going to be absolutely key—

Interjections.

Ms. Marit Stiles: —and you may not want to hear it, but that is the truth.

Among kids five to 11, less than 40% have had both first shots of the COVID vaccine. This weekend, in Ottawa, Dr. Kaplan-Myrth and volunteers held another successful Jabapalooza event. They helped get 355 kids a back-to-school booster.

While communities are taking matters into their own hands, what's this government's plan to boost vaccine coverage for our students?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: This question coming from a member who would have closed schools the entire school year—they have no credibility.

But where this government—what we seek to follow is the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, who said just last week, "I am confident that this school year will be just that: safe and healthy."

Mr. Speaker, I joined the member from Mississauga Centre this morning at a brand new school built and funded by our Premier in Mississauga. To see these kids smile again, to see them share with their educators, get a hug from their teacher, high-five their friends—it was everything. It's what we're here to do in education: to inspire these kids to believe again in a publicly funded education and to actually be kids with their friends.

This school year is going to be more normal, it's going to be more stable and it's going to be much more enjoyable. As the Minister of Health noted, the extracurriculars and

sports, the mental health lift, the tutoring investments—all of this is designed to get these kids back on track.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Every single person, every single parent in this province wants a normal school year. But it's going to take a whole lot more than some wishful thinking from this government, and that means real people in real classrooms, not just pretty words in an expensive government ad campaign and threats to education workers.

Last year, we know that this government ended up spending \$900 million less on education than they committed. Will the government commit today to spend every single cent in education on keeping our schools safely open?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Students in this province are returning to more normal, stable, enjoyable schools, and we couldn't be more excited for them. To start the school year off with an additional \$650 million to ensure they catch up, a program that allows 5,000 additional front-line staff to support our kids, to keep them on track—that is a plan that underscores the commitments to publicly funded education to help these kids get back on track with their studies and to restore the physical and mental health benefits that come with our schools.

Mr. Speaker, we're excited for these kids. This is why we're here: to get them on track with their studies after two years of difficulty, and we owe it to all of them as a Parliament to come together to ensure that they stay in school without interruption right to June.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is for the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. This summer, over 230 community and social service organizations wrote to the government calling for them to double the social assistance rates. Rates for Ontario Works and ODSP have been frozen for four years, and inflation is at a 40-year high. The government's 5% increase to ODSP and nothing for Ontario Works recipients won't even be close enough to cover the cost of rising basic needs.

1050

Will the government recognize that more needs to be done to support social assistance recipients and double the rates for ODSP and Ontario Works today?

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

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank the opposition for the question. We'll always be there for the most vulnerable, always have been. The previous government ignored ODSP for 15 years. One of the first things we did when we took office: We increased ODSP. And now we're doing it again. We're increasing it by 5%. This is the largest increase in over a decade. As the NDP and Liberals stood there and starved these people, we increased it by 5%—the largest in a full decade.

We'll always fight for the people that need our help. That's the reason we lowered the taxes for 1.7 million lower-income people. They aren't going to have the

burden of the tax that the previous government put on. We lowered the gas tax by 5.7 cents, on top of the 4.3 cents and—

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The official opposition will come to order.

Supplementary question? The member for Ottawa West—Nepean.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Since the Premier thinks his historic increase is so great, I invite him to try living on it. Today, my colleagues and I are beginning a two-week advocacy effort, living on an approximate social assistance grocery budget of \$95.21. We are undertaking this effort in solidarity with the thousands of social assistance recipients and community organizations that have been imploring this government for years to raise the rates.

Will the Premier and the Minister of Community and Social Services join us in this solidarity effort with social assistance recipients?

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

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Our government is continuing to support those who need it most, whether it's people who need job re-skilling and retraining or people who are unable to work. That's exactly why we increased the ODSP rate to a historic 5% and aligned it with inflation: because we know that high inflationary times are troublesome and make it that much more difficult for people.

We've also got the discretionary benefit. We've created the LIFT and the CARE tax credits. We increased the rates at the very beginning. If you look at our track record throughout the years that we've been here, we started with an increase that the Liberals never did, and then we created the social services relief fund of a billion dollars for people during a very difficult time. All the while, we created programs to help people: the micro-credentialing, the energy and property tax relief, the Ontario Trillium fund. The list goes on. We are continuing to work on this. We know that people need support, and we're continuing to do just that.

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yesterday was Labour Day, a day set out to recognize the sacrifice and dedication of this province's hard-working women and men. Unfortunately, many have come to view it only as a day off that marks the unofficial end of summer.

The economic strength of this province is built upon the sacrifice of our carpenters, electricians, plumbers and the full array of blue-collar skilled trades workers. Our economic success has only been made possible by the hard-working men and women of this province helping to build and maintain the infrastructure that keeps us safe and secure each and every day. Because of that sacrifice of

those on the front line, our province was able to emerge out of the worst of the COVID pandemic.

Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development: What is our government doing to support all workers of this province? What are we going to do to recognize and thank them?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I want to thank the member from Sarnia–Lambton for that question, but more importantly, I want to thank him for his leadership on the ground in Sarnia. The MPP from Sarnia–Lambton really is why we're doing a lot of the work we're doing. He was a union member, and also on the management side. So to the member: Thank you for everything that you've done.

Our government stands with working people right across Ontario. They are our everyday heroes. On Monday, members of our government and myself had the great honour of marching shoulder to shoulder with union leaders and workers at Labour Day celebrations across Ontario. Together, we are working for workers. We're leading the way in Canada and right across North America with common-sense measures that support hard-working people and their families. And, Mr. Speaker, we're just getting started. Our government is on a mission to make Ontario the greatest place in the world to live, work and raise a family.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: The people of my riding know that this province faces many challenges. They see that we are currently encountering a housing crisis, and the only way to solve this is by working with our skilled carpenters and tradespeople. They see that we have a supply chain shortage, and we will address this through the hard work of our truck drivers and Teamsters. They see that we are facing global economic uncertainty, driven by dangerous actors in China and Russia. Ontario can provide that economic leadership by regaining its manufacturing materials leadership role once again, ensuring financial security for our global partners. So many people see Ontario as a beacon for economic opportunity, and I'm pleased that our government embraces this.

Once again, my question is for the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. What is our government doing to support and partner with our workers as they help us to become a powerhouse once again?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, has an ambitious plan to build Ontario and put workers in the driver's seat of our future. In our last working for workers bill, we introduced first-of-their-kind measures to deliver better jobs and bigger paycheques for workers in Ontario. We've also hired over 100 new health and safety inspectors to make sure workers are safe and return home to their families every single day. We've introduced the right to disconnect, which will allow workers to enjoy their off time with their friends, but most importantly, their families. And we've made unprecedented investments in training

for in-demand jobs to tackle our historic labour shortage and grow Ontario's economy.

Mr. Speaker, we're rolling up our sleeves and getting things done for the workers of Ontario.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: *Remarks in Oji-Cree.* Good morning, Speaker. My question is to the Premier.

Bill 7 is not an appropriate solution for northern Ontario. Elders like Garnet Angeconebe, who is directly impacted, have reached out to my office. Garnet is an Indian residential school survivor who is now at the end of his life and he is being institutionalized again by Bill 7. This is not right.

My question is: How is moving elders away from their families a human solution?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: In fact, what Bill 7 seeks to do is improve the quality of care for our seniors who are in hospital. It is very, very clear that—

Interjection.

Hon. Paul Calandra: If the member for Niagara Falls would like to hear the answer to the question that his colleague posed, I think that would probably be beneficial to the House.

What the bill actually does is provide a better quality of care—the right care in the right place at the right time. I think we would all agree that, for our seniors, they deserve the best quality of care possible. That is why, in particular when he talks about the north, we have made so many investments in long-term care in the north, because we want to ensure that the discrepancies that existed for far too long between north and south, urban and rural, are no longer part of the fabric of the Ontario health care system. That is why we've also partnered with First Nations to ensure that there are bed allocations specifically for First Nation communities, and we will continue to do it.

Bill 7 is a positive step in helping us reform our health care system once and for all, and we're on our way.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: We need clear expectations in bills like these around rural and northern equity. In Sioux Lookout and Red Lake, yes, the hospitals have high numbers of alternate-level-of-care patients, but the answer isn't shipping elders to southern Ontario without their consent.

What is this government doing to ensure Bill 7 has real accountability so that rural and northern health care equity is not forgotten?

Hon. Paul Calandra: First and foremost, let me just say this: The only people who are talking about shipping our seniors from the north to the south are, in fact, the NDP. That, in fact, will not happen because of Bill 7. What it does is ensure a better quality of care, the right care in the right place at the right time. That's what Bill 7 is all about. Because health care professionals would agree that

a hospital is no place for a senior who is waiting to be in long-term care to wait. As the Auditor General has reported, as health care professionals reported, there is no physical activity; there's no social activity. They are more susceptible to disease in a hospital.

1100

What we are doing with Bill 7 is ensuring that our seniors who are waiting for long-term care have access to that quality of care while they wait for their preferred home of choice.

I will let the opposition continue to fantasize about what we are doing in Bill 7, but what we are finally doing is putting our health care system, and ALC in particular, on the right path. It's because of the investments that we've made; we're improving health care and we're getting it done for seniors in the north and the—

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

EDUCATION

Mr. Ross Romano: My question is for our excellent Minister of Education. Millions of students across all of Ontario are returning to school today and tomorrow. Mr. Speaker, I want to note that three of my own kids are starting today in grades 3, 4 and 5. All of these students are so excited with the promise of a normal school year for the first time in nearly two years. Parents, like my wife and I, know how difficult it has been, and we know that COVID-19 has caused so many disruptions for our students and made it very difficult for a normal school year for them.

Studies have shown that in every jurisdiction, students' math scores have declined sharply. Schools have also played an important role in their social lives as well—something that our children have been missing. There is no substitute for in-person learning and a disruption-free learning environment for our students.

Speaker, can the Minister of Education please outline our government's plan to ensure that our kids can catch up, and outline the supports that are in place for Ontario students to ensure that they can succeed?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I do want to thank the member from Sault Ste. Marie for being an exceptional member, a proud father and someone who, like our government, believes in public education. When we saw these students return to school this morning—and more will return tomorrow—it underscores what we're here to do in the first place, which is ensure children learn the necessary skills to help them succeed in life.

This year, children will be returning to a modernized curriculum that is actually in line with the labour markets, that when they graduate, they can get a good-paying job: a new science curriculum and a new math curriculum that focus on the transferrable skill sets that are going to help them get from the classroom to the boardroom to the shop floor.

The full experience of learning that we envision for kids starts with them staying in school, and we're going to fight

to ensure kids stay in uninterrupted, in-person learning right to June.

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

Mr. Ross Romano: While I'm so happy to hear that our government is acting to ensure that we are prepared for our children's safe return to school, we must also ensure that they are protected while they are in transit to and from school.

With nearly 840,000 students riding school buses every day, many experts say that our students are most at risk when they are travelling to and from school. Studies show that improvements to school bus lighting systems will greatly improve visibility and safety for our students when they are entering and exiting school buses. That is why our government has been calling for the improved eight-lamp, amber-red warning systems to be installed on all of our Ontario school buses. This will help drivers know further in advance of when school buses are slowing down and stopping, which is a crucial factor in increasing school bus safety for our students.

Speaker, can the minister please update this House on the status of the implementation of the eight-lamp, amber-red warning systems on our Ontario school buses here in Ontario to keep our kids safe?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: This is an important question, because as kids get back to class this week, we're going to see over 800,000 children a day on our buses, and I want to express my gratitude to our school bus drivers for all the amazing work they do in our province.

Speaker, the problem though, in working with the member from Kitchener–Conestoga, the Minister of Transportation and others, is that we know there are literally hundreds and hundreds of drivers a day blowing past a school bus that is stopped, violating the law. It puts so many children at risk, and we've seen this in all of our communities. So the province of Ontario has moved forward with the Safer School Buses Act, which ensures that all school buses in the province now have the new eight-lamp amber-red warning system, designed to create more awareness, more caution and ultimately more safety for our kids and for the drivers themselves.

This is positive progress. It builds on a \$1.1-billion investment through transportation that is with the aim of getting kids to school, so that they can stay in school right to June.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is to the Premier. Every day we hear more stories of a broken long-term-care system, more proof that Bill 7 will make a broken system worse. CTV News reported the story of Mona Chasin, an 80-year-old woman who had to go to the hospital after a stroke, and now she has been told she will lose her bed in a long-term-care facility.

Seniors should be treated with dignity and respect. Why is this woman being evicted from her home because of a hospital stay?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I just want to get this straight: So the member now is advocating in favour of the bill that we just passed, while at the same time advocating against it, all in one question?

That is what Bill 7 is all about: It is about improving care for our seniors, because nobody thinks that a senior who is in a hospital waiting for long-term care should be sitting in a hospital. Nobody believes that, because they don't have access to the physical exercise that they need. They don't have social opportunities. That is why we passed Bill 7, to ensure that our seniors who are waiting for long-term care can get into long-term care faster. That's the whole point of it.

Only the NDP are suggesting that a hospital room is a better place for a senior waiting to be in long-term care. We disagree with that, and that is why Bill 7 allows us to get our seniors who are waiting in a hospital into long-term care.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is to the Premier again. This is an 80-year-old woman who is being told she can't go back to the home that she's with her husband at, because she was at hospital for 29 days, got COVID in the hospital and then had to isolate for 10 days. So that's what the question is about. This woman should go back to her husband, where she's comfortable, where her family is comfortable. That's what the question was. It would be important if the minister would please listen to the question. It's a serious issue for this family.

Mona's family wants her to return to her home. Her home is where her husband lives and where she is comfortable. Her family fears that Bill 7 will force her into a new facility. Her niece told reporters: "It's devastating.... I don't think our elderly are being properly cared for.... I don't know where she is going to end up."

Why is the government forcing seniors like Mona into homes away from their loved ones and their families?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I will remind the member opposite that Anthony Dale, the CEO of the Ontario Hospital Association, said: "Ontario's hospitals are rapidly becoming the health care provider of last resort for thousands of people who actually need access to home care, long-term care and other services."

Specifically regarding the example you raised, it is essential that all partners continue to work collaboratively together in a Team Ontario approach to seeking to overcome the underlying issues facing the health care system and ensure that patients are receiving access to the right kind of care in the right setting. I have faith in the hospital, in the long-term care, in the Ontario health team in that community to do the right thing for that family, for that husband and wife to be able to remain together. But, member, you need to understand that the system works together—with long-term care, with home care, with

hospitals—to make sure that, in the example raised, that individual gets the most appropriate care in their community.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is to the Premier. It has been a particularly violent weekend in our country, and, on behalf of this Assembly, I extend condolences to the people of rural Saskatchewan on an unimaginable situation that has occurred.

When these types of mass incidents happen, it is seared in the minds of the community and those that are impacted. In my community, in Scarborough, we had the Danzig shooting 10 years ago. At that time we lost Shyanne Charles and Joshua Yasay, two young people. And I can tell you that after 10 years, those wounds have not healed.

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I spoke to Tyrone Charles, Shyanne's grandfather, about how he and his family—in particular, his daughter, Afifa—are doing 10 years on. And I can tell you, Speaker, that with this tragic loss, those wounds have not healed. He said to me they have gained an angel, yet the pain is still overwhelming for Shyanne's mother and the entire family.

My question today to the Premier: You have an opportunity to provide support to those individuals by supporting Bill 9, which would provide the help that families need right now. Will you support that bill tomorrow?

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

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Thank you for that question. When we talk about incidents like what occurred in Saskatchewan, what we've seen in the province of Ontario, we know that we need to do more, and our government has and will continue to do more. The investments that have been made, the \$3.8 billion that will be invested over 10 years to build on the Roadmap to Wellness, are the types of investments that will focus and assist, whether it be the mobile intervention crisis teams that are out working each and every day to defuse situations and to provide support to individuals; whether it be the \$194 million that was invested during the pandemic to provide emergency funding to help reduce wait-lists and improve capacity for individuals in need of help; whether it be the \$31 million that was invested for a 5% across-the-board increase in government-funded youth and children mental health supports. We are continuing to do this work, and including youth wellness hubs that are also providing supports to families and individuals throughout the province. We will continue to do that work.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, Tyrone Charles told me, in the aftermath of a shooting, the spotlight on the families is so bright but only for five minutes. What people need is support when they need it, and sustained support, like for Ali Demircan's daughter, who, four years after her father was shot in the Danforth shooting—now she needs

counselling help. This is a gap that Bill 9 would fill by providing trauma-informed counselling directly to those victims and survivors at the time of need. Expanding our health services would provide that much-needed help and support.

For far too long, Ontarians who have suffered from social, emotional, physical and mental health impacts of gun violence have done so alone. Traumatized families like the Charleses have had to struggle through years in silence. Bill 9 would change this for them, and I'm asking this government, do they support Bill 9?

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Once again to the member opposite, I appreciate where she is coming from with respect to the question that's being asked. The work that we continue to do—for instance, the youth wellness hub is something that we began and fully supported. The youth wellness hubs in Wellington county, for instance, have hosted more than 14,000 youth since their launch in 2021.

Mr. Speaker, I've attended some of those vigils that take place with moms who have lost their children. I've seen the pain that's caused by the trauma that's induced as a result of these violent crimes.

Our government is making the investments to build the continuums of care with community-based supports. It is making the investments to ensure that the supports are there for the families as well as for the individuals. We know that many of these investments should be made early on to support children and youth, because by doing that, we provide them hope and we provide them opportunities.

So once again, our government continues to make investments to help the people of the province of Ontario where and when that help—

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

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: We have seen the concerning impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on our health human resources system. With an aging population, the issue of more front-line health workers will only increase in the years and decades ahead. Experts also warn that Ontario's population will increase by as much as two million to six million over the next two decades. An increasing population will mean more individuals needing access to our health care system in the future. Getting more students into the health care profession programs today will help address the health care human resource issues we'll see tomorrow.

Speaker, can the Minister of Colleges and Universities update this House on what our government has done to help encourage students to pursue a meaningful career in nursing programs?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member from Markham-Thornhill for that question. I, too, was encouraged to see the reports that applicants to nursing programs are up in both college and university programs by 25% since the 2018-19 school year. Speaker, that translates to more than 13,000 students who applied to a

university program and more than 12,000 students who applied to a college program right here in Ontario.

Our government has been working hard to address the gap in health care professions through innovative programs like our three-year college degrees and our new Learn and Stay program. Over the next four years, the Learn and Stay program will help over 3,000 nursing graduates receive financial support to cover the cost of tuition in exchange for committing to practise for two years in an underserved community.

We have created 14 new programs at colleges and universities across Ontario, allowing thousands of students to have greater choice and flexibility in accessing high-quality and local education.

This record number of applications demonstrates that the work we are doing to increase the number of students entering nursing and health care professions is working, and we'll continue to look for innovative ways.

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

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you, Minister, for that great answer, and thank you for your great work on this file.

Speaker, under the watch of the previous Liberal government, the people of my riding saw the lack of vision and understanding about the state of our health care system. We saw how they cut medical residency programs for new students, forcing them to move out of the province. We saw their record of championing freezing health care budgets as their goal was to keep costs down.

Once again, can the minister explain to this House what work the Ministry of Colleges and Universities is doing with other ministries to address the health human resource shortages in Ontario, and what action is our government taking to strengthen the system after the years of Liberal neglect?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you again to the member for that question. We know that a high-quality health care system starts with high-quality post-secondary education, but it doesn't end there. That is why the Ministry of Colleges and Universities has been working closely with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Long-Term Care throughout the pandemic and beyond to address the health human resources issues that Ontario faces. For example, we are adding 2,000 nurses to the health care system through the Ministry of Long-Term Care. This is a \$35-million investment to increase enrolment at our publicly assisted colleges and universities, allowing institutions to accept an additional 1,000 practical nursing diploma students and over 800 bachelor of science and nursing degree students.

Through the Bridging Educational Grant in Nursing—this is a nearly \$100-million investment that will support the upskilling and training of PSWs and RPNs. This program will increase access to nursing programs and create an additional 500 spaces for enrolment in our bridging program this year. And through our fall economic statement, we announced an investment of nearly \$342 million over the next five years to add over 5,000

registered practical nurses and 8,000 personal support workers.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. Whether workers are returning to the workplace or have worked there all along, this government has made one thing clear: “Don’t count on us to help keep workers safe.” Not only did they scrap COVID isolation requirements, they also scrapped the independent science advisory table before its members could advise against this dangerous move. Ontario workers are now more vulnerable than ever, especially if they don’t have access to paid sick days.

Speaker, instead of spreading illness in the workplace, will this government help prevent illness? Will they bring in 10 permanent paid sick days for all Ontario workers?

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

Hon. Monte McNaughton: We were the first province in the country to bring in job-protected leave when COVID-19 hit the province. When you’re sick, you can stay home, and you can’t be fired for that. Furthermore, we were the first province in the country to bring in paid sick days for workers to stay home, and those businesses get reimbursed up to \$200 per day.

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Mr. Speaker, we’ll continue having the backs of workers every single day during this pandemic and beyond.

That’s why, during the pandemic, we hired more than a hundred new health and safety inspectors. And I have to remind the opposition members that you voted against that; you voted against raising the total number of health and safety inspectors to the most in provincial history. But guess what? Under the leadership of Premier Ford and our PC government, we got it done.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: This was the first government to cancel the two paid sick days that workers had in Ontario.

Speaker, as the outgoing members of the science advisory table have stated, COVID is far from over. It still poses real and significant risks. Dropping mandatory isolation was reckless and the wrong thing to do. We are also heading into a potentially wicked flu season.

No Ontario worker should have to choose between going to work sick and losing their pay.

Will this government finally do the right thing, pass my private member’s bill, and ensure that all Ontario workers have 10 permanent paid sick days?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: We’ll continue working for workers every single day. That’s why we increased the number of health and safety inspectors, and since the pandemic hit Ontario, we’ve done more than 100,000 inspections and investigations in workplaces right across this province. It’s why we were the first in Canada to bring in job-protected leave almost on day one, when this pandemic hit. It’s why we were the first province in the country to bring in three paid sick days, and the member

opposite is well aware we’ve extended this until the end of March next year.

I can be clear with the members opposite and with all the people of Ontario that we’ll continue to have their backs, we’ll continue to ensure that we protect workers—that they can stay home when they’re sick—and we’ll continue working for workers every day.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier.

Last week, the government rammed through Bill 7, overriding a patient’s right to consent and leaving many questions in its wake, like how far patients can be sent away or how much they can be charged.

Last week, the member from Ottawa West–Nepean brought forward the story of Deana Henry, who, under the threat of Bill 7 and an \$1,800-a-day hospital bill, was compelled to go where she didn’t want to go. “I feel like I am non-existent,” is what she said.

Last week I heard the Premier muse about \$1,800-a-day hospital bills and how they weren’t right, without any concrete commitment to do something about it.

So will the Premier please let us know what he’s going to do to make sure that this doesn’t happen to any other Ontario family?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, as I promised, the regulations will be out very, very soon, and people will undoubtedly see how the opposition’s fearmongering over this bill was uncalled for.

More importantly, what the member refuses to highlight is how important this policy change is to ensuring that our seniors who are in hospital, who have been discharged or are waiting to be discharged, who are on the long-term-care-home waiting list, get the appropriate level of care in a long-term-care home.

I will let the opposition argue why a senior wanting to be in a long-term-care home should be waiting in a hospital, should be without the social environment that comes with a long-term-care home and the physical activity that comes with a long-term-care home, should be subject to the disease that comes when somebody is in a hospital. These are our seniors who are waiting to be in long-term care, and the best care for them is in a long-term-care home. It is a home, not a hospital, and that is what we want our seniors to progress to.

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

Mr. John Fraser: None of us would want any of our family members sent to where they didn’t want to go.

And, respectfully, saying you think something is not right and not taking action, especially when you have the power, doesn’t amount to much. It’s cold comfort to the families out there who are worried.

So I put forward a motion on the table today that will limit the maximum charge an alternate-level-of-care

patient awaiting placement in a long-term-care home can be charged as equal to the copay in Ontario's long-term-care homes. It's the fair and reasonable thing to do. Allowing the threat of a huge hospital bill to hang over people's heads is neither fair nor reasonable. It's unjust and unfair.

And it's within this government's power, it's within the Premier's power to pass this motion and to amend the Public Hospitals Act. Will the Premier commit to doing just that?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Premier?

Hon. Doug Ford: The only thing that was unfair and unjust is he sat there for 10 years and built 611 beds, propped up by the NDP. The Liberals were the ones who created this mess, created the disaster. I can't believe he has the nerve and the gall to stand up there and try to preach to us when we're building 58,000 new homes for seniors. We're going to continue to build them, make sure they have good health care moving forward in their later years—but you have nerve like I've never seen before.

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

The next question.

GREEN POWER GENERATION

Mr. Andrew Dowie: The residents of Windsor–Tecumseh—and truly all Ontarians—saw it on their hydro bills every month: The previous Liberal government ignored the needs of Ontarians when it came to providing reliable and cost-effective clean, green energy. As Premier Wynne stated about her Liberal government's record, “Electricity prices are going to have to go up. How are we going to pay for this?” I heard it. But ... I don't think I took it seriously enough.”

As the Auditor General pointed out in her 2015 report, we spent \$9.2 billion more than we needed to for green energy programs because of reckless policies.

The Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks recently attended the 15th International Conference on Candu Fuel in Ajax. Could the minister share what lessons he learned from this conference and what actions we are taking as a government to avoid the mistakes made by the previous Liberal government on green technology innovation?

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you to the phenomenal member from Windsor–Tecumseh for the question. It's an excellent one.

The member is correct. I was honoured to take part in the international Candu fuel conference, which was hosted by Cameco. On a personal note, Cameco is one of the largest employers in my riding and employs hundreds of hard-working men and women in the clean energy sector across this province and across Canada.

Not surprisingly, there was a lot of discussion about SMRs and praise for our government for recognizing that investing in SMR technology is what we need to do to secure Ontario's future. More importantly, it's securing a cleaner future for Ontarians. In fact, one SMR can prevent

up to two megatons of greenhouse gas emissions. What does that mean? Speaker, that's the equivalent of taking over 600,000 cars off the road, and it can power up to 300,000 homes with clean, reliable baseload power.

This is just another example of tangible steps that our government is taking to promote a cleaner future, working with men and women in the trades and making sure that we can have reliable, clean power for generations to come.

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I thank the minister for his response. I'm very proud that Ontario has been a leader in the fight against climate change. It was the previous Conservative government that led the charge on removing coal-fired energy plants from our electricity grid. It is encouraging to hear how our government is retaking environmental leadership by promoting investment in small modular reactors to address climate concerns meaningfully. Small modular reactors are a catalyst for efficient, economy-wide decarbonization and economic renewal while protecting jobs and the environment.

We've seen how other parties played politics and stood on the sidelines, criticizing innovations and new technology without offering viable solutions. Could the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks elaborate on how we are tackling climate change by supporting electricity-generating technology and innovative solutions like SMRs?

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you to the member for that question. As a student of history—and, fun fact, a member of the History Students' Association at Ottawa U—I always appreciate the revisionist history from the hateful eight—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member to withdraw—

Hon. David Piccini: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):—and conclude his answer.

Hon. David Piccini: The member is correct: It was a Conservative government that first began the phasing-out of coal power and a Conservative government that's worked with industry to see record GHG reductions in the steel sector. Partnering with Algoma and Dofasco, we're taking another two million cars off the road.

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Speaker, it's not through punishing taxes on the backs of hard-working Ontarians when we're dealing with an inflationary crisis that we will achieve a cleaner, greener, more sustainable future. It is working with industry that we've seen historic reductions in the steel sector. It's working with industry that we're making record investments in public transit. And it's working with industry that Ontario will be a powerhouse in SMR clean green technology for the world.

HOUSING

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The BC government just completed a report that looked at the effectiveness of its

speculation and vacant homes tax, designed to make housing more affordable for people who intend to live in the homes they rent or buy. The tax has raised over \$231 million in affordable housing and has added over 20,000 long-term rental units to the Vancouver area—20,000 units, all with the stroke of a pen.

Just like BC, Ontario has an issue with vacant homes as well. Minister, to quickly increase housing supply, can you bring in an effective provincial speculation and vacant homes tax?

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Through you, Mr. Speaker: Thank you to the member opposite for that question. As the member well knows, this government actually acted on the non-resident speculation tax by increasing it from 15% to 20%, and made it province-wide, so that foreign speculators wouldn't hurt people buying homes in this province.

Now, the member opposite also talks about the vacancy tax, and of course, the vacancy tax is in action right now. In fact, municipalities such as Toronto have the vacancy tax, and other municipalities have asked for the vacancy tax, and we have granted that.

But, Mr. Speaker, what the member opposite is really getting to is that we have a housing supply challenge in this province, and it's this government that is committed to building 1.5 million houses over the next 10 years, something they didn't do.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you for the answer. When this government makes a decision to not bring in a provincial vacant homes and speculation tax, they are choosing the side of big investors over first-time homebuyers.

My question is back to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing again: The city of Toronto passed Ontario's first inclusionary zoning law back in 2021. Inclusionary zoning requires developers to set aside some affordable housing units in each development located near transit stops. It's a very good way to build affordable housing in one of the most expensive cities in the world.

Here's the challenge: Toronto has approved 104 areas in the city where inclusionary zoning should apply, and has submitted these 104 requests to the ministry to approve. How many inclusionary zoning requests have you approved, Minister? Zero.

Minister, when are you going to allow the city to proceed with inclusionary zoning, so developers build more affordable housing?

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

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Steve Clark: Speaker, our legislation that's on the floor right now, Bill 3, builds upon our success. Our government has made a commitment over the last three years. We've spent \$4.3 billion supporting our community housing sector and building more supportive housing.

I've said many, many times, Speaker, that there is not one silver bullet that is going to solve the housing supply crisis. Our government has put forward many pieces of

legislation—More Homes, More Choice, our province's first housing supply action plan, in 2019. We followed that up with More Homes for Everyone. Each time, Speaker—this is the craziness of the whole situation—every time I put a bill forward—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Steve Clark:—the New Democrats, every time they vote no. They vote no to More Homes, More Choice. They vote no for More Homes for Everyone. They voted no for Bill 3. When are you going to support more housing supply—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Once again, I'll ask the members to make their comments through the Chair.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Mr. Speaker, we know that increasing the number of electric vehicles on our roads and highways is good news not only for the environment, but for our economy as well.

My question is for the Minister of Energy. We know that we have a long way to go before electric vehicles replace gas-powered cars. We have seen that other provinces have a head start when it comes to EV policies and infrastructure. What, then, is the Minister of Energy doing to ensure that electric vehicle ownership becomes more accessible and attractive in Ontario, so we can get more electric vehicles on our roads and highways?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the member from Canada's clean energy capital, the Durham region, for this question this morning. It's important, because when I talk to people who are interested in buying an EV, one of the first things that they talk to me about is potential range anxiety. They want to know that when they buy a car, they're going to be able to get to where they want to go and not run out of electricity.

That's why we've taken the steps to ensure that the EVs have the charging stations that they need in the province. Unlike the previous Liberal government that did everything they could to slow down EV uptake in our province, by driving the price of electricity through the roof and putting EV charging stations at places where they're plugged in all day and only one vehicle can go there, like a GO station, we're taking the steps to ensure that we're building EV chargers at every single ONroute across the province, so that when people are travelling to visit our beautiful province, they can go to the Thousand Islands, or they can go to Sarnia-Lambton, or they can go to Kingston and the Islands, or they can go to London, or they can go to Brantford. They can go anywhere they want along the 400 series of highways and get a charge and power up.

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

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: I thank the minister for his answer, but I do wonder, in light of that answer, how this great plan will impact Ontario's electricity grid. Electric vehicles are the cars of the future, and putting more on the

road is certainly something to be proud of. But does the minister have a plan in place to deal with the increased demand for electricity? Can the minister explain to this House how he plans on keeping Ontario's grid reliable and affordable?

Hon. Todd Smith: Absolutely, I can. We need more electric vehicles on the road, but at the same time we need to ensure that our grid and our electricity supply can support that increased demand—not just from EVs, but from our growing economy. Because of the investments that are being made, because of the leadership of our Premier and our Minister of Economic Development, we're seeing historic investments in our province. We have the electrification of our transportation and heavy industry as well.

That's why, last year, I provided direction to the Independent Electricity System Operator that sets out the path to procure new electricity generation in our province over the next 10 years through a competitive process. This work is well under way. Just recently, we were able to renew new capacity, new generation in our province, saving the people of Ontario 30%-plus along the way. Unlike the former Liberal government, which drove up the cost of electricity, we have a plan in place that's going to provide reliable and affordable energy—

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

HEALTH CARE

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: My question is to the Premier. Michelle Hurtubise, at the Centretown Community Health Centre, recently told the CBC that people have to wait more than two years for an appointment at her clinic. It's the only one in her city that specializes in trans health.

Does this government believe that waiting two years for a primary care doctor is acceptable? What is this government going to do to help trans Ontarians access gender-affirming health care?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I appreciate the member opposite's question, because it gives me an opportunity to talk about some of the great work that we're doing with our Ontario health teams, including, of course, the CHCs, family health care practitioners who provide guidance and resources that could be used for all primary care providers when caring for transgender individuals, and that's the Sherbourne Health centre or CHC.

We have many primary care teams across Ontario who run primary care programs as part of their LGBTQ+ services, or specific clinics for trans populations, providing interdisciplinary primary care services. These are teams that work together—including mental health services—for their clients. In addition, we have a couple of examples of family health teams: the Couchiching Family Health Team in Orillia, an interdisciplinary program created to provide trans health care, mental health care, education and system navigation for trans or questioning people and their loved ones living in the north Simcoe and Muskoka region.

We have the Queen Square Family Health Team in Brampton—again, trans health programs supporting trans individuals with access to supportive, team-based—

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

The supplementary.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Unfortunately, none of those services necessarily help the resident who's actually in Centretown Community Health Centre.

We all recognize that gender-affirming health care is life-saving health care and, during the last Parliament, my predecessor, Suze Morrison tabled the Gender Affirming Health Care Advisory Committee Act, a bill that I'm looking to re-table, with wide support from everyone in this House.

Will this government commit to helping all Ontarians, including trans Ontarians, by ensuring that they support the gender-affirming health care act when I re-table the identical bill?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As the member opposite would know, individuals have the right to table either resolutions or PMBs in this Legislature. We will obviously carefully review that and assess the value of moving it forward.

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

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I understand the member from Ottawa–Vanier has a point of order.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I am seeking unanimous consent that, notwithstanding standing order 100(a)(iv), the independent members be permitted to share the five minutes allotted to a single member for the debate on ballot item number 1—that is tonight—standing in the name of the member for Brampton North.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): M^{me}. Collard is seeking the unanimous consent of the House that, notwithstanding standing order 100(a)(iv), the independent members be permitted to share the five minutes allotted to a single member for the debate on ballot item number 1 standing in the name of the member for Brampton North. Agreed? Agreed.

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

The House recessed from 1141 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

CONSENT AWARENESS WEEK ACT, 2022

LOI DE 2022 SUR LA SEMAINE DE SENSIBILISATION AU CONSENTEMENT

MPP Wong-Tam moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 18, An Act to proclaim Consent Awareness Week /
Projet de loi 18, Loi proclamant la Semaine de
sensibilisation au consentement.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I will invite the member to briefly explain their bill.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much, Speaker. The bill proclaims the week beginning on the third Monday in September in each year as Consent Awareness Week. The week invites Ontarians to have thoughtful, affirming and age-appropriate conversations about consent where they live, work, study and play. This week was chosen to recognize and raise awareness of the increase in sexual violence across post-secondary campuses during the first six weeks of the new academic year.

Understanding consent requires action, awareness and accountability. Only 28% of Canadians fully understand the meaning of consent.

Through this bill, Ontario will be the first jurisdiction in Canada to recognize and adopt Consent Awareness Week.

PETITIONS

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Faye Moffatt from Hanmer in my riding for this petition.

“Stop Privatization

“Whereas Ontarians get health care based on their needs, not their ability to pay;

“Whereas the Ford government wants to privatize our health care system;

“Whereas privatization will bleed nurses,” physicians “and PSWs out of our public hospitals and will download costs to patients;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To immediately stop all plans to privatize the Ontario health care system, and fix the crisis in health care by:

“—repealing Bill 124 to help recruit, retain, return and respect health care workers with better pay and better working conditions;

“—licensing tens of thousands of internationally educated nurses and other health care professionals already in Ontario;

“—incentivizing health care professionals to choose to live and work in northern Ontario.”

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

LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I’m proud to read out the petition entitled “Put Public Safety First. Get a Fair Deal for Safety Inspectors.

“Whereas safety inspectors at the Technical Standards and Safety Authority (TSSA) help ensure the safety of Ontarians by inspecting amusement park rides, food trucks, elevators, fuel-burning equipment, propane-dispensing stations, boilers and pressure vessels in our schools, hospitals, long-term-care homes, nuclear power plants and more; and

“Whereas TSSA safety inspectors have been bargaining for their first collective agreement since November 2021, and when the employer walked away from the table were forced out on strike on July 21; and

“Whereas TSSA safety inspectors are fighting for improved accountability for public safety standards and practices, wages and benefits that are consistent with industry standards, measures to address understaffing issues and improve retention and recruitment and be a stronger voice in the workplace; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario, including the Premier’s office, is responsible for protecting public safety and ensuring that provincial agencies such as the TSSA bargain with their employees in good faith.

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

“—intervene to ensure that the TSSA stop its stonewalling, return to the bargaining table and negotiate fairly with OPSEU/SEFPO Local 546 TSSA members to reach a deal;

“—ensure that newly unionized employees have automatic access to first contract arbitration should they want it when bargaining reaches an impasse; and

“—commit to labour policies and legislation that are actually working for workers and advance a decent work agenda for all working people in Ontario.”

I’m proud to sign this, and will be giving this to page Sophie.

LABOUR LEGISLATION

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I’m very pleased to introduce this petition on behalf of the Unifor 222 workers in my neck of the woods, cleaners with GDI Services who are out on the strike line and who unfortunately have to deal with scab labour right now. This is an anti-scab legislation petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the use of replacement workers (scab labour) undermines workers’ collective power, unnecessarily prolongs labour disputes, and removes the essential power that the withdrawal of labour is supposed to give workers to help end a dispute, that is, the ability to apply economic pressure;

“Whereas the use of scab labour contributes to higher-conflict picket lines, jeopardizes workplace safety, destabilizes normalized labour relations between workers and their employers and removes the employer incentive to negotiate and settle fair contracts; and

“Whereas strong and fair anti-scab legislation will help lead to shorter labour disputes, safer workplaces, and less hostile picket lines;

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

“—to prohibit employers from using scab labour for the duration of any legal strike or lockout, specifically banning the use of any employee or contracted worker to perform the duties of a bargaining unit employee;

“—to prohibit employers from using both external scabs (those hired specifically to replace striking or locked-out bargaining unit members) as well as internal scabs (new hires, members of the bargaining unit who might otherwise cross the picket line, or any other employees at any of the employer’s establishments, including managers);

“—to include significant financial penalties for employers who defy the anti-scab legislation; and

“—to allow for the very limited use of temporary workers, only to undertake essential maintenance work to protect the integrity and safety of the workplace, but not to contribute to the ongoing, normal operation of the workplace.”

I wholeheartedly support this petition, will affix my signature and send it to the table with Daniyal.

LABOUR DISPUTE

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I’d like to submit to the House this petition entitled “Put Public Safety First. Get a Fair Deal for Safety Inspectors.

“Whereas safety inspectors at the Technical Standards and Safety Authority (TSSA) help ensure the safety of Ontarians by inspecting amusement park rides, food trucks, elevators, fuel-burning equipment, propane-dispensing stations, boilers and pressure vessels in our schools, hospitals, long-term-care homes, nuclear power plants and more; and

“Whereas TSSA safety inspectors have been bargaining for their first collective agreement since November 2021, and when the employer walked away from the table were forced out on strike on July 21; and

“Whereas TSSA safety inspectors are fighting for improved accountability for public safety standards and practices, wages and benefits that are consistent with industry standards, measures to address understaffing issues and improve retention and recruitment and be a stronger voice in the workplace; and

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“—ensure that newly unionized employees have automatic access to first contract arbitration should they want it when bargaining reaches an impasse; and

“—commit to labour policies and legislation that are actually working for workers and advance a decent work agenda for all working people in Ontario.”

I proudly affix my name to this petition, and I will return it to the centre table with page Juliet.

1510

LABOUR DISPUTE

Ms. Jessica Bell: This petition is called “Put Public Safety First.

“Whereas safety inspectors at the Technical Standards and Safety Authority (TSSA) help ensure the safety of Ontarians by inspecting amusement park rides, food trucks, elevators, fuel-burning equipment, propane-dispensing stations, boilers and pressure vessels in our schools, hospitals, long-term-care homes, nuclear power plants and more; and

“Whereas TSSA safety inspectors have been bargaining for their first collective agreement since November 2021, and when the employer walked away from the table were forced out on strike on July 21; and

“Whereas TSSA safety inspectors are fighting for improved accountability for public safety standards and practices, wages and benefits that are consistent with industry standards, measures to address understaffing issues and improve retention and recruitment and be a stronger voice in the workplace; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario, including the Premier’s office, is responsible for protecting public safety and ensuring that provincial agencies such as the TSSA bargain with their employees in good faith.

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

“—intervene to ensure that the TSSA stop its stonewalling, return to the bargaining table and negotiate fairly with OPSEU/SEFPO Local 546 TSSA members to reach a deal;

“—ensure that newly unionized employees have automatic access to first contract arbitration should they want it when bargaining reaches an impasse; and

“—commit to labour policies and legislation that are actually working for workers and advance a decent work agenda for all working people in Ontario.”

I support this petition and I’ll give it to page Sharmin.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Ms. Jill Andrew: I proudly stand in support of this petition entitled “Put Public Safety First. Get a Fair Deal for Safety Inspectors.

“Whereas safety inspectors at the Technical Standards and Safety Authority (TSSA) help ensure the safety of Ontarians by inspecting amusement park rides, food trucks, elevators, fuel-burning equipment, propane-dispensing stations, boilers and pressure vessels in our schools, hospitals, long-term-care homes, nuclear power plants and more; and

“Whereas TSSA safety inspectors have been bargaining for their first collective agreement since November

2021, and when the employer walked away from the table were forced out on strike on July 21; and

“Whereas TSSA safety inspectors are fighting for improved accountability for public safety standards and practices, wages and benefits that are consistent with industry standards, measures to address understaffing issues and improve retention and recruitment and be a stronger voice in the workplace; and

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

“—intervene to ensure that the TSSA stop its stonewalling, return to the bargaining table and negotiate fairly with OPSEU/SEFPO Local 546 TSSA members to reach a deal;

“—ensure that newly unionized employees have automatic access to first contract arbitration should they want it when bargaining reaches an impasse; and

“—commit to labour policies and legislation that are actually working for workers and advance a decent work agenda for all working people in Ontario.”

I absolutely support this petition—a shout-out to all the safety inspectors in Toronto–St. Paul’s. I’m handing this, affixed with my signature, to Sophie.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition about the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act, and it reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there is overwhelming evidence to show that paid sick leave significantly reduces the spread of infectious disease, promotes preventive health care and reduces health care system costs; and

“Whereas 60% of Ontario workers do not have access to paid sick days, and therefore must sacrifice income to stay home if they are sick; and

“Whereas low-wage and precarious workers who can least afford to miss pay are the most likely to be denied paid sick days; and

“Whereas employers benefit when sick workers can afford to stay home, limiting the spread of illness to co-workers and customers, and allowing workers to recover faster; and

“Whereas during an infectious disease emergency, it is unreasonable and dangerous to public health to make workers choose between protecting their communities and providing for their families; and

“Whereas mandating employers to provide paid sick leave through the Employment Standards Act ensures that workers have seamless, uninterrupted access to their pay;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately provide workers with 10 annual employer-paid days of personal emergency

leave and 14 days of paid leave in the case of an infectious disease emergency....”

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

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

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

“Improve Winter Road Maintenance on Northern Highways....

“Whereas highways play a critical role in northern Ontario;

“Whereas winter road maintenance has been privatized in Ontario and contract standards are not being enforced;

“Whereas per capita, fatalities are twice as likely to occur on a northern highway than on a highway in southern Ontario;

“Whereas current MTO classification negatively impacts the safety of northern highways;

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

“To classify Highways 11, 17, 69, 101 and 144 as class 1 highways; require that the pavement be bare within eight hours of the end of a snowfall and bring the management of winter road maintenance back into the public sector, if contract standards are not met.”

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

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am pleased to read this into the record.

“Stop Ford’s Health Care Privatization Plan.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontarians should get health care based on need—not the size of your wallet;

“Whereas” the Premier and health minister “say they’re planning to privatize parts of health care;

“Whereas privatization will bleed nurses, doctors and PSWs out of our public hospitals, making the health care crisis worse;

“Whereas privatization always ends with patients getting a bill;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately stop all plans to further privatize Ontario’s health care system, and fix the crisis in health care by:

“—repealing Bill 124 and recruiting, retaining and respecting doctors, nurses and PSWs with better pay and better working conditions;

“—licensing tens of thousands of internationally educated nurses and other health care professionals already in Ontario, who wait years and pay thousands to have their credentials certified;

“—making education and training free or low-cost for nurses, doctors and other health care professionals;

“—incentivizing doctors and nurses to choose to live and work in northern Ontario;

“—funding hospitals to have enough nurses on every shift, on every ward.”

I support this petition. I will affix my signature and gladly send it with Juliet.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: This is a petition on gas prices.

“Whereas ... Ontario motorists continue to be subject to wild fluctuations in the price of gasoline; and

“Whereas the province could eliminate opportunistic price gouging and deliver fair, stable and predictable fuel prices; and

“Whereas five provinces and many US states already have some sort of gas price regulation; and

“Whereas jurisdictions with gas price regulation have seen an end to wild price fluctuations, a shrinking of price discrepancies between urban and rural communities and lower annualized gas prices;

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

“Mandate the Ontario Energy Board to monitor the price of gasoline across Ontario in order to reduce price volatility and unfair regional price differences while encouraging competition.”

I will definitely be affixing my signature to this and giving it to page Danial.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRONG MAYORS, BUILDING HOMES ACT, 2022 LOI DE 2022 POUR DES MAIRES FORTS ET POUR LA CONSTRUCTION DE LOGEMENTS

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

Bill 3, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to special powers and duties of heads of council / Projet de loi 3, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les pouvoirs et fonctions spéciaux des présidents du conseil.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): When we last debated this bill, the member for Niagara Centre had the floor. He still has time, should he choose to use it.

Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Burch: It’s a pleasure to continue my speaking from this morning. I got about seven minutes into it, so I just had time to thank a bunch of people.

I want to start off, first of all, by mentioning my son, Jackson, who’s starting his first day of high school today. He’s a little bit nervous, as I’m sure a lot of kids across Ontario are, so I want to wish him and all the kids and parents and teachers a safe return to school today, and a great school year.

1520

I had some time this morning to thank municipal candidates from across Ontario. I’m a former city councillor and budget chair myself, and also a mayoral candidate, so I understand how difficult it is to run for municipal office, to put your name forward. And I just want to congratulate all those people who have done that. It’s not an easy thing on your family—or on your finances, quite frankly, as many of us know. Municipally, it’s so important to be involved in your community. So congratulations to all those folks.

I named all the delegations that came for hearings last Monday—from municipal associations to groups of builders and developers. We appreciate everyone’s input, and it was great to join my colleagues from University–Rosedale and Ottawa Centre to talk with those delegations about their concerns with the bill.

I just want to give some general reflections on those comments from the delegations that appeared before I get into the actual bill. Everyone who appeared agreed that we need more homes, and I think everyone in this room, in this House, agrees that we need to build more homes. We also agreed that we need more affordable homes. Where things diverged is whether this bill will actually accomplish that. We’re suggesting that the government has really failed to show how stronger-mayors legislation will actually translate into more homes. Some of the delegations suggested and spoke about ways that it may actually slow down the ability to build more homes, and we’ll get into that shortly.

There’s also some debate about how a mayor will use those powers. No one could really answer the question, “How can you guarantee that a mayor will use the powers in the way that the province wants them to?” There’s no evidence to suggest there are more NIMBY mayors than non-NIMBY mayors. And if you have a strong NIMBY mayor, they can unilaterally hire a strong NIMBY CAO and a planner under this legislation. So the translation of how this bill will work in practice is something that the government has not fully explained—and whether those powers are appropriate and transparent. Many of the delegations raised points of view in terms of this making municipal government much less transparent, especially when it comes to the hiring practices, which I will talk about further in my presentation as well.

No one seems to understand what provincial priorities are specifically, and how they would be promoted by this strong-mayor scheme. Some real confusion on the government’s part, I feel, is in distinguishing between the Canadian and American municipal government systems, which are fundamentally different. A number of folks on the government side have talked about Chicago and other American cities, but in practice, one doesn’t translate into the other. City managers in the United States are not the same as CAOs in Canada. They’re fundamentally different systems, and to suggest that you can take an American model and put it here in Canadian cities is not practical—and many folks who have a lot of experience, such as the

Ontario provincial planners and others who appeared as delegations, said as much in their presentations.

Another question is why the government has not taken action on things that will actually make a difference. Many folks have raised things like exclusionary and inclusionary zoning and the changes that need to happen there. The housing crisis has gotten worse, not better, under this government. I've noticed a lot of the language in the House recently—they talk about “the previous government” this and “the previous government” that, and I know that they're referring to the Liberals, but I think they have to understand that they're actually the previous government, and things have gotten worse, not better, especially with respect to affordable housing.

Finally, I've really been reflecting on what a lot of the big city mayors and other municipal associations have said in terms of needing that support, financial and otherwise, from the province.

I can remember, as a councillor, between 2006 and 2014—we went through the financial crisis in 2008, and there was a joint infrastructure spending plan that the Conservative federal government, actually, put forward. Many of you, especially if you were into municipal politics, will remember that. When the will was there and the financing was there, that infrastructure program moved forward with an incredible number of projects throughout the country.

Also, most recently, we had the Canada Summer Games in Niagara, and we appreciated the investment in our community and the great respect for the volunteers and the athletes. But, boy, was an awful lot of money ever spent on those games. A lot of my constituents said, “If we could show the same cross-party, cross-government commitment and funding to the affordable housing crisis as we do to those games, imagine what we could do for the affordable housing crisis.” I think those are legitimate questions to ask—why the government has come forward with this and not some more tangible and effective ways to deal with the affordable housing crisis.

I want to be clear about our position on the bill, which is that, once again, this Premier is demonstrating a disdain for local democracy by unilaterally interfering with municipal politics during a municipal election with absolutely no consultation. The Premier's strong-mayor proposal has nothing to do with housing, as the Premier has already admitted; it's about the Premier giving the mayors the power to help him bypass councils, override local bylaws and stifle consultation. The bill will make local government less transparent and less accountable while doing nothing at all to address the affordable housing crisis.

Many of the comments we've heard from right across the province have to do with the really incredible lack of consultation around this bill. Especially if you're going to put a bill forward in the middle of a municipal election, you would think that you'd consult, even on short notice, with AMO and other municipal organizations. But we heard nothing about this bill or strong mayors for the entire last term of government. We heard nothing about strong

mayors through two housing bills that this government brought forward in the last term. We heard absolutely nothing about it during the Housing Affordability Task Force and all of those recommendations that came forward. We heard nothing about it during the election. If this was planned to happen immediately after the election—bringing us back in the middle of summer, and an emergency session to pass legislation—you would have thought they'd be aware of that during the election and put that out there.

There was no consultation with the big city mayors, and there was no consultation with the mayor of Ottawa, which is one of the first two cities that this legislation is supposed to affect. As a matter of fact, the mayor of Ottawa said he found out about it in the media, which is incredible.

The bill is supposed to be about building homes. That's what the government says. But apart from the bill's title, there's literally nothing in the bill that has to do with building homes. There's nothing that implements, as I mentioned, even a single recommendation of the government's own Housing Affordability Task Force, such as ending exclusionary zoning and enabling more missing middle housing, both of which were debated during the election. My friend from University-Rosedale, as the housing critic, has been raising this endlessly for years, to no avail, with this government. There's also nothing that establishes a public home builder or ensures the construction of new affordable or non-market homes. There's nothing that ensures the construction of new basement apartments, laneway homes, granny flats—all the things that have been talked about for years and years. There's nothing that expands inclusionary zoning, incredibly. That's something that could happen.

And it's not clear to many what problem the bill is trying to solve. For example, Toronto mayor John Tory has not lost a single significant vote at council, and there's no evidence that a mayoral veto would have changed any of the significant council outcomes.

1530

The minister has claimed that the bill is necessary because some municipalities are blocking progress on housing. We heard from the big city mayors chair, Cam Guthrie, about some of the big city mayors' frustrations with being blamed for the housing crisis, which this government has done quite aggressively, both within its legislation and in its public comments—blaming the slow progress of housing, that it's all the fault of municipalities. The minister has also failed to explain how giving more power to the mayor would address this issue.

The bill links veto powers to provincial priorities, and the minister has not explained why any mayor elected to serve municipal voters would willingly overturn a council vote to serve the Premier. The province already has perfectly legitimate ways of identifying provincial interests and requiring municipal consistency with provincial policies, especially with respect to housing and development. If the problem is that municipalities are not complying with provincial laws and policies, then how

does a mayoral veto help? Why doesn't the province just use its existing powers?

The bill gives the mayor control over both raising taxes and spending them through the new budget process. I'll be mentioning that a little bit later on as well. Instead of being required to secure the support of the majority of council, the mayor requires only the approval of one third. There's no requirement that the mayor receive recommendations from a budget committee or a public consultation process. The mayor could ask a lobbyist to write the budget behind closed doors if they wanted. I find that particularly troubling as a former budget chair who—I was the chair of the St. Catharines budget committee, which is a large urban municipality. I had a lot of respect for the process that that municipality used—having department heads, councillors who were elected from council, the mayor and the media sitting in the room as the budget process unfolded. It was a transparent process that I had a lot of respect for. It's really shocking where this bill takes that process.

I'd like to talk briefly about what's referred to as the weak-mayor system versus the strong-mayor system. I don't like the term "weak-mayor system." I don't think the system we have produces weak mayors; if you think about people like Hazel McCallion and others who are held up as examples of a strong mayor, I think it clearly depends on the quality of the mayor who people elect.

While councils wield the powers of the municipality, the mayor's statutory role includes providing leadership to council, representing the council at ceremonial functions and promoting the purposes of the city. Something we don't discuss at great length in this House is the role that informal powers play in governance. I was fortunate enough to serve under a very strong mayor who did things by consensus, and we got an awful lot done in Niagara. The member from St. Catharines actually served on that council with me, and we're very proud of the work we did—a mayor who led by consultation and character and strength.

A council may also delegate some of its formal authority to the mayor, and we saw that in Toronto when Toronto city council delegated to Mayor David Miller the power to appoint the executive committee and chairs of standing committees, which grants the mayor additional formal powers. Because executive committee roles are desirable by councillors, the power to appoint committee members tends to ensure that the mayor can usually count on close to a majority of council votes. We saw powers also taken away from a former mayor of Toronto as well, and many would argue that that's a very important check and balance in the system.

With the strong-mayor system, we can ask why this is being brought forward now. We know that in 2011, over a decade ago, the Premier was quoted as saying, "I believe in a strong-mayor system, like they have in the States. The mayor should have veto power ... so he has enough power to stop council.... The mayor should be the mayor. At the end of the day ... the mayor's responsible for everything." That comment in that article gives us a lot of insight into

the legislation that's before us. The Premier—at the time, a councillor—outlined that it was a challenge to get legislation passed with 23 votes to woo on council.

We heard a lot about the mayoral system in Chicago in the Premier's comments from 2011 and over the past few weeks. The government members like to bring up Chicago. But what's interesting about Chicago, as I've raised in the past, is that it's a charter city. An issue that we've tried to talk about in this House—and folks at Charter City Toronto and charter cities Ontario have approached both the government and the opposition with some pretty interesting and well-supported ideas. To complicate matters, Chicago, which the Premier touted as a great example of municipal governance, is actually a weak-mayor system under the charter. In practical terms, though, Chicago has an extremely powerful mayor, which shows how informal rules in practice are often vastly more relevant than the formal ones, and it really depends on the quality of the mayor and the quality of the council as well and their ability to work together.

I've raised the opinion of Ken Greenberg, the former director of urban design and architecture for the city of Toronto, who talked about the Premier's record with development at the municipal level: "His previous government sliced the number of councillors in half just before the last municipal elections in 2018, and his cabinet has had a field day issuing ministerial zoning orders ... to let developers build sprawling projects slicing up Ontario's ... greenbelt and unsustainable hyper-dense towers that don't help with housing affordability" at all.

Mr. Greenberg said, "Critics also worry about what might happen if a strong mayor comes to power who is also a populist bent on crushing the careful official plans drawn up by cities for sustainable smart growth. When he was a Toronto city councillor," the Premier "himself actually road-tested this scenario when he tried to strike a unilateral deal to undermine Waterfront Toronto and get hand-picked developers to build a luxury yacht club, megamall and Ferris wheel by the lake with little or no parkland" attached.

"An American mayor's biggest rival for power is not the city council, it's the city manager—an appointed bureaucrat who has vast power and can make elected councils weak or irrelevant."

Mr. Greenberg also pointed out that "Canadian cities have chief administrative officers, but they're not really the mayor's rival; they're professional civil servants who have only a fraction of the powers that many US city managers enjoy."

Mr. Greenberg pointed out, "While it is true that a 'good' strong mayor may be able to accomplish more things more quickly, what happens when we elect a bad one who tries to run the city with hare-brained slogans and schemes," as he calls it?

He said, "My concern is that under the guise of seeking to 'get things done,'" the Premier's "strong-mayor move to centralize power may undermine a critical virtue of Canadian cities: the need for consensual city building.

“Democracy, in cities and everywhere else, relies on hearing many voices—not just the strong one—and having a non-partisan group of civil servants who are loyal not just to a single politician, but to the city itself.”

I thought those were very wise words by Mr. Greenberg.

It's not hard to imagine what could happen if powers were abused at the municipal level at the behest of the current Premier. The record is not good.

1540

Shortly after the 2018 election, as I mentioned, the government tabled Bill 5, to cancel regional chair elections and cut the size of Toronto city council while the campaign was already under way and folks had already put their names forward and put money out there. When a lower court found Bill 5 to be unconstitutional and granted a stay, the government, again, passed Bill 31, which invoked the “notwithstanding” clause to bypass charter rights. After an appeal court overturned that, Bill 5 went ahead, and Bill 31 was left to die on the order paper. Bill 5 was still subject to a constitutional challenge before the Supreme Court, which—you know this government, over the last number of years, has not been shy about spending taxpayer dollars on court cases to defend itself.

In 2020, the government tabled Bill 218, a COVID recovery bill that included a clause which repealed the legislation allowing municipalities to use ranked ballots in municipal elections, which many folks considered to be extremely intrusive and undemocratic.

I want to turn to some of the testimony that we heard last Monday from delegations, and in particular some exchanges—in our first delegation, we had Dr. Myer Siemiatycki, who showed up and gave what I thought was an excellent presentation about some of the concerns with Bill 3. He's a professor of politics and public administration at Toronto Metropolitan University. I'd like to read into the record part of his presentation because I thought it really highlighted the concerns that folks on this side of the House share.

“I'm generally a ‘glass half full’ kind of person. I like to accentuate the positive. Regrettably, I don't have positives to say about Bill 3. That's because I don't think it fulfills its stated objectives—and will create a host of problems. I don't think Bill 3 meaningfully strengthens city mayors; rather, I actually think it weakens them, and it creates new risks for their city government—nor do I think the bill's measures will make a dent in our housing problems. The province already has more than enough powers to do that, and I wish Queen's Park would exercise them.”

Those are comments we heard from municipal associations as well. Why is the government not exercising the powers that it already has?

He went on to say, “I'm certainly not alone in my skepticism over Bill 3. Toronto's five living past mayors have all gone on record as opposed to this bill. Interestingly, these were mayors from all political stripes—a Conservative, an NDPer, a Liberal and, in fact, an independent.

“Bill 3 is not a partisan issue. It's a question of good governance and solving real problems; I'm sorry that Bill 3 achieves neither. Instead, it will create a host of new problems for mayors and for municipalities while generally leaving our housing problems to fester....

“Bill 3 is another example of Ontario provincial governments misusing municipalities for their own interests. It turns our mayors from local chief magistrates into provincial enforcement officers at city hall. The veto power accorded to the mayor in this legislation applies only to council decisions that are counter to ‘prescribed provincial priorities.’ Mayors will now be expected, and perhaps even pressured, to overturn majority decisions of their democratically elected councils in order to comply with provincial policy. This doesn't strengthen mayors or local government.

“Bill 3 further mistakenly assumes that mayoral authority in Ontario is handcuffed by the other elected members of council. Mayors in Ontario have more than enough authority and soft powers to lead their council. No one ever accused Mississauga's Hazel McCallion of being a weak mayor. And Toronto mayor John Tory ... has not lost a single significant vote on council during his eight years in office. What really weakens mayors are the limited financial resources and statutory powers that cities receive from the province”—and we heard that over and over again, Speaker. “Instead of addressing this, Bill 3 sets its sights on weakening the role of municipal councillors.

“The bill gives the mayor sole authority to hire and fire senior city staff. This is dangerous. It will turn a professional, neutral, high-quality senior staff into personal selections of the mayor and no one else. In such a system, senior staff will recommend and deliver what the mayor wants, regardless of council and city residents' preferences. That's not a public administration model designed for excellent government.”

We heard those concerns from the professional planners as well.

“Additionally, Bill 3 will give mayors super powers over the municipal budget. Not long ago, Toronto experienced a successful public and city council revolt against a previous mayor who promoted a budget making deep cuts to municipal services. Do we really want to further centralize budget powers in the mayor's hands rather than in a majority of council backed by public input? I don't think so.

“In considering your stance on Bill 3, I would ask committee members and all members of the Legislature to consider this”—and this is a very important question: “Are municipalities a legitimate democratic form of government? If so, is there any red line a province should not cross in imposing its will on municipalities, and is Bill 3 that red line?”

“Furthermore, I would ask the members of this committee from the governing party to consider this: The day will inevitably come when another party forms government at Queen's Park. How will you feel back in your hometowns if the next provincial government tells mayors to align your local government's decisions with its

prescribed provincial priorities? I imagine you may well be back before this committee yourselves complaining about the loss of local democracy....

“For almost 200 years, Ontario municipalities have been well served by a governance model based on mayoral-led, collegial, collaborative governance rooted in strong ties to their residents. That needs to continue.”

I think that those comments very accurately reflect what a lot of us on this side of the House feel about these changes.

Later on—it was interesting—my colleague from University–Rosedale asked a question. She said, “One of the issues that I’ve heard from constituents” in her riding “is how putting more power into the mayor’s office will limit the authority that individual councillors have in Toronto. Councillors in Toronto have upwards of 100,000 people voting for them, and there is real value in ensuring councillors have the power over the budgetary process and the power they need to represent their constituents well.” The member from University–Rosedale asked the presenter to speak on how democracy and civic engagement are limited by concentrating power in the mayor’s office.

The answer was interesting. He said, “There’s no question that if this legislation goes through, it will marginalize the input and the voice of city councillors. By doing that, who it’s really harming are local residents. Currently, the councillors have a single vote on all municipal issues. They also collectively appoint the senior staff of the city. It is currently not a unilateral decision of the head of council, the mayor. So, if we go down the path of this legislation, ward councillors will effectively be sidelined in the major decisions that a city government is making. The senior staff will see their careers as totally dependent on approval from the mayor. That means that the kind of advice that will come to city council and the recommendations that will come to city council from senior staff will, out of their own self-protectiveness, be framed by what they perceive the mayor to want, and what councillors connected to local residents advocate will be inconsequential.”

So that flags a really important issue that we heard a number of times throughout the presentations.

At one point, I asked one of the groups of builders—because we kept hearing this line, which obviously comes from the government, about taking politics out of the planning process; that somehow this bill will take the politics out of the planning process, which I find extremely puzzling. How a bill that will possibly cause mayors to be vetoing their own council and then council to be vetoing the mayor—it seems to me it injects a whole lot of politics into the process. With the budget process, the legislation actually allows the mayor to hire a CAO without going through any of the budget processes and to come up with a budget all on their own. So I don’t think anyone really thinks this is going to take the politics out of the planning process.

As a matter of fact, in my experience—and we heard this from some of the other presenters—we had a lot of

difficult planning decisions that I dealt with as a councillor. Whether you’re in Toronto or a small town or a medium-sized municipality, those are issues that you deal with. And you deal with residents who are upset about developments in their neighbourhood—some of them for good reason, and some of them what we would call NIMBY, not in my backyard. It’s often the planner who actually is the voice of reason—a planner who is independent, who has been hired through a proper hiring process, and who is part of their professional association. I can remember many times the planner promoting a development that conforms to the official plan, even though the mayor and council may be leaning a different way out of political pressure, because they’re often the voice of reason. The planning department is often the objective voice, and they’re often the ones saying, “This doesn’t go against the official plan. There’s no reason for this development not to go forward.” And sometimes they actually get council off the hook, because council can then say, “We’re following the professional advice of our planner.”

So I think that people who are more experienced with the process will understand that this idea of the mayor actually hiring a planner is not such a good one.

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Just on the budget process again, it is our understanding that under the new legislation, the mayor can draft a budget and present it to council, which we see as a very dangerous thing to allow a mayor to do unilaterally, without going through a public and transparent process. Council may pass amendments, but these amendments can be vetoed by the mayor.

Toronto currently has an executive committee which oversees setting strategic priorities and fiscal policy. The process of a budget committee is allowed under the bill, but it’s not required. So there’s no question that under this bill, the mayor could unilaterally put a budget together, and if they had more than a third—not a majority, but a third of council—they could pass that budget and do it in a way that’s not in any way or in any sense transparent.

With respect to the hiring of a CAO: I’ve talked at length about this in the past, from experience. As you may recall, in Niagara we had a situation where—the power to hire and fire may seem innocuous, but we had a CAO who was hired, actually, by the chair and was investigated by the Ombudsman of Ontario, Paul Dubé, who came to a number of conclusions about why a mayor or a chair should not be able to unilaterally hire a head executive officer.

When I was first elected in 2018, a tremendous amount of scrutiny was being placed on the regional chair in Niagara, and particularly on the CAO as well.

The former MPP for my riding worked for many years to bring accountability to the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, where the chief officer was hired into the region. It was done in a way where they received the résumés and information on other candidates, and the CAO was hired into an office and given a severance package—which was not transparent and was not even

done with the permission of council—of several years that amounted to millions of dollars. This was written about extensively in the media. It was called an inside job. The Ombudsman came out with some recommendations that I think are instructive in this debate: first of all, ensuring that staff in the chair's office do not usurp or undermine the role of professional staff, especially when those roles have been set by council or a committee; and adopting a policy setting out the process for hiring a chief administrative officer, including the appropriate roles of staff and their accountability to council or a committee of council charged with the hiring.

He recommended adopting a bylaw setting the parameters of the relationship between council and the CAO—this is something that the professional association has asked for at our delegations—including the role of council with respect to amending the CAO's contract and salary and ensuring that staff and officials act in accordance with the direction of council and committees of council.

A CAO has incredible powers, particularly in larger municipalities, and I think it's important that this House is thoughtful about the implications of this legislation.

As I mentioned, we talked to Susan Wiggins from the Ontario Professional Planners Institute, who gave some really serious concerns about the hiring of a CAO. She said, "Currently there is a separation between the mayor and the head of the planning department. There's often a chief administrative officer or a city manager who reports to council and is responsible for selecting senior management, including a chief planner. This layer of separation avoids a sense of obligation and allows the chief planner to provide his or her independent advice on the planning matter of the day. This independence often serves to benefit more housing supply in certain communities. It allows elected officials," as I mentioned, "including mayors, to defend politically challenging projects by saying, 'The chief planner has deemed the project to align with all of our policies and plans.'" I saw this happen many times, as a city councillor. "That opinion of the chief planner is a professional opinion from highly trained professional planners and is based on data-gathering and research, as cited in the legislation.

"The heads of planning in both Ottawa and Toronto are registered professional planners ... and as such are bound by a professional code of conduct that requires recommendations in the public interest. If a mayor is seen to have direct control over the hiring and firing of the chief planner, it would remove the important separation between these two roles.

"OPPI is concerned that allowing a mayor to hire and fire the head of a planning department may actually be to the detriment of building more housing in the province. It may create more political pressure on the mayor from factions who may not support intensification where policies direct it. We therefore recommend that the chief planner be" exempt under the exempt persons in the act.

That comes from the Ontario Professional Planners Institute, which is a group that sets the standards for

planners, suggesting that the head of the planning—that it may result in less homes being built, not more.

Getting to some of the reaction of mayors across Ontario: I was interested to see an article in the Hamilton Spectator from the mayor of the city of St. Catharines, where I served as a councillor. In Niagara, as I've mentioned in the past, all of the mayors of the three larger municipalities were pretty quick in coming out and saying they were not in support of this legislation, and they had some serious concerns about it. I thought that Mayor Sendzik from St. Catharines wrote some really interesting comments, especially about the official planning process: "The idea that giving more powers to mayors will magically lead to more housing is too simplistic. If this is all it takes to address the housing crisis, why not give more powers to end homelessness and tackle mental health issues and addictions? Add in more powers to end climate change and mayors will become superheroes"—he said sarcastically.

"But that is what Premier Ontario Doug Ford is attempting to do as a means to solve the housing crisis through his government's new sweeping legislation.... In essence, it follows this line of thinking: We have a housing crisis; therefore if mayors had more powers, the housing crisis would be solved. The press release announcing the legislation even proclaimed it as 'empowering mayors to build housing faster.'

"The sweeping set of new powers for mayors includes the ability to hire ... chief administrative officers and senior staff positions." It goes on to say—to the point that I've already raised—about the ability, if a NIMBY mayor is elected, to hire people who support that position.

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He said, "After eight years as mayor of St. Catharines, I can confidently state I didn't need special powers to build more housing. In St. Catharines we have approved more housing developments, of all types, over the last eight years than any time in the last 30 years." And this is the important part: "We achieved this because of a progressive city official plan, approved in 2012."

This is where this mayor gets into what we've heard from many municipalities in their complaints about the Ontario Land Tribunal and actual constructive suggestions that this government could adopt to make the planning process more streamlined. He said, "Official plans are a tool developed by municipal staff who are experts in municipal land use planning. It conforms with provincial planning regulations that take into account future population growth, transportation expansion, protection of farmland, sustainability, heritage protection and other aspects that guide growth. Official plans are future forward land use planning regulations that shape communities for tomorrow and support growth to create complete communities. It's all prescribed under the Ontario Planning Act"—it's already there.

"If a developer proposes a housing project that meets the requirements of the city's official plan, it should be approved by staff and council. But under the Planning Act,

there is a process that provides the public with opportunities to comment on proposals in their neighbourhood and this is the part where projects become contentious, often leading to appeals to try and stop development.

“And this is where the province needs to step in.”

I’ve talked to developers I got to know as a city councillor. I represented a ward of the city that was a former industrial area, and there was all kinds of brownfield development happening. I had to work very, very closely with developers, and I’ve maintained a lot of those relationships. Whether you talk to community groups or developers, many of them will talk about how the official plan should be respected and that what needs to be cut down on is the number of appeals to the Ontario Land Tribunal. There’s quite a campaign being led across Ontario, adopted by many mayors, to actually abolish the Ontario Land Tribunal. Whether you agree with that or not, we can certainly agree, almost universally, that some major reforms need to happen. That’s something practical that this government could do in listening to municipalities and respecting official plans.

Mr. Sendzik continued: “The province doesn’t need to give mayors special powers. It needs to reduce appeals by the public to projects they think ‘don’t fit’ in their neighbourhood. If a development conforms with the official plan—a public process reviewed every five years and updated every 10 years—staff recommend approval and a simple majority of council support it, there should be no appeal process.”

So that puts the planning emphasis on the front end, on the official plan, and cuts down on the appeals—and not just by neighbourhood groups. In Niagara, there were developments held up for an extended period of time by a developer who appealed a council decision—which conformed to the official plan—to the OLT, and that held up all developments around the city of St. Catharines for quite some time. So it happens due to developers as well.

He said, “Adding more powers to the office of the mayor will only weaken the functionality of cities. It won’t accelerate building of housing, as the roadblocks that exist due to appeals will not be curtailed by the proposed legislation.”

So what does the bill do for housing? I’ve stood up in the House many times to speak to the housing legislation, as my friend here from University–Rosedale has done. The bills have arguably made the situation worse because, as we have argued many times, they actually exacerbate the kind of speculation that’s happening in the province rather than doing anything at all to fix the affordability problem. As we’ve mentioned, all of the recommendations of the Housing Affordability Task Force, which this government talked about endlessly, are being ignored in favour of a bill that does nothing to promote more housing.

So if the minister is serious about housing, we have suggested many things, as have big city mayors, AMO, many other folks. We could be talking about ending exclusionary zoning. We could be talking about allowing municipalities to build missing middle homes. This legislation does nothing about that. We could open up public

land for affordable housing. We could put in real rent control, something that would be really helpful here in Toronto. Clamp down on speculation—my friend, this morning, asked a question about a vacancy and speculation tax. We could fund community housing. That’s one of the big failures, both of provincial and federal government—not putting money into social housing, where the real need is. And we could expand inclusionary zoning. Instead, we have a bill that—the government cannot demonstrate that it, in any meaningful way, supports the building of homes, or especially of affordable housing.

In my area of Niagara, one city, Niagara Falls, which is the worst example—a waiting list of 18 years to get into affordable housing, through the Niagara housing board.

I would be remiss if I didn’t mention AMO, who presented last Monday. AMO is careful—they have a number of members, and not everyone is opposed or in favour; they have a variety of opinions. But they did come out with three concerns that we should mention briefly:

First, they asked, “As the government considers how it may expand the new provisions in the Municipal Act to include additional municipalities, it must engage in broad consultation with the public and with both professional and political municipal organizations, including AMO.” There’s obviously frustration there that there was not appropriate consultation. And they certainly hope that if the bill moves forward—the government has a majority, so, obviously, it will—when the decision is made to expand into other municipalities, if it is, that the appropriate consultation that didn’t happen this time will happen in the future with those municipalities and with those organizations.

Secondly, they said, “The AMO board has taken note of the strong concerns expressed by municipal public administrators regarding the proposed provisions of the Municipal Act that would allow a mayor to unilaterally hire and fire a chief administrative officer, and it urges this committee to give careful consideration to those concerns as it proceeds.” They’re asking us to listen to the administrators and the professional planners who have come forward and said, “There’s a red flag here. You need to really think before you make a mistake here.”

And third, “The AMO board finds that the proposed changes to the Municipal Act which would allow a mayor to unilaterally hire and fire department heads and to reorganize a municipality’s public administration are at odds with established good practices of both private and public sector governance and administration, and should be removed from the bill.” That’s some pretty strong language about the government’s plans in that regard.

So there are some pretty strong concerns from people who have come forward—concerns that the government would have heard if they had consulted properly or at all. I want to say it’s rare, and it hasn’t been so rare for this government—but to come forward with a bill that has never been mentioned in provincial government circles for the last five years, even through an election, during a municipal election, raises some real red flags and some real concerns.

My time is almost at an end, and I want to conclude by saying that we see nothing in this bill that will achieve the minister's stated priorities. I don't think this government has been able to demonstrate clearly how strong-mayor powers will create housing or make it more affordable. Once again, this government has shown that in a time of a crisis, they cannot offer solutions. Municipalities have routinely articulated to the province that the housing crisis does not solely fall on their shoulders and what they need to address it is support and financial assistance. Over and over again, as I mentioned, this government has blamed municipalities for the entire housing situation.

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Instead, what this government offers is sweeping new powers encouraging mayors to veto council priorities, hire and fire senior staff, and unilaterally create budgets.

This bill does not create housing or strengthen democracy. It weakens councils and entrenches the notion that mayors should be sledgehammers for provincial priorities. While we do not yet know the full detail, we know that this bill has the capacity to make municipal decision-making less transparent and less accountable.

If this government was really interested in creating housing, not just enriching their friends with high-priced development and MZOs, they would listen to and work in partnership with municipal councils and give them the legislative and financial support that they need to move forward.

With that, I would once again like to thank all of the delegations who came forward last Monday. I thought they did an excellent job on very, very short notice. I hope that the government will give some real consideration to the concerns that were raised with respect to creating a situation in councils that is less transparent and less accountable—problems, potentially, with budget processes, where a mayor can unilaterally bring a budget forward without any kind of democracy on the council—serious concerns that have been brought forward by professionals about turning objective, professional positions into hiring by friends of the mayor, and the serious situations that could result from that in planning decisions.

The housing crisis has gotten worse under this government, and it's time that they came forward with real solutions that will bring real results.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Questions for the member for Niagara Centre?

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciated listening to the comments from the member from Niagara Centre, but I'm a little bit confused—because we know that we have seen more housing starts in the last year than in 35 years in the province of Ontario. The Associate Minister of Housing could correct me if I'm wrong, but we've actually seen more rental housing starts in the last year than we have seen in decades and decades. So I'm left confused, because the evidence is clear: If you want to stop rental housing construction starts, put in rent control. But it seems to me that the only idea that we've had from the member from Niagara Centre is rent control, which is demonstrably an absolute failure.

I was wondering if he could explain to the House why we've seen more housing starts and more rental starts in the last year than in decades, if our plan hasn't worked, if our policies don't work.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to the member for the question. I will agree with the member that he is confused. That's what I will agree to.

I realize that an hour is a long time to listen to a speech, but if he was listening at the part where I proposed solutions, I believe I rhymed off seven or eight things, which included inclusionary zoning, getting rid of exclusionary zoning, more social housing, more investment. There's a long, long list of things, and we've talked about it ad nauseam in this place for years now.

I guess we're confused as to why the government is not listening to us, because we propose real solutions. The folks we've spoken to at AMO and other cities have proposed solutions, but the government is just not coming forward with those.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Question?

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you to our member for that eloquent one-hour lead on the Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act.

The issue with this bill, as we've all discussed many times over, is that the bill doesn't actually address real affordable housing and supporting folks in our communities who are struggling with affordable housing. I'm thinking of one constituent in St. Paul's in particular who has been on the list for approximately a decade for affordable housing.

Does the strong-mayor bill address the issues of the need for, for instance, rent geared to income, supportive housing, transitional housing, affordable housing?

What if a strong mayor doesn't believe in rent-geared-to-income units or doesn't believe in creating real affordable housing?

How is that going to help my constituent on ODSP, who is also now considering medical assistance in dying instead because she can't get housing?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to my friend from Toronto—St. Paul's for the great advocacy work that she does for her constituents, many of whom are struggling to find a place to live or struggling with renovation and all the other problems we see in Toronto.

The bill does nothing—it doesn't even mention housing at all, much less affordable housing, and that's one of the things that we've consistently brought up with the government. They talk about housing supply constantly, but the real problem is affordable housing for folks, especially now, when we see inflation up at 7%, 8%, and the government has actually lifted rent control, making life much more difficult for people.

The bill does nothing for housing in general and could make things even worse for people who are looking for affordable housing.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I recognize the member for Markham—Unionville for another question.

Mr. Billy Pang: Actually, I'm so glad that the member opposite agreed that there is a housing supply crisis. This legislation, at its core, is very simple. We need to support efficient, local decision-making to help cut through the red tape so that we can build more homes.

Madam Speaker, through you: Why does the member trust that he can represent Ontarians but he cannot trust Ontarians to choose their own efficient local leaders?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Actually, I believe the opposite of that, which is that folks elect councillors. We have a municipal election going on right now, and they're going to go out and they're going to elect councillors to represent them—some cities at-large; some in the ward system.

As a former councillor, I can tell you that the strongest councils are ones where the mayor and council work together, and they work to get to consensus. Where you can't get to consensus, there is an element of democracy there that's supported by professional staff who are hired in an independent, objective manner. That's how good governance works—not by giving powers to one person to overturn the majority of people who were elected, and hiring their friends as CAOs and planners.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Question?

Mr. Tom Rakoczevic: Interestingly enough, we went to a place where I wanted to ask the question—when power gets expanded in one area, it always comes at the expense of something else. In this case, it comes at the expense of councillors. People go to the polls to vote for mayors, generally, for a vision overall, but, ultimately, for councillors to make local decisions.

Can you expand again a little bit, briefly, on why it's important that councillors have a say, are respected and have power to be able to make decisions?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you for the question. It's a very good one.

A lot of people fear that this legislation will actually make decisions less transparent and less democratic. As I just mentioned, a really good council is one where the mayor shows leadership, they communicate with their councillors, and they respect the will of the majority of their councillors and they bring them along.

I had a mayor who, if they had an idea, would call around to council between council meetings. That isn't always the case. That process can actually help development decisions go through because, if you have a council that's fractured, or you have a mayor who's not respecting the will of a councillor who is representing their constituents, you don't have that connection to the constituents and developers, and you're not able to represent their concerns properly.

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The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further questions?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you to the member from Niagara Centre for your solid and factual information. I was not confused by your speech, unlike others here.

Do you believe there should be an actual tracking system for this lofty goal of 1.5 million homes to be built in the next 10 years, and if so, what would you propose for a regular transparent and regular report back? And what types of housing should actually be built to help solve this housing crisis?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you very much to the member for the question and for her participation in the committee and asking some really good questions to the delegations.

I think that the 1.5 million number is really a political number, obviously, that the government wants to throw around. We can come up with whatever number we want, but at the end of the day it's what we're willing to do to actually get meaningful results. And when we look at this bill, it's not designed to get meaningful results, like some of the things that we have proposed and that the member has proposed, such as inclusionary zoning, such as targeting missing middle housing. There's some effective ways we can do that through the planning process, but this legislation does none of it.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Brantford–Brant.

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate the opportunity to ask the question one more time briefly, because I'm still confused. We've seen more housing starts, more rental starts than in decades in the province of Ontario. If it's not the More Homes, More Choice Act, if it's not the More Homes for Everyone Act, I would ask the member to briefly explain what he thinks those new housing starts must be due to, if not from the policies of our government?

Mr. Jeff Burch: The member thinks that he has me. What do you think, guys?

Look, the 1.5 million target and all of those targets that have to do with housing supply, they're not focused on the supply that we actually need, which is affordable housing supply. You can build all kinds of—and in the election, we talked about building highways that no one needs leading to homes that no one can afford. That's what I see as the policy of this government: a focus on homes that no one can afford.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. That's all of the time we have for questions.

We're going to continue with further debate.

Mr. Deepak Anand: It's always a pleasure to rise in this House, especially with the wonderful colleagues I have here around me.

We're talking about an important dream come true for all of us: making sure we have home. A home is not just a place where you live. It is a place where you raise your family, you raise your career and give back to the community. And that's what we're doing today here: We are finding out how we can help and support our communities by giving them another tool to build more homes. That's what we're doing here: Bill 3, the Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act, 2022.

Before I go back to this and talk more about this, I just want to talk about my journey when I came in 2000 and we started living in Brampton. That was my first place that I rented, a basement, and when my wife and my son came

on June 5, 2000, we wanted to give him more space. By this time, I had a job. We moved into an apartment building; we rented an apartment. But my wife continued to say, “We need to save together to buy our own first home.”

And that’s exactly what we did. In 2001, we bought our first house. I still remember; when the house was being built, we used to go every weekend just to see how high it had gone. That’s what we were seeing: our dreams coming together, of raising our son. That was the home that we actually bought and lived in, the first house.

If we talk about the day when I landed, which was in 2000, I remember the population of Brampton was about 225,000 people, and today it’s over—what—700,000, 800,000? In these last 20 years, we’ve seen Ontario’s population growth has accelerated. The province is set to grow by nearly two million people over the next decade. The people of Ontario are counting on all levels of government to work together and build homes so that they have a place to live and raise their family, to make their dreams come true.

Why has the population gone up? Well, there are many reasons. Immigration is the first one. We have seen increased immigration. We have seen a growing number of non-permanent residents, including international students, coming into this country. In the last five years, approximately 645,000 international students came here. Given that approximately 60% of them come to Ontario and about 60% of those come to the GTA—if you look at it that way, it’s about 180,000 international students who are coming, and they need a house as well. What happens is, many times they love to bring their family or their parents to visit, to see them and stay with them. That means they need a house, so it means we need more houses.

If we put these things together for Ontario, both international and interprovincial migration, just take a look at the year 2019: 153,000 immigrants settled in Ontario. That accounts for 45% of all immigrants to Canada. It is projected that almost 30,000 will make Ontario their home through interprovincial migration from the rest of Canada.

Madam Speaker, one thing else has happened in the last four years. Under the leadership of Premier Ford, we have seen Ontario becoming an economic engine and a lucrative destination—to settle down here.

I’ll give you an example. A great example was shared by Minister Vic Fedeli this morning. Site Selection, a leading international business publication, has named Ontario the winner for the 2022 Canadian Competitive-ness Award; 10 of the 24 best locations to invest and their corresponding economic development are nowhere but here in Ontario, and we should be proud of that.

This is fantastic news. But what happens is, when we see economic growth happening, more and more investors want to come here, and within the province itself, those who invested here want to grow. And what happens? They need more people. When they need more people, they’re going to bring more people. When they bring more people, we need more houses.

Madam Speaker, I always talk about me as a first-generation immigrant. Immigrants are not just here to come here and live a life. They actually give back to the community. I want to talk about a couple of examples here. I want to draw your attention to somebody I admire. His name is Ray Gupta. Ray is the CEO and chairman of Sunray Group. Ray immigrated to Canada and then founded this company in 2006. He actively supports Canadian immigration and continues to work with the local council to help the immigration and job efforts in Ontario. Ray Gupta is one of many examples of how the immigrant success story evolves from the initial struggle to eventually contributing back to the Canadian economy.

I just want to give another example. Immigrants arriving in Canada aim to achieve financial stability and join the workforce. However, they go the extra mile by giving back to their communities. A great example is Canadian Muslim Friends, an organization known across the board for their community work. Canadian Muslim Friends has organized several community events, such as an annual blood drive, a food drive, a toy drive and fundraising for both the SickKids hospital and the Trillium hospital. They conduct seminars on current issues that many immigrants can relate to. Canadian Muslim Friends continues to celebrate religious gatherings and Canada Day, encouraging members of all communities to join and strengthen our community bonds. That’s the Ontario spirit we have.

Let’s talk about Toronto, because Toronto and Ottawa are the two major regions that are being considered in this third reading of Bill 3. Toronto is one of the fastest-growing metropolitan areas in North America. In 2018-19, its population grew by 131,000, accounting for 53% of provincial growth. Similarly, Ottawa had an 8.5% population growth in the National Capital Region over the last five years. Ottawa’s population also reached the one-million mark. The regions of Toronto and Ottawa both have experienced faster growth than the rest of the province.

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Ontario’s population growth is evident; the housing market has not been able to match the demand. Ontario is facing a housing crisis, where potential homebuyers have been frozen out of the market.

I’ll give you an example: My heart actually broke when I got a call from one of my friends. There was an international student. He was sitting at his office, and then this friend of mine—his name is Pervaiz Akhtar—Pervaiz called me and he said, “There is somebody who is sitting in my office and he’s been kicked out of the shelter, and he has a paper—he said, ‘I have a paper to prove that I’m mentally stable.’” Madam Speaker, in these two lines there is so much. Somebody who sent their child here to educate themselves, to get to a better life, because we live in a heaven—and I look at these two lines. Somebody who is actually kicked out of a shelter, not just a house, and has to prove mental stability means he has gone through a lot in the past.

I had the opportunity to talk to the child. He went into a vicious cycle, wherein he didn’t have a job; by the time

he could find a job, he didn't have enough money to pay the rent and he was kicked out; when he was kicked out, he got into bad company; after the bad company, he got into a situation where he went the wrong way. In order for him to bring it back—I'm thankful to organizations like PCHS and Indus community centre for their hard work to bring him back into the system. But what happens is not everybody has the opportunity to go and meet these people. I don't know how many of these situations there are which could have been avoided if we had enough housing supply in place, and that is what we are doing here.

We're trying to give our municipalities another tool through the Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act so that we can build these houses faster, and as we are building these houses faster, we're reducing the red tape, we're reducing the cost of building those houses, which in turn means less cost to those end users as well.

Madam Speaker, with the population of Ontario increasing rapidly, the time for action is now. The residents of Ontario are facing a shortage of homes. That is why our government is committed to building 1.5 million new homes over the next 10 years, as well as other key infrastructure like roads and transit. There is a high demand for housing, meaning an urgent need for immediate building and construction.

I just want to add to this, to my colleagues: It's not just building the houses. In order to build the houses, we need the tools and the skill set to build those houses. That is why our ministry, the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, is actually working along with these other ministers to make sure that we are supporting current and future skilled trade workers. We have over 350,000 jobs which are going unfilled.

Talking about first-generation immigrants, I want to share with you that 75% of our internationally educated immigrants are not working in the field in which they're trained. Under the leadership of Premier Ford and Minister Monte McNaughton, the Minister for Labour, Training and Skills Development, we are providing an additional \$83 million towards the Skills Development Fund to help support groundbreaking training projects that upskill workers and prepare job seekers for future work. Our government helped people receive training needed to fill the shortage of skilled workers in Ontario, and we'll continue to do it.

Not only did these changes help get people work in their chosen field, they also helped speed up the registration process for our internationally trained professionals. To be more specific, the Working for Workers Act reduced the number of hoops a potential worker would need to jump through, allowing them to start working in their field as much as five years sooner than before the act was implemented. Newcomers are now given the pride of continuing their career and contributing their knowledge and experience to their new home, all the while knowing that their government is going to work with them.

We no longer have regulatory bodies putting unnecessary barriers in the way of new immigrants. This makes

our province of Ontario the best place for newcomers to come and thrive. We thereby made it easier for people to settle here and find jobs in their fields. What we've done by doing this is we've attracted more people, and as we've attracted more people, we need more houses.

Madam Speaker, talking about skilled workers, we need skilled workers urgently to build these homes immediately. Skilled workers in our construction industries and health and safety industries are needed to build housing. I'm proud to say that our government, through the leadership of Premier Ford, is envisioning a long-term plan to make Ontario the best place to be. Over the next 10 years, over 100,000 jobs will be available in construction alone, and with this bill we will be able to build over 1.5 million homes. We are investing a historic \$1.5 billion between 2020 and 2024 to help workers and job seekers start rewarding, well-paying and in-demand careers in the trades. Our government is making these investments because it is what our people and our province need today.

It is no secret that Ontario is in the middle of a housing crisis. Ontarians re-elected our government at a time when they're facing a rising cost of living and a shortage of homes. I want to share with you—and I'm sure all my colleagues will agree—that when we were door-knocking, when we were going door to door and meeting our residents, loud and clear we heard from residents that they need this government to take action and take action now so that the housing crisis can be addressed.

And it's not just people like me who actually have a house—no, it is the people who are newcomers to Canada who need a house. But then often people ask me, "Well, you're already living in a house. How come this is a crisis for you?" So for those, I want to share that I have two children and they need freedom. They need to be independent, and they will need a house. It's not that those living in a house don't have to worry about the housing crisis, because it's going to impact each one of us in one way or the other.

That is why the proposed Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act is crucial in allowing the largest-populated cities, Toronto and Ottawa, to have the ability in driving policy changes. Empowered mayors could better help the province and municipalities in working together on housing and other initiatives that are critical for their communities. It's not just me who's saying it. For example, Toronto Mayor John Tory said he wants "to make sure city hall is working more efficiently and effectively for Toronto residents and businesses and that we make it as easy as possible to get things done."

It is something we need as we face record growth in the great province of Ontario. Our population is going to increase and the building of housing needs to begin and begin now. As our province continues to flourish as we do many, many investments—for example, we're the province that is actually building 30,000 long-term beds. We are the province that is going to have four hours of home care and 86,000 child care spaces. We're going to be building four subways, electric vehicle manufacturing, construction of highways, and everything we're going to

be doing is going to attract more people, and those people need housing again.

So as we're doing this, there is even more pressure on our housing system. We need to cut red tape and speed up the local planning process by giving municipal leaders new tools and powers to help reduce timelines for development, standardize processes and address local barriers to increasing housing supply. It's not me alone saying it. These are some of the quotes that community leaders and industry leaders have said, and I picked those quotes.

The new municipal powers will go a long way in addressing affordability, getting more shovels in the ground and incentivizing developers to come build in Ontario's largest cities. In turn, as we build faster, as we build cheaper, those benefits are going to go to the end use of our residents.

The proposed legislation provides a solid foundation to ensure that mayors have tools to combat the systemic barriers that exist at the municipal level that prevent housing from being built. That is why we're putting our trust in local leadership in Toronto and Ottawa and in the voters who will choose these new mayors next month by proposing to give these mayors more responsibility to help deliver on our shared provincial-municipal priorities. Our government believes in a strong-mayor system that would address the housing crisis in these cities.

1640

Madam Speaker, we always talk about the consultation, and I think the biggest consultation is going back to our voters, our residents. People think this is a place of power; I call this a place of responsibility, because the power is with the people. It is the people who elect their elected officials, because they have the power. We just exercise the responsibility. They have that power again on October 24. They're going to elect the mayor, who is going to deliver that.

I just want to highlight a few more examples of the support we have received. It is clear that we are not alone in this belief. The changes included here would, if passed, give the mayors of Toronto and Ottawa the ability to drive policy changes. It would give them the power to select municipal department heads and, perhaps most importantly, to bring forward budgets.

When we're talking about this, we look at the C.D. Howe Institute. They found that restrictions and extra costs on building new housing are dramatically increasing the cost of housing projects. The institute found that these barriers can add up to \$168,000 dollars or 22% to an average cost of a single detached home in Ontario.

Furthermore, the Ontario Association of Architects, taking a 100-unit condominium building in Toronto as an example, said it could cost up to \$2,000 per month in addition to the consumers, which in turn means that if there is something which is being delayed by 10 months, that's an extra \$20,000 fee the end user would have to pay.

Madam Speaker, the examples are endless, but I want to conclude by saying that Rescon says we are under-producing housing by 12,000 units per year here in

Ontario because of delays, and 12,000 housing units is not just 12,000 people; it is actually 12,000 families. It is the families of many of those new immigrants with young children who are preparing to rise and grow into life here.

The reality is that over one third of Ontario's growth over the next decade is expected to happen in Toronto and Ottawa, and that is why we need to take action, and we need to take action now through Bill 3, the Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, because I only have one minute left: Our government's target is to build 1.5 million homes over the next 10 years, and that is what we're doing. We must explore new methods to help municipalities get homes built faster. As the population of Ontario continues to grow, housing needs to keep up. We need to consider all Ontarians and begin taking action now to help them one day have the dream of home ownership.

I urge each and every member on both sides: Let's work together. Let's deliver real long-term housing solutions in the next 10 years and let's build our Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Questions for the member for Mississauga–Malton? I recognize the member for University–Rosedale.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you, Speaker, and congratulations for your appointment as one of the Speakers in this House.

Thank you to the member for Mississauga–Malton for your presentation. I sat in committee and heard speakers come in and speak to this bill. I want to raise the commentary raised by Susan Wiggins. She's the executive director of the Ontario Professional Planners Institute. Her organization represents planners who work in a non-partisan capacity in municipalities all across Ontario, and she had some concerns. She said there is a benefit between having a separation between the mayor and the head of a planning department, and that "OPPI is concerned that allowing a mayor to hire and fire the head of a planning department may actually be to the detriment of building more housing in the province. It may create more political pressure on the mayor from factions who may not support intensification where policies direct it."

What's your response to the OPPI association's concerns that this could hurt supply?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the member for that important question. We all need to make sure that we are going in the right direction. We want to build 1.5 million homes in 10 years. This is a requirement, that we need to have it, but at the same time, we want to make sure that we elect the right local leaders, and that is the reason I said that in my remarks as well. We have trust in the people of Ontario that they are going to elect the right people.

Having said that, Madam Speaker, I just want to say that it would not limit the powers of the members of the council. They will continue to play an important role, and along with that, every planning department would have a say in this process. What we are changing is that we are making sure that we are cutting the red tape and we are giving the right tools with the right powers to the mayors.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further questions? The member for Thornhill.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and congratulations on your new role.

I want to thank the member for providing so much information, specifically about his own neighbourhood. I respect and understand that, as we suffer with the same issues in my own area of Thornhill. We know that more and more experts agree—and this is solid information—that supply and demand go hand in hand. The major driver of a housing crisis—it's pretty simple: When there's not much going around, the price goes up. Can the member please share with us and the House how this critical policy that you talked about will affect not only Ottawa and Toronto, but future locations?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Mississauga–Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Through you to my colleague: I totally agree with you. We don't live in a silo. It's kind of a vicious cycle. What's happened, as an example: If it takes between 16 to 42 months to build something, what is going to happen? The builder will have to pay the cost of carrying. And if the cost of development is too high, who's going to pay? The end user is going to pay. At the end of the day, when we add red tape, when we increase the length of time required to build a house, who's going to pay? The end user is going to pay. We're making it easier, we're making it cheaper for the end user by building it faster so that they can have it faster, or by building it cheaper so they that can afford it. We're giving a hand to Ontario, and that's what this bill is going to do. It's going to cut the red tape and it's going to give the ability to the leaders of—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. Further questions? The member for Toronto–St. Paul's.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you, Speaker, and congratulations on your appointment as Deputy Speaker.

To the Conservative member: I worry about what happens if the strong mayor goes against the Premier's provincial priorities. Many folks in St. Paul's and across the province have been asking that very question: What is the consequence for the strong mayor if they go against the provincial priorities? We've seen with this government that, when they even go against themselves, their caucus members are punished. Their cellphones are locked up, their international travel is cancelled by their Premier and House leader—they get slapped on the wrist.

So folks want to know: Can we trust the government? Are they transparent? Are they really putting people first if what they're doing is creating a strong mayor who's pretty much a lapdog to the Premier?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Mississauga–Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Through you, I just want to say one thing to the member opposite: She is talking about the provincial priorities and how the mayors respond. But before I do that, I just want to acknowledge and I want to thank each and every

minister—and Premier Ford—in this caucus. Every time we needed help, we actually got that support right away. So we can't thank them enough. We are thankful to the whole caucus and our House leader for giving us an opportunity to grow in our ridings and support our communities. So I just want to put that on the record.

Going back to what the member said: Our priority is to address Ontario's housing shortage, and as we committed in the last election, we promised 1.5 million homes built in 10 years, and we know this will only be possible if we work closely with our municipal partners. And that is exactly what this bill is doing. We're making sure the mayors have the tools to make sure that they are able to help our provincial priorities.

1650

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Flamborough–Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and congratulations on your appointment; you look great in the chair this afternoon.

Throughout this debate, the members opposite, including the member from Toronto–St. Paul's, suggested that people who elect a mayor in Toronto and/or Ottawa are not somehow following a democratic process, that this isn't democracy. Democracy only seems to flow in one direction, and that is if it follows the ideology of the opposition.

In fact, the member opposite just suggested that these mayors would be lapdogs, and my question to the member is: Is this a democratic process? When we allow residents, voters, to elect a mayor who then follows through on their platform, is that democratic? And by giving these mayors additional powers to cut through red tape and build more homes, can we address the housing shortage here in Ontario?

Mr. Deepak Anand: I want to acknowledge that my colleague and member from—

Ms. Donna Skelly: Flamborough–Glanbrook

Mr. Deepak Anand: —is doing an amazing job. Thank you for that wonderful question.

You know, I said that earlier and I'm going to say it one more time: We are a House of responsibility. The power is with the people, and the people have exercised the power. You can actually see it around—how we started and where we are right now. So the people do exercise their power.

So what our government is doing, our government is making sure we're putting the trust in those people, Ontarians, to elect the right local leaders. That's why we are setting the bar higher for our mayors and making it easier to hold them accountable based on the decisions they make.

What are we doing through this bill? We are making sure that we are keeping the costs down and we are building 1.5 million homes to address the housing supply crisis, something—when we went door to door, we asked what they needed, and that's what we heard. And that's what we're delivering today.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We have time for another question.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you very much to the member opposite for the presentation.

I have a question. It's a bit of a hypothetical, because he wasn't here during the previous government. But if he had been here during the previous government, and the previous government had introduced legislation that said, "We will give super powers to mayors so long as they follow our agenda," do you believe that you and your colleagues would have supported that under the previous government?

Mr. Deepak Anand: I just want to acknowledge and thank the member from Humber River–Black Creek. We actually are both champions from York University, so we've been holding that bar high in the Legislative Assembly.

The question is: What do people need? As we all work together to make sure that Ontario is growing and growing and becoming an economic engine, people need shelter. People need houses, and that's exactly what this bill is doing: making sure we are able to deliver those houses right here in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further debate?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm happy to have the opportunity to rise today to speak on Bill 3, the Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act. The title is a real misnomer, Speaker, since the bill doesn't actually do anything to support the building of new homes, particularly homes that people can afford. But I'm always happy to talk about the need for affordable housing and what the government can and should be doing to make sure that everyone can find an affordable, adequate, high-quality place to call home.

But let me come back to this point, because first I want to talk about what this bill does do, which is to undermine local democracy. This bill and the government's failure to actually consult mayors and municipal governments clearly show what little respect this government has for democracy and accountable government in general.

Let's take Ottawa, for example. Ottawa is one of the two municipalities targeted by this bill, but no one in Ottawa wants this bill, no one in Ottawa asked for this bill, no one in Ottawa needs this bill and no one in Ottawa was consulted on this bill. Just last Wednesday, every single city councillor in Ottawa, and the mayor, voted unanimously against this bill. The government can't even get one single city councillor from Ottawa to support this bill—not even one—and it's not easy to get unanimity from the Ottawa city council these days. The government has made it absolutely clear that they want to push this bill through with no consultation with affected city councils and communities, and no compromise—just like they did with Bill 7, just like they did with the budget. There is a clear pattern of behaviour from this government regarding unpopular, unnecessary legislation that we've seen time and time again. They come up with a piece of legislation that no one asks for, don't consult the people it might actually affect and then push it through the chamber with as little possible debate as they can get away with.

In response to the perfectly valid and reasonable objections of city council, the government predictably says, "Well, of course, city councillors don't want this bill. They get in the way of developers building housing. We're giving the mayor the power to fix this. We're doing this so the mayor can have almost total executive control, work around city council and get more housing built." But guess what, Speaker? The mayor doesn't want the bill either. The person they're arguing needs these powers to be able to build more housing isn't just opposed to the legislation, but he says it makes no sense at all.

The mayor of Ottawa, Jim Watson himself, said, "It's really a stretch to try to think you're giving more powers to the mayor, it's going to magically create more housing units in the City of Ottawa—it's just a little of a bizarre situation."

He added that he doesn't feel it is right to give the mayor of a city "extraordinary powers" at the expense of all other members of council.

Watson has also called it "a solution looking for a problem."

Catherine McKenney, candidate for mayor of Ottawa and a very strong supporter of more affordable housing, said of these powers, "I've never supported strong-mayor model. It's undemocratic. It takes away the democratic rights of residents who elect both a mayor and the councillors.... To be able to overrule any decision by council with only 33% of the vote essentially and it's not what we need to move forward to make our city more affordable for everyone.

"What we need really is a strong-city model where actual cities have more power. Very little has been denied. Applications come to us and most have been accepted. I find it hard to understand how this will allow developers to push projects through any quicker."

It's not just the mayor, mayoral candidates and city councillors who oppose this legislation. The head of a federation of 70 Ottawa community groups representing residents across Ottawa has called on the provincial government to scrap its proposed Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act, calling the bill "unwarranted and undemocratic," and noting that it will do nothing to build more affordable housing.

Robert Brinker, the president of the Ottawa Federation of Citizens' Associations, wrote to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing that the organization "opposes Bill 3 as unwarranted and injurious to our well-established democratic practices in Ottawa." Brinker said, "While 'building homes' forms part of the bill's title we see no provisions in this bill that would accomplish this."

The Federation of Urban Neighbourhoods, which represents community associations across the province, said of this bill: "This legislation is unprecedented and marks a huge shift in governance of Ontario's municipalities. Urban municipalities are governed by democratically elected city councils. The decisions of civic governments have been the collective responsibility of those elected city councils, not the singular responsibility of one member. While democracy isn't always perfect, citizens of urban

municipalities have generally been satisfied with their form of representative government.”

So there we have it, Speaker. City council doesn't support this bill. The mayor doesn't support it. Community associations don't support it. It's undemocratic, irrelevant to the needs of Ontarians. This bill does not build more housing.

But what's not in dispute is the need for more affordable housing. What the mayor of Ottawa and city councillors and other stakeholders are pointing out is that the province already holds a lot of tools that they could use to expand affordable housing any time they want to. As Mayor Watson says, this government could provide more funding to support the development of housing and expand inclusionary zoning to cover the entire city. The government could be implementing real rent control and vacancy control to make sure that people aren't squeezed out of the housing they already have.

But while the government could be doing all these things, they're not. There's nothing in this bill that actually expands the supply of affordable housing, nothing that takes steps to make sure people can afford the housing they've already got. Constituents in my riding are crying out for affordable housing, but this bill does nothing to help them.

1700

I'd like to share a few stories with the government about what life is really like for my constituents when it comes to housing.

In June, two constituents in my riding of Ottawa West–Nepean reached out to my office pleading for help. For their safety, they wish to remain anonymous. While they were at work, their landlord changed the locks. Because they had no protection under the Residential Tenancies Act, as they were boarders, not renters, the police were of no help. These constituents, one a former military service member with 12 years of service, became homeless overnight.

They had no options for affordable housing, and the Ottawa Community Housing wait-list has people waiting an average of eight years. And that's just the average; many wait much longer. The lack of affordable housing has pushed them into a precarious living situation, as it does with many people across Ontario. These constituents told my office that they don't have any other options for housing, and, because the government is making life so difficult for them, they have decided to leave Ontario. They said, “Every system is broken, and we don't have enough working years remaining to justify staying.”

Homeless veterans on the streets of Ontario. These aren't just numbers on a page or statistics; these are real human beings experiencing the consequences of this government's decisions.

Jocelyn, a resident of Ottawa West–Nepean, is living with a brain tumour. She is in constant pain, dealing with headaches and fatigue which does not allow her to work. She applied for ODSP but was told she was ineligible because she didn't fit the criteria. With no other options, Jocelyn turned to Ontario Works and was approved, but

this meant she could no longer keep up with her rent payments. She applied for Ottawa Community Housing and was approved for the urgency list, but with the urgency list averaging a two-year wait, she had to find another living situation immediately. The only affordable option for Jocelyn was to live in a shared space with a roommate.

Jocelyn's living situation left her in turmoil because her new roommate was abusive. Her only saving grace was her small 14-year-old dog who had been with her for this entire journey. Jocelyn exhausted every effort to find another affordable living situation, but the only option left was to move into a women's shelter until she could find affordable housing.

Today, Jocelyn is living in a women's shelter in the east end of Ottawa, but she was forced to separate from her dog, which is causing her a lot of anxiety. She was just approved for ODSP, but it is still not enough to pay for first and last months' rent on an apartment. Instead, she is forced to wait at least another year until an affordable unit becomes available.

Another constituent in my riding, Eloise, had reached out to me with fears that her landlord is trying to evict her from her unit. She has lived in the same unit for 44 years and is seeing similar units become vacant and get listed at almost double what she pays.

Over the past several years, as she has become aware of this issue, she has witnessed a number of older tenants coerced into moving out, only to see their units re-rented at much higher rates. She fears that she is her landlord's next target.

Recently, the landlord has been visiting her unannounced, requesting entry and searching for ways to file claims with the LTB against her based on the arrangement and upkeep of her unit. She has complied with every demand and has ensured that her unit is safe, yet the visits continue. She is finding that this is having a huge impact on her physical and mental well-being. Her doctor has even noted a significant decline in her health since this began, because of anxiety associated with harassment from her landlord.

At 68 years old, on a fixed income, she knows that if she is evicted from this unit her housing options will be incredibly limited, and if she applies for affordable housing, she will be 76 before she gets into a unit. At her age, an eight-year wait is too long.

So how is this bill going to make life any easier for the people in my riding? How is this bill going to help the homeless veteran? How is it going to help Jocelyn and Eloise? How is it going to help the many, many residents of Ottawa West–Nepean who are struggling to find affordable housing or to cover the costs of the housing they are desperately trying to retain right now?

Speaker, the government is not fooling anyone. This bill does not do anything to make life more affordable. It doesn't build affordable housing. It doesn't make our local government more accountable to residents who are in desperate need of affordable housing. In fact, it makes local democracy less accountable.

The solutions we need to the housing crisis don't require a bill to centralize power in the hands of one all-powerful figure. We need to build more affordable housing and more co-op housing. There's a crisis with a lack of genuinely affordable housing in our cities, towns and rural communities, especially for low- and limited-income households, racialized and Indigenous households, newcomers, people with disabilities and other marginalized communities.

Ottawa has a particular lack of affordable housing that is getting worse. Most of the affordable housing supply in Ottawa is rent-geared-to-income units within not-for-profit developments that are specifically built and operated to support affordability. We continue to have a very low vacancy rate for market-rate housing in the city, and very high rent. There are 500 families in hotel and motel rooms around the city right now. Some of them have been there for two years—two years with kids—waiting for affordable housing.

There are around 10,000 households alone on the centralized wait-list for social housing in Ottawa, with wait times for social housing often as long as eight years or more because the demand is so much greater than the supply. We need to increase the supply, with a special focus on increasing non-profit housing and the funding that non-profit housing organizations receive, not a bill that turns our mayors into all-powerful CEO figures who will somehow magically create housing units out of thin air through sheer force of will.

And when we're talking about affordable housing, we also have to look at the income side of the equation, because how are you going to pay for housing if you don't have the money to pay for it to begin with? This government has already thrown Ontarians with disabilities under the bus by legislating a paltry 5% rise in ODSP payments. Inflation this year alone is 8%, and that doesn't take into account the fact that ODSP has been frozen for the last four years.

A person on ODSP gets \$1,227 a month. A person on Ontario Works gets only \$733 a month. The average one-bedroom apartment in Ottawa costs \$1,100 a month. That leaves a person on ODSP with only \$127 after rent. A person on Ontario Works doesn't even get enough income to cover rent. So how are folks on social assistance going to afford one of the Premier's new McMansions if they can't even afford rent, let alone enough money left over for basics like food and heat?

The government also cancelled the increase to the minimum wage when they took office, putting minimum-wage workers years behind where they should be. That move cost a full-time minimum wage worker more than \$5,000. That's a lot of money that could have helped with rent. And now, when we have a cost-of-living crisis, the Premier is only increasing the minimum wage by 50 cents. That's a 3.3% increase when inflation is 8%, so you can do the math on how far ahead workers will be. The government could start helping low-income households by progressively raising the minimum wage to \$20 an hour and put more money in working people's pockets, but

they're not going to do that, because it cuts their buddies' profit margins.

Then we have the CUPE education workers, who provide such dedicated and necessary support to our kids, but half of them have to work two jobs just to make ends meet. They've taken an 11% real wage cut over the past decade. The government is driving them into poverty. On \$39,000 a year, these educational workers are struggling to afford housing when costs are escalating rapidly. But instead of negotiating with them, the government is attacking them. Instead of hiring more educational assistants to support our kids, the government is pumping money into private tutoring and services outside of the school system.

We're also seeing in real time the dramatically negative effects of Bill 124 with our nurses and health care heroes, but it's the whole public service that has been feeling the pinch: real wages down, resources down, more private outsourcing, more profits for middlemen, and a two-tier system for public services where if you're rich and wealthy, you can buy high-quality health care or private education for your children. But it's middle-class and working-class families that are paying the price. It's seniors and marginalized citizens who are feeling the pinch as they can't afford to go private. They can't even pay their rent when they're forced into legislated poverty.

This government's new slogan, created by their spin doctors, is that they get it done. Well, they've gotten a lot done. They've driven our health care system to the brink of collapse. They got that done. They've legislated those on ODSP and Ontario Works into poverty, so got that done too. They've devalued, disrespected and underpaid our health care heroes, causing them to leave their profession in droves. Anyone that's trying to get care for themselves or a loved one in our province can see just how clearly they've got that done. They've pushed through Bill 7 without any public consultation or hearings so that they can tear families apart and send seniors and persons with disabilities far away from their loved ones and their communities. Well, mission accomplished, Speaker. They certainly got that done. And now they're going to do it to our municipal government, too.

1710

No new measures to address affordable housing, but mayors who can veto the democratic will of the people's representatives: That's quite an accomplishment. I urge this government to drop Bill 3, stop legislating those on low incomes into poverty, and use the tools you have available to build affordable housing provincially, instead of vandalizing our local democracy.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We'll go to questions now.

Mr. Vincent Ke: Thank you for the member from Ottawa West–Nepean's presentation. Speaker, in her remarks, the member said that the city of Ottawa doesn't need this bill, the mayor of Ottawa doesn't need this power etc. But she ignored the fact and the reality, which is that across this province, growth is happening. We have heard that one third of Ontario's growth over the next decade is

expected to happen in Toronto and Ottawa, and we know that we need to plan for this growth. For too many years, we did not plan for the growth we are seeing now, and as a result, we have a shortage of housing.

My question to the member from Ottawa West–Nepean is, why does she not agree that we need to provide municipalities with the tools they need to accelerate the construction and to address Ontario’s housing crisis?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I know that the government frequently has trouble remembering that Ottawa is part of Ontario. When we had the unfortunate occupation of our city earlier this year, the Premier couldn’t even be bothered to come and see and assess the damage that people in Ottawa were experiencing. Nonetheless, I think when the entire city council of Ottawa condemns the bill, the mayor of Ottawa condemns the bill, the community associations of Ottawa condemn the bill, it’s quite clear that Ottawa does not, in fact, want this bill and does not, in fact, need this bill and that this bill will not, in fact, address the needs of Ottawa.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I would like to thank the member for Ottawa West–Nepean for her articulate comments on this bill and for sharing some of the examples of the challenges that people in her riding are facing as they deal with the housing crisis that we have in Ontario. She addressed some of the real solutions that would address those problems in her remarks, but I wondered if she could just try to summarize in one minute why this bill is so ineffective at dealing with the real issues that people are facing in her riding, and all of our ridings, and what would have been a better approach.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I thank the member for London West for that question. What I have really seen, especially in a year of knocking on doors in the riding, is that we just have a massive shortage of affordable housing available. People living in apartments are paying exorbitantly high rental rates that they can barely afford. So many of them feel that their landlords are trying to squeeze them out to jack up the rent for the next tenant, and they have no idea where they will be able to live next. The wait-list for community housing in Ottawa is over 12,000 people, with wait times of over eight years. We just can’t keep up with the demand for affordable housing, which is why we have 500 families with kids living in hotel rooms for two years, which I don’t think is anything any of the members opposite would really care to try. This bill does absolutely nothing to actually address any of these challenges that Ottawa is experiencing.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Mississauga Centre.

M^{me} Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Merci beaucoup, madame la Présidente, et félicitations pour votre siège.

I wanted to push back a little bit on the member opposite. Does she know that, across this province, housing starts are at an all-time high? Last year, Ontario had over 100,000 housing starts, the highest level since 1987. Speaker, I wasn’t even born in 1987, and I’m not

sure if the member opposite was born in 1987, but this Progressive Conservative government has accomplished the highest number of housing starts since 1987, and that is thanks to this Premier and this Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

But we know that still more needs to be done. Does the opposition not agree that we need to accelerate the construction of all kinds of homes: affordable homes, supportive housing, condos etc.? Does the member not agree, and can she not join us and work together to build more housing in Ontario?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I thank the member from Mississauga Centre for the question. I do not care to read my age into the record of Hansard, so I will just leave you guessing on that front. But I would like to share some numbers with you as well.

There are currently 10,000 families on the waiting list for affordable housing in Ottawa. There are currently 500 families living in motel rooms and hotel rooms around the city, including in the Travelodge in Ottawa West–Nepean, because there’s not enough affordable housing available. The average cost of rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Ottawa is \$1,100, and yet the single rate for Ontario disability is \$1,227 and the amount that a single person on Ontario Works gets is only \$733. So I think from these numbers, it’s absolutely clear what the crisis is, and that is this government’s record.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Question?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to thank the member from Ottawa West–Nepean. You bring a refreshing, new perspective to this particular bill and on many other issues on behalf of the good people in Ottawa West–Nepean.

My question to you is: There’s a group of individuals we seem to not be talking about enough, which is our public servants. This bill risks huge potentials of politicizing certain decisions that are being made at the leadership’s office. These individuals go to work each and every day to best serve their community as a whole. They go in wearing the community on their backs, in their hearts, and this is potentially going to put them in a very difficult position as far as the decisions they make. And those are backed by mayors such as David Crombie, Barbara Hall, Art Eggleton and David Miller, who say that this particular bill risks ending meaningful democratic local government.

Why should we be engaging not only with the public but also those that are serving our community? Why is engaging them, having a discussion with them so important?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I thank the member from Algoma–Manitoulin for the question. I think it’s so important in a democracy that we have conversations with people who are affected by legislation before we implement that legislation. Unfortunately, that’s not a principle that this government seems to share. In this case, we have a situation where the former mayors—

Hon. Michael Parsa: It’s called an election.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Oh, so an election decides everything and you never need to talk to anybody again for the next four years? That explains so much. Thank you for answering the question.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further questions?

Mr. Kevin Holland: The member opposite states a lot of numbers of what is needed and not understanding that we are actually taking action to fill those needs that she is mentioning.

The Liberals had 15 years to plan for growth and build the housing that we so desperately needed in this province. The problem we're facing right now did not happen overnight and did not happen in the term of this government's mandate. Unfortunately, with the support of the NDP, they stood idly by and allowed the problem to get out of hand.

Our government is working diligently with our large municipal partners to build more homes. Does the opposition not recognize that the province has a role to play to ensure that we plan for growth?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I thank the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan for the question. I'm a parent of three children who are 12 and nine. We have a lot of conversations these days about responsibility, as you do with tweens. One of the conversations I frequently have with them is that you are responsible for what you can control, not responsible for the actions of others. So I would suggest to this government that perhaps it's time they take some responsibility for their four years in office instead of blaming everything on the previous government.

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What you are responsible for is what the rates of OW and ODSP have been for the past four years. What you are responsible for is the lack of rent control for the last four years. What you are responsible for is the lack of vacancy control for the last four years. So what you are responsible for is the housing and cost-of-living crisis for the past four years.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We don't have time for another set of questions and answers, so we'll move to further debate.

I recognize the member for Orléans.

M. Stephen Blais: Merci, madame la Présidente, et félicitations encore pour votre nouveau poste. I have to say, the chair looks good on you.

It's a privilege to speak to Bill 3, Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act, 2022, today. As we know, Ontario is facing a housing crisis, so when I first saw the name of this bill when it was finally introduced, I thought, "Wow, this government is finally going to do something about housing." Boy, was I wrong. Don't let the name fool you. This bill has absolutely nothing to do with housing. Sadly, despite its name, this bill won't build a single new housing unit.

There are no measures in this bill that will directly lead to more housing. There are no measures in this bill that will address the affordability crisis facing Ontario

families. This bill does nothing for people like my parents, who lived in the suburbs and raised their family there their whole life, then wanted to downsize their home but stay close enough to be close to their kids and the grandkids without gobbling up all of their equity. This bill doesn't do anything for people like them. It does nothing for young professionals and young families who are having trouble buying an entry-level home in Orléans and other parts of Ontario. This bill does nothing to build or finance any housing whatsoever. It doesn't address the life-cycle issues being faced by co-ops and other housing providers. It doesn't address land availability, density or zoning.

Madam Speaker, quite simply put, this bill is not a housing bill; this bill is a municipal governance bill. That's okay. You can have municipal governance bills. But call it what it is: a municipal governance bill.

As I've said before, it's not even close to the most important municipal governance issue facing cities and towns in Ontario. We have councillors who are abusing their staff and their colleagues—not addressed in this bill. We have councils unable to meet because of lack of quorum, consistently—not addressed in this bill. We have councils firing their lawyer because they don't like his advice, only to hire a new lawyer and then lose in court as a result—not addressed in this bill. There are real municipal governance issues that need to be addressed in our province, and unfortunately this bill doesn't come close.

This bill seems to come from the point of view that councillors and senior city staff are the reason why housing isn't being built or isn't being built as fast as it's needed in Ontario. This government talks about cutting red tape and accelerating approvals to bring housing to market faster. That sounds really good. However—since this bill is about Toronto and Ottawa, I'm going to talk about my hometown for a minute—in Ottawa, the biggest piece of red tape holding up housing isn't in the mayor's office; the biggest piece of red tape isn't in the city manager's office; and despite an anti-development NIMBY councillor running for mayor—a councillor supported by the NDP caucus, I might add—the biggest piece of red tape isn't around the council table.

How can I say that? Let me give you a couple of numbers. The current administration at the city of Ottawa was largely elected in 2010. I was proud to be part of that class of change at city hall. As we started to implement our work, we started to measure the progress of our work. Measurement is an important part of implementing change. I firmly believe that. In 2012, the city of Ottawa issued building permits to build 6,522 new units of housing. After being in office for 10 or 11 years, in 2021, the city of Ottawa issued building permits for the construction of 10,016 new housing units. That's a 54% increase in housing unit starts. It seems to me that Ottawa city council is doing quite a good job at accelerating housing construction in the city of Ottawa.

Ottawa has put in place the vision, the ambition and, in large part, the staff to increase housing construction. And while there are always improvements to the process that

can be made, the city of Ottawa has demonstrated its commitment and drive to address the housing crisis.

The biggest piece of red tape with housing and development in the city of Ottawa isn't the mayor, isn't council, isn't the CAO or the city manager. The biggest piece of red tape impacting housing in the city of Ottawa is this government. And why do I say that? This government is sitting on the city of Ottawa's official plan.

Laughter.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Members of this chamber might be forgiven—and their laughter demonstrates it—for not paying day-to-day attention to the planning decisions and debates at Ottawa city council; I can forgive you for not paying that close attention. So let's make sure we know what we're talking about.

Last fall, after literally years of work, after countless public delegations, negotiations with the home-building industry, consultations with community associations and other stakeholders, after extensive discussions and debates, Ottawa city council came to consensus—without a veto, without a carrot and a stick—and approved a new official plan. That was October 27, 2021, almost a year ago. Within this official plan, there are proposed plans for urban expansion to help create more neighbourhoods by partnering with the Algonquins of Ontario, an important part of Ottawa's efforts towards reconciliation. In addition to adding these development lands, the official plan includes a direction to achieve the majority of growth through intensification and growing the city around rapid transit systems. It recognizes the city's climate change master plan and seeks to reduce Ottawa's greenhouse gas emissions by 100% by 2050. It includes higher density around higher-order public transit. The city, through the official plan, is embracing the idea of 15-minute neighbourhoods, not just in the downtown or inside the urban core, but in the suburbs as well. New communities in Orléans and Barrhaven and Kanata and Findlay Creek are now more dense than inner urban areas like the Glebe and Old Ottawa South.

Ottawa has the vision to address major issues facing us as a society. Creating livable communities with active transportation is a step towards dealing with Ontario's affordability crisis. It's a step towards the climate crisis. It's a step towards addressing the physical fitness crisis. And it's a step being held back by this government. The plan laid out in Ottawa's official plan clearly provides the solution to tackling some of Ontario's most serious social problems. It's a plan that will spur growth and move housing forward—housing of all types—not just in Orléans, but across the city of Ottawa. And it's stalled by this government. When council approved the plan last fall, the law said that the minister had 120 days to approve it. That would have left the decision until about March. Ottawa's official plan continues to sit on the minister's desk, collecting dust, waiting for approval. So, despite this minister and this government claiming that red tape is their enemy and that cutting it is imperative to solving the housing crisis, they've wrapped Ottawa's aggressive housing goals in an enormous ball of red tape, and that ball of red tape is the minister's signature.

If this government is serious about addressing Ontario's and Ottawa's housing crisis, the minister should first approve Ottawa's official plan to get housing built, to bring in new lands for new communities, to address density and intensification around transit infrastructure.

As I've said, this is not a housing bill or a housing plan; this is a municipal governance bill.

I pointed out the important work that the city of Ottawa has done to measure its progress on so many critical elements of change.

I found it interesting that, in committee, an amendment to allow for the measurement of new housing built as a result of this bill was ruled out of order. It was ruled out of scope for the bill.

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Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: It was five hours late.

Mr. Stephen Blais: It was ruled out of scope, not late. It was ruled out of scope, Madam Speaker, for the bill. So, if tracking the supposed results stemming from a piece of legislation is out of scope, then I don't know what we're doing. If we're not going to track the results of what we do, what are we doing at all? It was ruled out of order because even the government knows that this is not a housing bill. It was ruled out of scope because it doesn't address housing and the amendment was about housing. So even the government knows that this isn't a housing bill. It's a municipal governance bill, and one that doesn't address the most important governance issues facing Ontario municipalities.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We have time for questions.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you for your presentation and concern about the Strong Mayors, More Homes Act. I also share the concerns that were raised—that this bill won't necessarily build more homes, and it certainly passes the buck.

What are some measures that you think the provincial government, the Ontario government, should do to increase housing supply for Ontarians who intend to live in a home that is built?

Mr. Stephen Blais: That's a great question.

Given that this bill is about the city of Toronto and the city of Ottawa, the first thing they should do is to approve Ottawa's official plan: to bring new lands into the urban boundary, to change policies around intensification and density around transit, to address the missing middle, and to help Ottawa build more and better 15-minute communities for all the residents of the nation's capital.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further questions?

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you to the member on the other side, and I want to thank him for his statement.

One of the things that is part and parcel to this new issue—obviously, it's not a new issue; we've had 15 years of a previous government that did very little to deal with this issue. It's not a new issue, but attainable homes is a massive problem, and Ontario is launching the housing supply action plan, along with this. This team will work to

implement the recommendations that we've heard from the Housing Affordability Task Force.

Does the member on the other side have any comments with respect to this affordability issue and the task force? Does he not think that it would be important to have them at the table to help with this issue of affordability that has just been brought up?

Mr. Stephen Blais: I stand to be corrected, but I don't believe this bill addresses a single recommendation from the task force.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Questions?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to the member for their presentation.

One of the most incredible things to me about this whole affair is the mayor of Ottawa finding out about it in the media, of all places.

If you're the mayor of a municipality, and a government comes forward with a piece of legislation in the middle of an election and they don't even bother to tell the mayor—well, they told one of the mayors, the mayor in Toronto, I assume because of their political stripe.

What kind of opposition is there in Ottawa to this, and how much of that has to do with no one in Ottawa, including the mayor, knowing anything about the legislation until it was presented?

Mr. Stephen Blais: I don't know a single elected official in Ottawa, save for the members of the government caucus, who supports this bill. I don't know a candidate running for mayor—at least, a serious candidate running for mayor—who supports this bill.

I know that the mayor was caught off guard. We were at the Navan Fair a day later, and he told me that he had yet to be called about this bill.

Certainly, if you're going to make change and work collaboratively with municipalities in Ontario, the easiest thing you can do is pick up the phone and have a chat before you go to a microphone.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Questions?

Mr. John Fraser: I would just like to ask the member—because I didn't know that at committee any motion or amendment with regard to housing was ruled out of scope, that it didn't actually apply to the bill, that the bill had nothing to do with housing. Can you explain to me why you think the government would put forward a bill that they claim is about housing, when it's not?

Mr. Stephen Blais: As I mentioned, there was an amendment to track how much new housing is built over the course of the next decade or so, to address the success of this bill and demonstrate how the government is or is not achieving its housing goals. That amendment was ruled out of the scope of the bill. The only way that tracking the construction of housing can be ruled out of scope in a housing bill is that the bill isn't about housing. So the government's own Chair of committee and committee Clerk recognized that this bill wasn't about housing, which is why they didn't even allow the amendments to be debated and voted on.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): There's no more time left for questions, so we're going to move to further debate.

Report continues in volume B.

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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	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Tangri, Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain / 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	
Vaugeois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Vacant	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	