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of Ontario



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(Hansard)**

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Tuesday
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Mardi
1^{er} novembre 2022

Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott
Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
Greffier : Todd Decker

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 1 November 2022

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 1^{er} novembre 2022

The House recessed from 1156 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

THINK TWICE BEFORE YOU
CHOOSE NATURAL GAS ACT
(ONTARIO
ENERGY BOARD AMENDMENT), 2022

LOI DE 2022 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LA COMMISSION DE L'ÉNERGIE
DE L'ONTARIO (RACCORDEMENTS
AU RÉSEAU D'ALIMENTATION
EN GAZ NATUREL)

Mr. Hsu moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 29, An Act to amend the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998 with respect to municipal conditions on residential natural gas connections / Projet de loi 29, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur la Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario à l'égard des conditions municipales sur les raccordements résidentiels au réseau d'alimentation en gaz naturel.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I would like to invite the member to briefly explain his bill.

Mr. Ted Hsu: This bill amends the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998, with respect to municipal bylaws regarding residential natural gas connections. Section 42 of the act is amended to provide that the duty of gas distributors to provide gas distribution services along the line of their distribution pipelines does not restrict municipalities from imposing conditions on any new residential connection in accordance with a municipal bylaw establishing limits on greenhouse gas emissions attributable to residential consumers in the municipality.

PETITIONS

LABOUR DISPUTE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: This is a petition entitled "Support Education Workers—Stop Bill 28."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government is launching an unprecedented and unfair fight with Bill 28, attacking the bargaining rights of workers;

"Whereas if the government refuses to negotiate a fair deal with education workers, it will drive caring adults out of the classroom permanently and our kids will pay the price;

"Whereas the staffing crisis created by the Ford government will mean that the youngest students will have less support in school, kids with disabilities won't have the help they need, and classrooms will go uncleaned;

"Whereas the Ford government can make sure there are enough caring adults in the classroom to support students by giving education workers a decent standard of living;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately respect workers' rights, rip up the anti-worker Bill 28, and have the Ontario government return to the bargaining table with a fair deal that retains education workers, rather than driving them away."

I fully support this petition and give it to page Nolan to deliver it to the table.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: "Support the Education Workers—Stop Bill 28."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government is launching the unprecedented and unfair fight with Bill 28, attacking the bargaining rights of workers;

"Whereas if the government refuses to negotiate a fair deal with education workers, it will drive caring adults out of the classroom permanently and our kids will pay the price;

"Whereas the staffing crisis created by the Ford government will mean that the youngest students will have" the least "support in school, kids with disabilities won't have the help they need, and classrooms will go uncleaned;

"Whereas the Ford government can make sure there are enough caring adults in the classroom to support students by giving education workers a decent standard of living;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately respect workers' rights, rip up the anti-workers Bill 28, and have the Ontario government return to the bargaining table with a fair deal that retains education workers, rather than driving them away."

I fully support this petition. I'm going to give it to page Malini. Thank you.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I have a petition entitled “Petition to Raise Social Assistance Rates.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s social assistance rates are well below Canada’s official Market Basket Measure poverty line and far from adequate to cover the rising costs of food and rent: \$733 for individuals on OW and soon \$1,227 for ODSP;

“Whereas an open letter to the Premier and two cabinet ministers, signed by over 230 organizations, recommends that social assistance rates be doubled for both Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP);

“Whereas the recent small budget increase of 5% for ODSP still leaves these citizens well below the poverty line, both they and those receiving the frozen OW rates are struggling to live in this time of alarming inflation;

“Whereas the government of Canada recognized in its CERB program that a basic income of \$2,000 per month was the standard support required by individuals who lost their employment during the pandemic;

“We, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly to double social assistance rates for OW and ODSP.”

I fully support this petition, will sign it and send it to the Clerks.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Ms. Catherine Fife: This is entitled “Support Education Workers—Stop Bill 28.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government is launching an unprecedented and unfair fight with Bill 28, attacking the bargaining rights of workers;

“Whereas if the government refuses to negotiate a fair deal with education workers, it will drive caring adults out of the classroom permanently and our kids will pay the price;

“Whereas the staffing crisis created by the Ford government will mean that the youngest students will have less support in school ... by giving education workers a decent standard of living;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately respect workers’ rights, rip up the anti-worker Bill 28, and have the Ontario government return to the bargaining table with a fair deal that retains education workers, rather than driving them away.”

It’s my pleasure to affix my signature and give this to page Nolan.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Leena and Robert Luopa from Worthington, in my riding, for these petitions.

“To Raise Social Assistance Rates.

“Whereas Ontario’s social assistance rates are well below Canada’s official Market Basket Measure poverty line and woefully inadequate to cover the basic costs of food and rent;

“Whereas individuals on the Ontario Works program receive just \$733 per month and individuals on the Ontario Disability Support Program” will be receiving \$1,277 per month, which is way below the poverty line;

“Whereas the Ontario government has not increased social assistance rates since 2018, and Canada’s inflation rate in January 2022 was 5.1%, the highest rate in 30 years;

“Whereas the government of Canada recognized through the CERB program that a ‘basic income’ of \$2,000 per month was the standard support required by individuals who lost their employment during the pandemic;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows: “to increase social assistance rates to a base of \$2, per month for those on Ontario Works and to increase other programs accordingly.”

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

1310

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition to raise social assistance rates, and I would thank Dr. Sally Palmer for providing me with these petitions, as well as the people on the front lawn today calling for the rates to be doubled as well. The petition reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s social assistance rates are well below Canada’s official Market Basket Measure poverty line and far from adequate to cover the rising costs of food and rent: \$733 for individuals on OW and soon \$1,227 for ODSP;

“Whereas an open letter to the Premier and two cabinet ministers, signed by over 230 organizations, recommends that social assistance rates be doubled for both Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP);

“Whereas the recent small budget increase of 5% for ODSP still leaves these citizens well below the poverty line, both they and those receiving the frozen OW rates are struggling to live in this time of alarming inflation;

“Whereas the government of Canada recognized in its CERB program that a basic income of \$2,000 per month was the standard support required by individuals who lost their employment during the pandemic;

“We, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly to double social assistance rates for OW and ODSP.”

I wholeheartedly agree with this. I hope the government is listening. I’m going to affix my name and give it to page Bridget to bring to the Clerk.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario concerning social assistance rates.

“Whereas Ontario’s social assistance rates are well below Canada’s official Market Basket Measure poverty line and woefully inadequate to cover the basic costs of food and rent;

“Whereas individuals on the Ontario Works program receive just \$733 per month and individuals on the Ontario Disability Support Program receive just \$1,169 per month, only 41% and 65% of the poverty line;

“Whereas the Ontario government has not increased social assistance rates since 2018, and Canada’s inflation rate in January 2022 was 5.1%, the highest rate in 30 years;

“Whereas the government of Canada recognized through the CERB program that a ‘basic income’ of \$2,000 per month was the standard support required by individuals who lost their employment during the pandemic;

“We, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly to increase social assistance rates to a base of \$2,000 per month for those on Ontario Works, and to increase other programs accordingly.”

I fully support this petition and will be affixing my signature to it and providing it to Sofia to deliver to the table.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Guy Bourgoïn: A petition entitled:

“To Raise Social Assistance Rates.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s social assistance rates are well below Canada’s official Market Basket Measure poverty line and woefully inadequate to cover the basic costs of food and rent;

“Whereas individuals on the Ontario Works program receive just \$733 per month and individuals on the Ontario Disability Support Program receive just \$1,169 per month, only 41% and 65% of the poverty line;

“Whereas the Ontario government has not increased social assistance rates since 2018, and Canada’s inflation rate in January 2022 was 5.1%, the highest rate in 30 years;

“Whereas the government of Canada recognized through the CERB program that a ‘basic income’ of \$2,000 per month was the standard support required by individuals who lost their employment during the pandemic;

“We, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly to increase social assistance rates to a base of \$2,000 per month for those on Ontario Works, and to increase other programs accordingly.”

I fully support the petition. I will sign it and send it with Rachel to the Clerks’ table.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I’d like thank Sally for sending me the petitions here, and this one is titled, “To Raise Social Assistance Rates.” It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s social assistance rates are well below Canada’s official Market Basket Measure poverty line and woefully inadequate to cover the basic costs of food and rent;

“Whereas individuals on the Ontario Works program receive just \$733 per month and individuals on the Ontario Disability Support Program receive just \$1,169 per month, only 41% and 65% of the poverty line;

“Whereas the Ontario government has not increased social assistance rates since 2018, and Canada’s inflation rate in January 2022 was 5.1%, the highest rate in 30 years;

“Whereas the government of Canada recognized through the CERB program that a ‘basic income’ of \$2,000 per month was the standard support required by individuals who lost their employment during the pandemic;

“We, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly to increase social assistance rates to a base of \$2,000 per month for those on Ontario Works, and to increase other programs accordingly.”

I fully support this petition and will affix my signature to it. Thank you.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Marit Stiles: I’m really pleased to present this petition on behalf of Lois Moore. It reads as follows:

Petition “To Raise Social Assistance Rates.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s social assistance rates are well below Canada’s official Market Basket Measure poverty line and woefully inadequate to cover the basic costs of food and rent;

“Whereas individuals on the Ontario Works program receive just \$733 per month and individuals on the Ontario Disability Support Program receive just \$1,169 per month, only 41% and 65% of the poverty line;

“Whereas the Ontario government has not increased social assistance rates since 2018, and Canada’s inflation rate in January 2022 was 5.1%, the highest rate in 30 years;

“Whereas the government of Canada recognized through the CERB program that a ‘basic income’ of \$2,000 per month was the standard support required by individuals who lost their employment during the pandemic;

“We, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly to increase social assistance rates to a base of \$2,000 per month for those on Ontario Works, and to increase other programs accordingly.”

I support this petition, and I’ll be affixing my signature and passing it to clerk Sofia—

Interjection: Clerk?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Sorry. Whew, that was an instant—
Interjection.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yes. To page Sofia. It’s been a long day.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): It has indeed.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Ms. Doly Begum: I have a petition here:

“Support Education Workers—Stop Bill 28.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government is launching an unprecedented and unfair fight with Bill 28, attacking the bargaining rights of workers;

“Whereas if the government refuses to negotiate a fair deal with education workers, it will drive caring adults out of the classroom permanently and our kids will pay the price;

“Whereas the staffing crisis created by the Ford government will mean that the youngest students will have less support in school, kids with disabilities won’t have the help they need, and classrooms will go uncleaned;

“Whereas the Ford government can make sure there are enough caring adults in the classroom to support students by giving education workers a decent standard of living;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately respect workers’ rights, rip up the anti-worker Bill 28, and have the Ontario government return to the bargaining table with a fair deal that retains education workers, rather than driving them away.”

Speaker, I fully support this petition, will affix my signature to it and give it to page Julien.

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

It appears the time for petitions has expired.

Interjection: It’s been a long day.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): For some of us, it has been.

OPPOSITION DAY

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I move that:

Whereas both Ontario Works, OW, and Ontario Disability Support Program, ODSP, recipients live in legislated deep poverty; and

1320

Whereas people on fixed incomes are forced to make untenable choices between buying food and paying rent just to survive and the Ford government’s meagre \$58 increase to ODSP rates and freezing of OW rates at \$733 a month do not keep pace with the actual cost of living; and

Whereas inflation is at a 40-year high, groceries are more expensive than ever, and basic expenses like hydro and gas bills continue to increase; and

Whereas average rents alone are significantly more than the entire monthly payments received by social assistance recipients, and affordable housing wait-lists in some communities are up to 10 years’ long and even longer for people who need supportive housing; and

Whereas the Ford government’s current approach to social assistance rates is untenable and denies recipients a dignified life;

Therefore, the Legislative Assembly calls on the Ford government to immediately double Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program payments to recipients as part of an overall strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario.

This is addressed to the Premier.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Tabuns has moved opposition day number 1. I look to the leader of His Majesty’s loyal opposition to lead off the debate.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I move this motion because the impact of the government’s failure to actually provide supports for people with disabilities, people on ODSP and OW, causes huge suffering, great suffering, for those who are dependent on those sources of income. Doubling rates for ODSP and OW recipients would mean lifting people with disabilities out of the deep poverty they currently live in, and even bumping their incomes above the poverty line.

We know that living with a disability has additional costs, and rates should reflect that. People living with disabilities are much more likely to live in poverty than those without disabilities, according to Statistics Canada. People living with disabilities earn less and are typically underemployed compared to those who do not have a disability. Four in 10 persons with disabilities aged 15 years and over living in poverty go without aids, devices or prescription medicines because the costs are too high.

Lack of access to a car and insufficient storage in the home make it hard for people to find and buy cheaper grocery options or to buy in bulk. Time constraints can limit cooking options and the capacity to substitute for healthier alternatives. Every day, individuals and families on social assistance have to make difficult choices to meet their basic needs: “Do I put gas in my car, or do I pay my hydro bill? Do I buy the medicine that I need, or do I heat my home? Do I pay my rent, or do I put food on the table? Can I purchase socks or soap after paying my bills?” And, frankly, Speaker, beyond those particular expenses, I’ve had people literally say to me, “When I’m thinking of coming to your office, I have to think through whether I can walk there because I can’t necessarily afford the bus.” People are making decisions at that level, a level that no one should have to go through.

People on social assistance are struggling and they have been for years. As soon as he came into office, Premier Ford denied ODSP recipients their 3% increase. He continued to deny recipients any increase for years after, also denying increases to OW recipients and cutting the basic income pilot that helped participants get out of poverty. When this government finally, and reluctantly, announced increases to ODSP rates, it was only 5%. Our caucus was calling for a doubling of ODSP and OW rates then, and we are renewing that call today.

We know that the government’s minuscule increase is inadequate, and it’s left many people out. The small increases come at a time of dramatically increasing inflation, resulting in an affordability crisis facing all Ontarians. The cost of living has risen dramatically. People are struggling to pay their bills and purchase weekly groceries. Rates were insufficient before, and they’re pitiful now. Rents are high, food prices are through the roof, and the government

is telling people to live on crumbs. No one can reasonably be expected to live on just over \$1,200 a month; or, if you're on Ontario Works, \$733 a month.

Speaker, it was interesting to me to watch when the Minister of Finance was asked, "Could you live on \$1,200 a month?" And he's generally a pretty straightforward guy. I can talk with him. We can disagree. But it was interesting: He would not answer that question.

One has to presume that he has looked at the numbers. He knows what it costs to rent a room. He would know what it would cost to rent a studio apartment. And he realized it is not viable. It does not work. People are in an impossible situation. And thus, he did not answer that question.

The meagre 5% increase amounts to only \$58 more per month for recipients of ODSP. Even with the government's proposed increase, people on ODSP must limit their spending to \$522 per month for shelter and \$706 for everything else. That is not workable. If someone is lucky and they have been able to stay in a unit for a number of years that is covered by rent control, then it's possible that they're paying a rent that's less than \$1,000 a month—possible.

I can't speak for all of Ontario, but I know that in London, it has gotten a lot tougher; Hamilton, Burlington; Sudbury, apparently; Toronto, for sure. All around, people are finding that \$1,000 a month is not getting you much at all—maybe a room. So people trying to live on this are left with virtually no money at all.

I talked to constituents who, again, in those rent-controlled units, are paying \$1,000 to \$1,100 a month, leaving \$100 a month for everything else. That is a prescription for misery. It's a prescription for ill health. It's a prescription for a society that's meaner and crueller than it needs to be, because we're not a poor society. We are not a poor society. I have to ask, where are people going to live on those levels?

People on OW must restrict themselves even more. They received no increase. Rates continue to be frozen at \$733 per month. I've talked to people who have come into my office, complaining about people on welfare, and I say, "Could you live on \$733 a month?" And they can't believe it's that low. They can't believe that they would be set adrift with \$733 a month and told, "Do your best to survive. Give it a shot."

Ms. Doly Begum: Good luck to you.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Good luck to you. ODSP and OW recipients are tired, and this government needs to start listening to them and double the rates.

Speaker, people are literally one stroke, one traffic accident, one fall away from losing everything—and losing it very rapidly, they find. A few years ago, I was talking to a man who had been a senior law enforcement official in eastern Ontario. His wife had died in a tragic accident. He had difficulties dealing with it. He started to drink. He lost everything within a few years, and then was trying to survive on these rates. He wound up camping in a tent in the Don Valley year-round. People can lose everything. And when they come to ask, "So what support is

there? What support is there to keep me alive?" they find it's not there. It's just not there.

Other people come to me and say, "I'm in my late fifties. I've lost my job. I can't get CPP. I do have a minor disability. Is there a program that will allow me to continue to at least live in my home?" I have to tell them the reality, and the shock on people's faces is quite something.

An opinion piece published this week in the Toronto Star by co-chairs of the ODSP Action Coalition, themselves social assistance recipients, and the Income Security Advocacy Centre asked an important question: When is 5% not 5%? The answer lies between the lines of Premier Ford's plans to increase ODSP rates.

Five per cent is not 5% if "you have specific dietary needs, you're pregnant or if you live in a remote community.

"ODSP also offers discretionary benefits for a variety of specific client circumstances, such as special diet and remote community allowances. Although not everyone on ODSP qualifies for these benefits, these benefits increased by 0%. For example, a single person on ODSP who receives the maximum basic needs amount and basic shelter amount,"—approximately \$1,169 a month—"who requires a special diet related to a medical condition and who is pregnant is not going to see a 5% increase to their total ODSP income. The 5% becomes just over 4%."

1330

Five per cent is not 5% when you must go through Ontario Works before accessing the Ontario Disability Support Program. "Ontario Works is meant to provide temporary financial support for those who cannot find a job, those fleeing violent personal situations and other situations that qualify. The average Ontarian might be surprised to learn that many" Ontario Works "clients are people with disabilities trying to access ODSP." They come to my office. They're desperate. They can't hold it together on \$733, and they're finding that it is very difficult to actually make the jump, even though they fully qualify, to get ODSP, which in itself is completely inadequate, but they're in even worse shape on OW.

"The ODSP applicant may be waiting to receive medical assessments that would confirm eligibility, or they may face processing lags or appeal backlogs. While they wait, they're forced to live on \$733 a month, the maximum amount for a single person on OW. That 5% rate increase becomes zero because the Ford government did not increase rates for all social assistance recipients."

The rates are not good enough, Speaker, and we are seeing the impacts of low social assistance rates in our food banks every day. I have no doubt that all of you sitting here in your ridings have seen the lineups at the food banks in your ridings, and what I noticed in the last few years is how those lines have gotten longer and longer and longer. It's shocking to see that. And you know people don't go there because they think it is a great way to get food. They go there because they've got to do it. It is a tough thing to have to do, and they do it out of necessity.

Ms. Doly Begum: Some are veterans.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Some are veterans. Exactly.

A 2021 Feed Ontario hunger report found that two thirds of people with disabilities had less than \$100 to spend on food per month after paying for housing and utilities. In September, Statistics Canada showed that food prices have increased 10.4% over the year, the fastest pace since 1981. The increases hit meat, up 8.8%; fresh fruit, up 10.7%; and vegetables, up 11%.

These are very difficult numbers for people living on almost nothing to deal with. It means their diets are radically restricted, are not what you need to actually be healthy and not what you need to actually have the energy to participate fully in daily life.

Our caucus has repeatedly challenged the government's record of cuts to essential programs and its stealthy privatization of public services.

In September, five MPPs from our caucus undertook two weeks of advocacy to push the government to raise rates. Our members lived on \$95.21 a week for food for two weeks. The initiative was an effort to understand the restrictions imposed on ODSP and OW recipients. They recognized that the \$95 allowed is more than many recipients spend on food after paying for all their basic needs, because I had people come and say to me, "\$95—they were doing pretty good. I don't have that much money."

I hope that a number of those who took part in this demonstration actually get a chance to speak today because I know it had a big impact on them. They physically and emotionally felt it.

While undertaking this initiative, members reached out to community groups and advocates to understand the real experience of people living on around \$1,200 a month. They consulted with recipients, advocates and service providers about what's needed to vastly improve social assistance after a decade of frozen rates.

In a period of high inflation, high cost of living and low social assistance rates, we know that things need to change, and they need to change immediately.

People cannot continue to live under such restrictive social assistance. Recipients need more flexibility with the funds they receive, and they need more funds. This is a wealthy society. No one should be living in desperation and hunger in this society, and yet they are. The government is in a position to change things and, morally speaking, they should be changing things. My hope is that the government members will vote in favour of this motion today and the government will take on this issue and actually address the problem. Every member of the government should ask themselves, "Could I live on \$1,200 a month? Actually, could I live on \$773 a month?" If you're honest with yourself, you cannot do it.

Change the law. Change the rates.

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

Mr. Nolan Quinn: I'm glad to be able to speak to this motion today. My starting point is a simple one: Our government knows that Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program are critical to helping those who have lost their jobs or who are unable to work. And we're supporting those who need it most. That's why

we've been making the largest increase to ODSP rates in decades. On top of that, we're aligning ODSP rates with inflation so that vulnerable people get more support to pay for life's essentials, especially during periods of high inflation.

Here's what a recent report from the Daily Bread Food Bank said about that: "The provincial decision to index ODSP will ensure that future hikes do not deteriorate into a debate over the worthiness of the government expenditure. The depoliticization through annual inflationary adjustment of future hikes is laudable. Only two other provinces ... have done the same"—two out of 10 provinces.

I'm not expecting the opposition to laud our government any time soon, but that is what those who support those who need help every day say. They know what the opposition won't admit: that the increase is a good thing and that the alignment to inflation is a good thing. It's good policy, and it's the right thing to do.

Knowing that individuals receiving ODSP may face challenges, we've often stressed the importance of the federal government's immediate delivery of their promise to support individuals with a disability through the establishment of a Canadian disability benefit, as they promised. And we're going to continue working with them to deliver on that commitment. The Premier and the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services have been consistent about that, and they will continue to be.

Our investments back up our transformation of social assistance, to build a more responsive, efficient and person-centred system that will get people back to work and help the province recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The motion talks about affordable housing, and I'd like to take a moment to discuss that, Speaker. There are many former municipal councillors and mayors in this Legislature, including on the opposition benches, so it should be well known that the delivery of supportive housing services rests with municipalities. Our government has worked with municipalities; we're supporting them to deliver these important services.

Our government's policies have delivered historic results in getting more housing built faster, and they complement our more than \$4.3 billion of investments over three years to grow and enhance community and supportive housing and to address homelessness for vulnerable Ontarians.

Service managers and Indigenous program administrators have the flexibility to choose how to best use provincial funding for programs and services that address and prevent homelessness in their communities, such as rent supplements, homeless shelters and supportive housing.

Through our Community Housing Renewal Strategy and response to COVID-19, we are investing more than \$4.3 billion for community and supportive housing and to address homelessness for vulnerable Ontarians. This funding includes a range of measures to help Ontarians, including our social services relief fund, which has provided \$1.2 billion to municipal service managers and Indigenous program administrators to improve housing and homeless shelter solutions and support vulnerable people. This is

one of the largest investments ever made by the province to our municipal and Indigenous program partners.

We are continuing to advocate to the federal government to receive federal homelessness funding. Currently, Ontario is underfunded \$480 million under the federal National Housing Strategy. So if the Liberals and the NDP want to help people, I would encourage them to advocate for this needed funding with their counterparts in Ottawa.

Some members opposite have mentioned Ontario Works, and I'd like to set the record straight on that, Speaker. The intent of Ontario Works is to help people in temporary financial need find sustainable employment and achieve self-reliance, and that's always been the intent. With about 400,000 jobs unfilled in Ontario, we have been working across government to create pathways to employment opportunities. We have continuously looked at helping address the labour shortage by connecting people with meaningful employment. Whether that means help with resumés or offering training, we are using every tool to get the people who can work back to work.

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The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services has been working closely with the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development so we can improve access to employment and training services, and connecting those who can work with meaningful employment in their community.

We are also making it easier to access support with new digital tools and modern service options. These changes are helping give Ontarians who are able to work a hand up to improve their lives in our communities. Part of that is our government's transformation of employment services. Ontario's employment and training programs are critical to building the skilled workforce that keeps Ontario open for business.

As the Auditor General has highlighted, the current system has not produced results for the people of Ontario. In fact, even before the pandemic, only 1% of people on social assistance were finding employment every month. That's why we launched three pilots in diverse parts of the province: Peel, Muskoka-Kawartha and Hamilton-Niagara. Building on their success, we're expanding province-wide. Our government passed the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act, which will help turn our vision for Ontario's social assistance program into a reality. Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program clients will benefit from a new system that will be easier to use, more localized and will help provide training necessary to help individuals who can work find meaningful employment.

Ontario is facing the largest labour shortage in a generation, with nearly 400,000 jobs going unfilled. If you're able to work, we need you, and that includes people who receive assistance, many of whom are eager to work but are being forgotten by our current system. They deserve our support to get back on their feet.

The status quo, where only 1% of people on social assistance find work each year, is not working. To build a stronger province for everyone, we need all hands on deck. That is why our government is making it easier for job

seekers, especially those on social assistance, to get the training they need for better jobs and bigger paycheques to support themselves and their families.

Speaker, our new customer service approach to employment services is giving more people a hand up towards meaningful and purpose-driven careers. In the first three regions where we adopted our one-window approach, 17,200 people have found jobs, including 5,700 who are social assistance recipients.

This approach has been successful in cases like David in Peel region who moved from Ontario Works to a full-time position as a forklift operator. David received the help he needed to obtain the career despite facing barriers such as a disability, an expired forklift licence and a lack of funds for equipment and travel. The changes in Peel made it so that the system worked with him, not against him, and the results speak for themselves. Our prototypes are serving more under-represented people that service provides in status quo regions. We're rewarding service providers who help find long-term careers they can build their lives around. Jobs change lives.

The BC government also moved to an outcomes-based model. They also awarded contracts to the very same organization we selected for Peel region. This model allowed WorkBC to open 19 new service centres. As the BC NDP Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction said, the system "will make it easier for more people to find good, stable jobs so they can provide for themselves and their families." We have the same program set up in Ontario.

Another great stride happening with employment services transformation is helping those with criminal records. Four million Canadians have a criminal record. A criminal record reduces the chance of a second interview by 50%. In Canada, 14 years after release, 41% of offenders receive social assistance. Some 85% of human resource leaders report people with criminal backgrounds would perform the same or better than employees without. Those facts are stark, Speaker.

Second chances break the cycle of stigma, economic hardship, poverty and incarceration. Second chances strengthen our communities and society, helping people lead purpose-driven lives.

Members have also talked about people not receiving the full increase, and I'm glad to be able to clarify this for them. While rates will vary according to individual needs in each person's case, everyone whose shelter costs were higher than the maximum amount received the increase. That increase applied to the basic needs allowance as well. We included detailed information on the rate increase with the September payment. If an individual has questions about the rate increase applied to their payment, they should speak to their caseworker locally.

As we continue to improve access to employment and training services, tying future ODSP rate increases to inflation will help Ontarians who need support to afford the rising cost of living. I know I've mentioned that alignment before, but I think it's extremely important. We're not just taking action to support the people who need it

most through our significant increases to ODSP rates now and for the future; we're doing it across the government.

I've already mentioned the investment of more than \$1 billion in social services relief funding during the COVID-19 pandemic to support those who needed it. That funding included direct funding for individuals in financial crisis and funding for municipalities and social service providers.

On top of those immediate supports, we are taking a whole-of-government approach that builds on the actions we took during the COVID-19 pandemic and leverages initiatives already under way across government, including the micro-credentials strategy, which will help provide people with in-demand skills that prepare them for the jobs of the future. It includes \$75 million over two years to simplify the system and remove obstacles for apprentices to begin their careers.

We're also improving mental health and addiction services through the Roadmap to Wellness, supported by \$3.8 billion over 10 years to create a coordinated mental health system that supports people to reach their potential in all aspects of their lives.

Our government has committed \$1 billion to build thousands of new child care spaces in schools over the coming years, on top of the 19,563 new spaces already added in 2020 alone.

In order to continue to bring children out of poverty, we invested roughly \$1.2 billion last year in the Ontario Child Benefit.

We are investing \$90 million to provide dental care to 100,000 low-income seniors as well.

We introduced the CARE tax credit, which will provide about 300,000 families with up to 75% of their eligible child care expenses.

This work builds on our government's new low-income individuals and families tax credit, LIFT, which will result in Ontario personal income tax being reduced or eliminated for about 1.1 million people in Ontario.

The Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit provides up to \$2,000 in relief for eligible expenses to help workers get the training needed for a career shift, retraining, or to sharpen their skills.

The Ontario Energy and Property Tax Credit is a refundable tax credit to help low- to moderate-income individuals and seniors with property taxes and sales taxes on energy costs.

And it was our government that increased the minimum wage to \$15 per hour, with a further increase to \$15.50 per hour just this October.

We continue to make investments to support food security and availability. Our government has invested \$83 million through the Ontario Trillium Foundation to provide grants to help eligible non-profit organizations, including those food banks, recover from COVID-19 and continue to deliver the vital programming in their communities.

As part of Ontario's efforts to support children, youth and families through these challenging times, we also provided \$8 million in funding for Feed Ontario. That

funding assisted Feed Ontario in producing and distributing pre-packaged hampers to support the great work food banks have been doing throughout the COVID-19 outbreak.

We also have the Student Nutrition Program, which continues to receive annual funding of \$27.9 million in 2022-23 so they can continue to deliver critical services for children across the province.

Each of these measures helped people, including those who depend on social assistance, to have better lives.

One more thing I'd like to highlight is our government's efforts to modernize social assistance to make it more efficient to administer and easier to use. We heard loud and clear from the municipalities that they were spending too much time on paperwork and that there was a wasteful amount of duplicated efforts with the ministry. That duplication takes time away that staff could be spending helping clients to access supports, improve their lives, and achieve more independence.

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Based on a 2018 study, caseworkers spent approximately a quarter of their day, about 400 hours per year, filing and organizing paperwork. ODSP offices alone have generated over 35,000 pieces of paper per day doing the paperwork, which is why we worked with municipalities to develop a new vision for social assistance. That's why we are also making it easier to access support with digital tools and modern service options, including an online application form, an expansion of the MyBenefits platform, and new communication channels to allow two-way digital messaging between clients and caseworkers, making it easier for everyone involved. These changes will transform the system to provide better support for our most vulnerable, allow front-line staff to focus on results for people rather than paperwork, and help people to return to work and participate in their community. Quite often I have heard the minister say, "It's people over paperwork."

To bring my thoughts on this motion to a conclusion, this government has been taking action from day one to support those who need it through social assistance. We raised rates when we first formed government and we have raised ODSP rates again by the largest amount in decades—a historic amount. And we are aligning rates to inflation, which is a game-changer. When inflation goes up, rates go up. We're putting more money in people's pockets now and tomorrow, and we're revolutionizing employment services to support people who can work to get back to work.

Members opposite should take a good look in the mirror as they criticize this government and remember that they voted against the LIFT and CARE tax credits that put money back into 1.7 million people's pockets, including people on social assistance, in the fall economic statement in November 2018. In the November 2020 budget, they voted against the micro-credentials strategy and the Ontario Trillium Foundation Resilient Communities Fund. In November 2021, they voted against the Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit. They voted against everything we've put forward, Speaker. Most recently, they voted against

the largest increase to ODSP rates in decades and the alignment of the rates to inflation.

On this side of the House, we understand that the pandemic and its after-effects represent one of the biggest economic challenges we've faced, and we recognize the impact inflation is having on people's lives across the whole province. We understand that getting people who can work back to work is good for our economic recovery, and that's good for those people as well. We understand the importance of supporting people who cannot work, so they can lead meaningful lives and pay for life's essentials.

Our government has provided that support from day one and that's a goal we will not lose sight of. We've backed up our understanding of facts with action as we work to solve long-standing problems, and we've backed it up with these investments. These investments back up our transformation of social assistance to build a more responsive, efficient and person-centred system that will get people back to work and help the province to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and support those who cannot work.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: I am pleased to have the opportunity to join in this debate today to double the social service rates in the province of Ontario. I think the member opposite missed that part of the debate and the motion that we're actually calling on. He spoke on a lot of stuff which definitely boiled a lot of blood over on this side, talking about tax credits. If he doesn't even realize that these people in very low income—they don't even get those tax breaks. So I'm not really sure where the member is coming from.

We definitely have listened, on this side of the House at least, to people who are living on social services and the struggles that they face on a daily basis. The amount of money that people are receiving on ODSP or Ontario Works is complete poverty; it's less than poverty. Some of my members—myself, as well as four others who will be speaking today also—took up the challenge of giving two weeks of our lives to try to put ourselves in the position to understand the depths of poverty that people are facing. There was no way that we could imitate poverty—that is absolutely for sure—but we did limit our diet to an amount, a formula that has been used for science for quite a few years. We came up with that number of \$97, I think it was, but immediately, as soon as we did that and came out with our press release and did a press conference, we heard from folks very loudly and clearly that many folks don't even have \$100 a month to eat—not even \$100 a month.

I would have loved—and we all called on the government and government members to take on that challenge: “Please, even if you're not going to just eat that amount, go to the grocery store. Just go to the grocery store and test your ability to shop with that very little amount of money.”

I found the challenge very difficult. I'm sure our experiences were very different, the members who took on this challenge. I am a single person. I live alone, so I only had

to cook and prepare for myself, but it came with several challenges—not going out with friends and family, because food was always a very social thing. So not only was I not eating properly or healthily, but I also then socially isolated myself at the same time.

In that time, I truly put my mind and my heart with the folks who live like this every single day. I'll tell you, Speaker: By day five, I was hungry, and even when I was hungry and then I ate, my body was still hungry, because I wasn't getting any proper nutrition. That hunger feeling truly turns into pain. It turns into complete brain fog. My body was not functioning as it should, and this was after five days.

After people started calling on us, saying that the money that we had allotted was too much, I had done one grocery shopping and I had spent, I think, \$53. I didn't spend any more money after that. I stuck to that \$53 for that two weeks, and there was nothing healthy about it. Trying to find substance, of pasta and stuff like that, was very difficult. So if I felt like that after a few days, imagine people who have succumbed to this. This becomes their everyday life, every day of what they have to deal with, and it's not just them. They also have to put their children through this, who can't go to school with the proper snacks like all the other kids, who don't get brand new clothes to start school like the other kids do—running shoes like the other kids.

There is a whole lifestyle that comes with poverty, and it's not pretty. It's not pretty, and I really think it's unfortunate that these members wouldn't even take the time just to do the grocery shopping, just to see what it's like, to actually look at prices on the shelf. As a privileged person, I really go into the grocery store and I just buy what I want. I know what I'm making. I know what I'm cooking. I buy what I want. This time, I had to look at prices, and I'll tell you, I look at prices every day since. I look, and they're horrible—as I'm sure you know, Speaker; you have to go and grocery-shop for your family as well.

It's really important that people look at this. A 5% increase only to people on ODSP is shameful. How many people are sitting on Ontario Works, trying to get on ODSP? They're stuck in the bureaucracy of it all, or they're on Ontario Works and they're already spiralling out of control. Maybe you don't have housing. Maybe you can't wash your clothes. Maybe you can't prepare yourself to have a good night's sleep with a roof or a bed, to be able to get up and go to a job.

To be able to apply: The member talked about the new way of doing things; how about if they don't have a computer? How are they supposed to apply to their new digital world if they don't have a computer? Now, I've heard from workers—

Interjection.

1400

Miss Monique Taylor: Oh, look: He holds up his phone. That's privilege at its finest—privilege at its finest, right there. It's mind-blowing, Speaker, the lack of understanding, the lack of compassion for people in this province who do not have the same ability, do not have the

same privileges that many of us have had. To be able to just hold up their phone and say, “Well, everybody has a phone”—no.

Interjection: They don’t have data.

Miss Monique Taylor: No, they don’t have data. They might have to go somewhere and hopefully tap into somebody’s data, if they even have a phone, and if they’re homeless, hopefully no one is going to steal their phone as they’re sleeping on the street that night.

Have you ever talked to somebody who is homeless and on the street, and they’re using drugs? Do you know why they’re using drugs? Because fentanyl helps them sleep, and crystal meth keeps them awake, so it’s their drug of choice. If they’re staying awake because they’re totally afraid and they don’t want anybody to touch their stuff, they’re into crystal meth. If they want to sleep through it, and they can’t and they just don’t want to survive it, whatever—they’re doing fentanyl because they can sleep. This is how our homeless population are surviving on the streets.

When we have rates that cannot even keep up with the cost of rent—the cost of rent in Hamilton for a one-bedroom nothing, probably maybe even renting a room these days, is \$1,500. They’re only getting \$733 on their total cheque for Ontario Works. The same people we want to go to work, we’re making it very difficult for them to succeed.

And for people who are disabled, of no fault of their own, we are forcing them into legislated poverty. I have a story here from one of my constituents. This is what he says:

“I always used to think you work hard and the possibilities are endless. I graduated college with honours, ran multiple successful businesses, employed many people over the years and paid my taxes. Unfortunately, I was injured and unable to work. I found going through the ODSP application process extremely cumbersome and felt very empathetic for others going through the same. ODSP is an essential service and should be provided to all people in need with the utmost care and respect. Although ODSP is helpful, it is not enough. The amount paid out does not even come close to paying all necessary expenses.”

His story goes on. These are the realities that we see, and then we have a government who came into office in 2018. There was a measly 3% increase sitting on the table that the Liberals had put out there—still shameful; very, very shameful, 3%. But this government came in in 2018 and cut that 3% to 1%. What was that supposed to do? How could that possibly be one of the first actions of a government that comes in? They gave 1%, and now they’ve scheduled 3% only for disabled people. If you’re on Ontario Works, if you’re waiting to get on ODSP, if you’re homeless and you’re only getting the basic-needs portion and not any shelter portion, no increase for you.

Then they’re going to tie it to inflation. As if it wasn’t bad enough this time, now you’re going to make sure that it continues on in the same disgraceful way. It’s not like, “Okay, well, it’s going to be really bad this time, because we’re really short”—which they’re not; they have found billions of dollars. Now we’re just going to make sure that

we’re legislating it, tying it to inflation, which will continue to keep them in poverty forever and ever and ever.

We are seeing the increases of our food banks. While I did my diet—I visit my food banks regularly, but during the social-service diet time, I visited many food banks across the province. They are begging for government dollars, which they are not getting. They are being more and more creative all the time, and the community is having a harder time being generous, with inflation and the cost of food rising for them; we’re seeing many working people in our food banks these days. So our food banks are desperate, so if they’re going to hear anything—maybe they don’t want to help people on Ontario Works or ODSP, because they think they can go to the food bank. The food bank is in trouble. So when they’re over there doing their photo shoots at the food bank with a big smile on their face, I hope they’re also asking them what their government can do to help support them and to make sure that our food banks, unfortunate as they are, can keep their doors open.

The FAO has come out with his report on the economic and budget outlook. There’s a shortfall to the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services of \$4 billion over the next six years. They’re actually cutting the ministry that is so desperate for funds. That ministry covers quite a bit. It covers children with autism, it covers Ontario Works, it covers social services—there are so many things that that vital ministry covers, and they are going to have a \$4-billion shortfall. That is terrifying. That is absolutely terrifying.

One of the other things that I wanted to bring up too: The member did talk about employment services and the pilot programs that are happening across the province, and he’s right. They’re privatized. They privatized the employment services that we needed for people who are vulnerable in this province, so when someone is now looking for work within it, they are tiered for what the employment services think they can do, and they get a bonus every time they team somebody up with a job. And then, if that doesn’t work—I guess that person loses that job—they can team them up with another job, and then they’ll get another bonus.

You know, the city of Hamilton applied for the tender to be able to provide that service for the city of Hamilton, and they lost, so they obviously were not the lowest bidder. I think ours was shipped out to—I think we’re in Florida.

Interjection.

Miss Monique Taylor: Yes, it’s Florida who provides our employment services for that, so that’s pretty terrifying.

Did I talk about digital, online and not being able to access—I think I did.

I want to take the time to read some more stories from constituents, because I think making sure that their voices are heard in this Legislature when it comes to how important it is for them to be able to have their rates increased, so they can live lives in dignity, is some of the most important pieces of this motion today. This one, I think

I'm going to come back to, because I did a portion of it earlier.

Oh, one of the other big problems is marital status. We're telling people that if you are on OW or ODSP, you can't live with another person, or else they're going to be responsible for you. How fair is that?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Terrible.

Miss Monique Taylor: It's terrible. It's absolutely terrible that a person cannot have their own self-dignity and their own ability to care for themselves. If they're disabled, it's not their fault. We all know this, right? We're not laying blame on disabled people in this province these days, are we? Because that's exactly what's happening.

If a person is disabled—I'm just going to say "her," just for a story's sake. She's disabled; she meets a gentleman who has a job, but she still should have her own independence. She cannot live with this person and she cannot marry this person, because she will lose completely all her own independence and be completely reliant on that man. How is that right? That is so wrong.

I hope the members over on that side, including the women's minister, are listening to this, because that is one of the most shameful things that are happening, and we heard that a lot throughout the process. They're considered one benefit unit, and so when they're calculated as a whole and they must—this is another good one; this one blows my mind. Maybe someone should just shout it out on the other side. What is common-law status in Ontario? Let's make it a little trivia. Anybody know? Common-law status: How long do you live together?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Three years.

MPP Jamie West: Three months.

1410

Miss Monique Taylor: It depends on which ministry you have to deal with: for the CRA, 12 months; Ontario, three years; ODSP, three months. Three months, and you're common-law.

Now, come on. I'll tell you, Speaker, I've been dealing with a young family. He hurt himself at work terribly. He fell 10 feet off a scaffolding on his head, has had five brain surgeries—several ups and downs. Because they only lived together for two and a half years, she's not entitled to be responsible for any of his paperwork. She can't cash his—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Power of attorney.

Miss Monique Taylor: Power of attorney—thank you. She can't be any of that. And because his parents live in the States, his responsibility would be put to a trustee, because they've lived together for two and a half years. In Canada, it's 12 months; in Ontario it's three years, unless you're a vulnerable population and you're poor in this province, and then we're going to make sure we stick it to you with the three months. These are the kinds of things that just don't even make sense. So when the member talks about reforming social services in this province, I would love to see them do something good. I would love to see them use their power for good instead of evil.

Legislating poverty in this province has got to stop. It has to stop. We have people on the front lawn today begging for their health, and it's the same people who are

always having to advocate. It's the disabled, vulnerable population who are going out of their way, and they're doing everything they can to advocate.

That's why I was really proud to stand with my colleagues and to do what we called the social-service diet, because we were then taking on that advocacy work for them. We were using our platforms as elected officials to try to convince the government to do the right thing. We see that it hasn't worked. Maybe it will work today. Maybe they'll have a free vote and members are going to vote with us today, and possibly pass something that is good and actually helps people in this province instead of continuing to legislate poverty and instead of putting roadblocks of marital status in front of them. Because God forbid—if you're disabled, you can't have a partner in life. You have to live alone, but the problem is that you can't really afford to live alone, because you can't afford the rent on your own.

Let's talk about another spiral effect. People in poverty are in these holes, digging their way out, and as they're digging, every pull is pulling more dirt on their head. If you've never had to struggle that way, think about it in that effect, because that's exactly what's happening. People need to live together. If Jamie and I are friends—we're not partners, by no means, but we're friends—and he's struggling to pay the rent and I'm struggling to pay the rent, then they're already going to put us as a single unit. We're not even together, but we can't afford the rent. Do you know what I mean?

These are the types of things that need to change in this province. People need to have dignity. They need the rates doubled. There is no doubt about it. There is no doubt about the fact that people cannot afford to live on \$733 a month. They cannot afford to live on \$1,223 a month. It's time. The time is now. The government has to see that it's the right time to do things. The cost of living is so high. The cost of rent is so high. The cost of groceries is so high. Kids need new shoes. Parents can't afford it.

It's up to you to make the difference. It's up to you to do the right thing. Pass this motion today. Do the right thing. Double the rates for people on social assistance. Give them back their dignity.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further debate? I recognize the member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much, Speaker. It's great to see you in the Chair. I think this is the first time I've seen you in the Chair, that I can remember. It's great to see you there.

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: Come on. You can be a bit more lively, eh?

I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing the motion forward—I fully support the motion—and I want to thank the member from Hamilton Mountain for her remarks. As always, she's very passionate, and you learn something. I did not know that common-law was three months for the purposes of social assistance. That seems to be weighting it in favour of reducing people's income, when we already know that that income is not enough and people are trying to live together to be able to

afford food and to be able to afford rent. I want to thank her for sharing that.

We know this motion is not going to pass, because the government is making it very clear that—

Hon. Greg Rickford: Don't presume that.

Mr. John Fraser: Well, we know that it's not going to pass. I can say that in here. I can't say it out there. We just know. Nobody looked shocked when I said that.

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: I know you're shocked.

Here's the thing: I don't understand why this government thinks 5% is going to cut it. Food prices are at 11%. I know; I came from the grocery business. There's a lot of profit-taking there right now. People can't afford to eat. It's a really serious situation. We're bidding on rents in Toronto.

I think one of the things that the government did in 2018 that they should change right now is the clawback. If you want to do things differently, let people earn more money. Why this government reduced the clawback and didn't increase it is flabbergasting. I find that totally surprising. It doesn't come as a cost to the government, so I can't believe this government would actually roll that back.

I did hear a member on the other side saying, "We need to do something new. We need to do something differently." Well, that's what happened 20 years ago, when Mike Harris said we needed to do something differently, and we did it differently, and we're at where we're at right now.

But he was right: We need to do things differently, and the way we could do things differently is a basic income. That's something that people from all parties agree on. We make it so hard for people when they need our help to get it, and then to get off it. We make it complicated for them to access the things they need to go to, to get done, when they don't have the supports or the income to be able to go there. I would urge the government to reinstate a basic income pilot. Look at it. It makes sense. Simplify. Give people what they need to live.

People want to work. Some people can't, but people want to work, and what we do is we put restrictions on people. We say, "We're here to help you, but we're going to make everything complicated, and we're going to make it really hard for you to get away from this." It's like a vicious circle.

I was speaking to a constituent the other day on the phone, and they ended up on ODSP, which took them a while to get on, because they got cancer. They were working. They could no longer work anymore. After their treatments, they weren't able to work. They were restricted by some of the consequences of the surgery that they had. We spoke for about 45 minutes on the phone. The only way that they're possibly able to afford food is that they're on a special diet; otherwise they wouldn't be able to eat. They're barely able to afford their rent. They don't have Internet.

That was a good point that the member for Hamilton Mountain brought up: In this day and age, if you don't have access to Internet, how do you do anything? It's hard enough to connect to government, if you can't actually connect to something that connects you to government.

1420

Again, I fully support this motion, but what I would really like the government to consider reversing course on is the basic income pilot. As I said, there are Conservatives and members of the New Democrats and Liberals and Greens who all support this. I think people are concerned about what they think are the political ramifications of doing it, that we're making it easy for people. We're not making it easy for people; we're making it easier for people: easier for them to work, easier for them to survive. Ending this income pilot, which happened in 2018, was the wrong thing to do.

I thank you for your time.

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

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I was also on the reduced-budget diet with my colleagues, but what I would like to talk about is how much work it is to have a disability. We did without a good amount of money for food, but that is only a small piece of what it's like to live with a disability. The amount of money that is available for people with disabilities is so low, it is actually punishment. If you have a disability, you know you will be punished by this government, by policy, put into a place of poverty, because the rates are deliberately lower than what it costs to live.

We did a round table, and I also met with a number of people, and I have to say, I was stricken. I was really shattered after those conversations, when I learned what individuals were having to do to get through their daily lives. People are dealing with pain. They can't get transportation. They can't get from A to B. They can't do their groceries. Many would like to work, but they recognize that they are—what they call themselves—"unreliable workers." Why are they unreliable? Because their disability gets in the way.

I spoke with somebody with epilepsy. He tried to work, but as soon as his employers found out he had epilepsy, out he went, because they were frightened that he might have a seizure.

There were others. I have a good friend in Thunder Bay who wants to work, but she has got pain, so some days she can't get out of bed. Some days she can. She does a lot to contribute to our community, but having a regular job is never going to work.

There were many others, certainly people who are living on OW, so I beg to differ with the member opposite, who is no longer there. People are on OW for months and months and months at a time while they are trying to get through the ODSP process and get approved. I know I could not survive on \$733 a month. It's an impossibility in Thunder Bay; it's certainly an impossibility in a larger centre.

We know that we are harming people. People are desperate. They're desperate, they're depressed, they feel shunned and they don't understand why they can't be given enough money to live. That's where I'll leave it. There is no reason that this province—this wealthy province—cannot provide enough money for people to live in dignity. I'm talking about just surviving. Dignity would be wonderful; that's icing on the cake.

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

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Fifteen years ago, I heard a description of poverty that has never left me. It came from Michael Creek, who was a director of Canada Without Poverty at the time. Michael Creek was someone who had lived a middle-class existence until he got cancer, and because of cancer he ended up being homeless. What he said was, “Poverty takes everything good in your life and wrecks it.”

We know that poverty is a determinant of social health. Poverty makes people sick. But poverty is also a mediator of so many other determinants of health. It’s your access to housing and to food.

This government, daily, legislates hundreds of thousands of Ontarians into that situation. A single person living on OW gets only \$733 a month. A single person living on ODSP, even after this government’s “historic” increase, gets only \$1,228 a month. The average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Ottawa now, according to rentals.ca, is \$1,800 a month. The government members can do the math. And that’s just for housing. You still then have to pay for groceries, utilities, diapers, feminine hygiene products, medical devices and supplies, PPE, haircuts and, if you can afford it, Internet or phone so that you can stay connected to community programs and find out whether or not your job application has been accepted.

This government is not only legislating people into deep, deep poverty, but they are creating a poverty trap. It is now a full-time job to be poor. It is an incredible search for housing you can afford. You have to deal with discrimination in the rental market. And to make matters worse, if you lose your housing because of this situation, the government takes away your shelter benefit, so now you’re supposed to get rehoused somehow with only half the amount of money.

People have told me over the past few months about the incredible amount of work that goes into searching for food: budgeting, planning, looking for savings; walking to the grocery store when you can only carry one bag back, if you’re lucky, if your physical condition allows you to; and finding where the food banks and the community meal programs are. Then, fighting with your landlord over the fact that they’re trying to get you ejected, trying to convince employers that they should take you on in this situation—this is a full-time job, and a full-time job that destroys your health.

Another story I heard a few years ago that has also never left me was from someone who was on the basic income pilot in Ontario. She told me 20 years on ODSP and she only ever got sicker. A few months on the basic income and her condition went into remission.

This government’s approach to social assistance is cruel and inhumane, but it is also deeply counterproductive. There is so much work to do to make these programs humane and supportive, but it needs to start by doubling the rates immediately.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It’s an honour to rise today and speak in favour of the opposition day motion. As the first MPP in this House to call for the doubling of social assistance rates, ODSP and Ontario Works, and as the leader of the party that pushed so hard to make this issue front and centre in the spring election, I want to thank the official opposition for bringing this motion forward as the first opposition day motion. It is vital that we have this conversation in Ontario.

I was just at a rally, as many of us were, on the front lawn, and ODSP recipients said, “The headline is probably going to be that we’re here to ask for more money.” But it’s more than that. It’s about decency. It’s about dignity. It’s about respect. It’s about the kind of Ontario that we want to live in. Do we want to live in a province that forces people with disabilities to live in legislated poverty, or do we want to live in a province that treats people with the dignity and respect that they deserve?

Doubling social assistance rates is the first step to ending legislated poverty in this province. The next step is to bring in a basic income that protects all Ontarians. Let’s look at some of the numbers. In 1998, a person with disabilities received \$930 a month; today, 24 years later, it’s gone up by \$239. Imagine, for most of us, how much the cost of living has gone up in the last six months or the last year, let alone the last 24 years.

Somebody on Ontario Works is forced to live on \$733 a month. Tell me anybody in this Legislature who could live on \$733 a month, especially when the average rent in many places is around \$1,500, \$1,800, \$2,000 a month.

1430

Somebody on ODSP, their shelter allowance alone is only \$522 a month. Imagine trying to find a place anywhere on \$522 a month and then trying to survive on \$702 a month.

We’re asking the impossible of people, and it has significant cost to society. Feed Ontario did a study showing that prior to the pandemic, poverty cost this province \$33 billion a year in increased health care cost, increased cost to our criminal justice system, increased cost to our social service systems, increased cost to lost productivity; the list goes on and on and on.

As a matter of fact, the number one determinant of people’s health is poverty. It’s poverty. So if we actually want to take pressure off the health care system to help keep our emergency rooms open, yes, we need to get rid of Bill 124, but we also need to get rid of legislated poverty. And that’s what this motion is about.

Speaker, you’ve heard from others—and I’ve heard this government say this—that the best way to get out of poverty is a job. I can tell you, I’ve talked to so many people on Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support who want to get a job but oftentimes face significant barriers to doing that.

Within the ODSP program itself, if you earn more than \$200 a month, you start having your earnings clawed back anyway, so you’re actually penalized by what the government is doing if you try to do a little extra work to supplement your income. So, in addition to doubling rates, we need to triple or quadruple the work allowance so people

can get a little work in if they're able to—and for many folks, doing a little bit they can do with their disability.

Speaker, I've oftentimes heard the members opposite talk about reducing red tape. I want to say the people who face more red tape in our society than anyone are people on social assistance. The amount of forms people have to fill out, having to report to a caseworker, the indignity of always being questioned, having your marital status challenged and whether you still qualify or not through your relationships—the list goes on and on. You want to talk about people who have to push through red tape, talk to people on social assistance trying to get by month to month.

I have a few minutes left. I want to appeal to each and every one of us in this House, but especially the members opposite. Oftentimes it's said, "We don't have the money to pay for this," or "The money doesn't grow on trees." Well first, when poverty costs \$33 billion a year, you know there's money. But you also have to look at priorities. The FAO said that the ministry is going to be underfunded by \$4 billion. That's enough right there to almost double ODSP rates right then and there.

So the money is there. The money is there to do the right thing. It's a matter of, are we going to rise to the moment and do the right thing? I encourage everyone in this House to do the right thing today and vote in favour of this motion.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: I'm proud to rise today to speak in support of our motion to double social assistance rates for the 900,000 people in Ontario who live on Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support payments.

If you are on Ontario Works, you receive about \$730 a month. If you are on Ontario Disability Support, you receive about \$1,200 a month. You cannot live on that. You couldn't live on that last year or the year before, and you certainly can't live on that now, especially at a time when we have an inflationary crisis—the Bank of Canada is estimating inflation is upwards of 7%—at a time when the cost of food is ridiculously high. When we go into a supermarket and we choose the products we want to take home, our bill is astronomical. And it keeps going up.

It is extremely difficult to afford to live in Ontario given the high cost of housing, especially the high cost of rent. Today in Ontario we have the highest price for rent that Toronto has ever seen. It's at record levels. You cannot afford to find a bachelor, even a rooming house, on \$733 or \$1,200 a month. It's just not possible.

I was one of five MPPs who lived on a social-assistance diet for two weeks, for about \$47 a week, in order to raise awareness about the unbelievably low social assistance rates that people receive. It was incredibly difficult. I asked the minister opposite, the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, to participate in the social-assistance diet as well. She did not answer the question.

I also want to thank the hundreds of people who reached out to our offices and many of the other NDP offices to thank us for raising an issue that too often gets ignored,

and also to double down on the fact that social assistance rates are too low and that the amount of money that we were spending on food was too high, because costs have gone up since the Harris government, when these rates were set. They talked about the high cost of rent. They talked about medical expenses that no one prepares for, that you suddenly have to pay. They talked about hospital visits that could destroy someone's budget. They talked about paying for clothes and how they just didn't have the money for that. They talked about the high cost of transportation, transit and driving. They talked about looking after children and how it was impossible to pay for formula and diapers and all the things you need to raise a child in the best way that you want to raise them. It was heartbreaking hearing their stories.

I spoke to the food banks in our riding to get a better understanding of how this inflationary crisis is impacting people on social assistance. I learned some very concerning things. I learned that the need is skyrocketing and that the people who are going to social assistance are not just people on social assistance; they're people who work full-time, because the minimum wage is too low. They are seniors, they are parents, they are young people. I heard from food banks that talked about how they now had to ration how much food an individual could get and that they had to turn people away, even people who were waiting upwards of three hours to visit the food bank.

I want to thank the many letters I received—and I want to conclude by reading one out. It was one of the most difficult ones I received. He said, "I spent 16 years of my life as an infantry officer in the Canadian Army.

"Right now I am dying of cancer while trying to live on ODSP. It is only because I live in Legion housing that I am able to survive."

Miss Monique Taylor: Terrible.

Ms. Jessica Bell: It was very difficult to read.

"In a country as rich as Canada it is profoundly wrong that veterans should be dependent upon private charity for mere survival while rich people enjoy multi-million dollar houses.

"I did not give 16 years of my life to defend that vision of an unequal and unjust society."

They are very important words, and it is why we are here today—to call on this government to double social assistance rates to help people, to increase the minimum wage so people who work can live dignified lives, to bring in real rent control so that Ontarians can live in affordable housing that meets their needs. It is the right thing to do, not just on moral grounds but also for economic grounds, because we know when people are given support they are less likely to go to a hospital, they are less likely to get sick, they are less likely to have interactions with the police and they are less likely to have children who struggle. It benefits all of us to help people who need help now. It helps our society, it helps them, and it's the right thing to do.

I urge you to support this bill.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: Speaker, I could give a speech about how unjust it is for people to live in poverty; I think my

colleagues have covered that. I could give a speech about how it costs Ontario a lot more to legislate poverty, but I think my colleagues have covered that.

1440

What I think would be better for us to have as content in this discussion, Speaker, is why Ontario is comfortable to have a basic income for the rich and not the poor. Let me explain what I mean by that.

Last night, like many Ontarians, I was watching the Raptors game—great season for the Raptors; hopes are high. But as I was looking at the floor, I was thinking about all those courtside seats that I know cost thousands and thousands of dollars. And I know this government, here in the province of Ontario, allows the owners of those tickets to deduct 50% of the cost of those tickets as legitimate business expenses. So what researchers are telling me is that millions of dollars in the Raptors game last night went to companies hosting their friends courtside, having drinks, watching the Raptors. And we have people living in legislated poverty.

I also looked at the commercials, Speaker, and who did I see? I saw the smiling face of Galen Weston, and Galen was talking to us about how he's freezing the prices on all those No Name yellow products. He was going to help the poor and the disadvantaged, wasn't he? Meanwhile, Galen's company, Loblaws, has seen its profit rise from first quarter 2021 to first quarter 2022 by 40%.

Has this government lifted a finger about pandemic profiteering that particularly hurts the poor and the disabled? Not a finger. Have they done anything to the energy companies that are making a mint at the pumps during the pandemic? Have they?

So I want to know, Speaker, why this government is comfortable with a basic income for the rich and the affluent, and not the poor. I can get into more details. The fact of the matter is, as the Financial Accountability Office told this House, the second-most expensive thing Ontario spends money on right now is tax expenditures. Health care: \$63.8 billion. The next most expensive thing we spend money on, \$44.4 billion, is tax expenditures.

What kind of tax expenditures, Speaker? We're talking about write-offs for meals and entertainment expenses like the Raptors game last night. We're talking about write-offs for stock ownership. We're talking generally, as the FAO said, about write-offs for affluent people—\$44.4 billion.

So we can have a basic income and guaranteed revenue for the big energy companies, for Loblaws. We saw—didn't we see?—during the pandemic whose wealth increased. There are 59 billionaires in Canada; most of them live in Ontario. Their wealth increased by \$110 billion according to Oxfam.

Who does this government really work for, and why do they not want a basic income for the poor and the disabled, despite the evidence my colleagues have talked about that it's actually great for society to make sure that people can have food in their bellies, a roof over their heads, a way to get around town and respect?

I want to end on that note. Let's talk about respect.

You and I both live in Ottawa, Speaker. We know that our festivals in Ottawa would not work if it wasn't for the volunteer labour of OW and ODSP recipients. I think about my friend George Upchurch, who I saw at Bluesfest this summer, who was out there flogging the wares for Bluesfest, getting people involved to volunteer, donation capacity, encouraging local artists. George can handle that, and he gets three square meals a day, as do other ODSP and OW volunteers, at that festival and many other festivals that would not work without social-assistance recipients showing up and playing a part.

I want an Ontario that looks like that, Speaker. I want an Ontario that gives respect and a basic income to the poor and the disabled, not for the friends of this government, not for the Galen Westons, not for the Richard Thomsons, not for the billionaires at the trough of the gravy train driven by this government.

That's enough. We're fed up. We can afford it.

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

The Leader of the Opposition to conclude.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'll be giving my reply. I want to thank everyone who took the opportunity today to speak about this issue. I don't think there's any question that we owe it to ourselves as a society to make sure that no one lives in the kind of misery that is currently dictated.

We know that we see the price of that misery on the streets of our cities and our towns—people waiting in line for food banks, people who are camping in our parks because they can't afford anything else. We know that those people in this situation live shorter lives, are more likely to acquire and die from disease. The impact they have on the health care system is real. The impact on them from poverty is very real. We do not have to have this happen.

My colleague from Ottawa Centre is entirely correct that there are billions of dollars sloshing around out there that could be used to make a difference in people's lives; this government could make a difference in people's lives.

I heard one member from the government party talk about the responsibility of the federal government. I won't argue; the federal government should be doing more. But I'm not in federal Parliament; I'm here. We are the richest province in this federation. We have the ability to look after our own. We should be looking after our own. No one here, no one outside this building, should fear that if they have a serious disease or an accident, they will lose everything they have and live in desperation.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Mr. Tabuns has moved opposition day motion number 1. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

A recorded vote being requested, we'll call in the members and there will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1446 to 1456.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Members, please take your seats.

Mr. Tabuns has moved opposition day motion number 1. All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Andrew, Jill	Glover, Chris	Sattler, Peggy
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gretzky, Lisa	Schreiner, Mike
Begum, Doly	Harden, Joel	Shamji, Adil
Bell, Jessica	Hsu, Ted	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Bourgouin, Guy	Hunter, Mitzie	Stiles, Marit
Bowman, Stephanie	Karpoche, Bhutla	Tabuns, Peter
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Kernaghan, Terence	Taylor, Monique
Burch, Jeff	Mamakwa, Sol	Vanthof, John
Fife, Catherine	Mantha, Michael	Vaugeois, Lise
Fraser, John	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	West, Jamie
French, Jennifer K.	Pasma, Chandra	Wong-Tam, Kristyn
Gélinas, France	Rakocevic, Tom	

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Anand, Deepak	Harris, Mike	Rasheed, Kaleed
Bailey, Robert	Hogarth, Christine	Rickford, Greg
Barnes, Patrice	Holland, Kevin	Riddell, Brian
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Jones, Sylvia	Romano, Ross
Bouma, Will	Jones, Trevor	Sabawy, Sheref
Byers, Rick	Jordan, John	Sandhu, Amarjot
Calandra, Paul	Kanapathi, Logan	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Cho, Stan	Ke, Vincent	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Clark, Steve	Kerzner, Michael S.	Scott, Laurie
Coe, Lorne	Leardi, Anthony	Skelly, Donna
Crawford, Stephen	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, Dave
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Lumsden, Neil	Smith, David
Dixon, Jess	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Graydon
Dowie, Andrew	Martin, Robin	Smith, Laura
Downey, Doug	McCarthy, Todd J.	Smith, Todd
Dunlop, Jill	McGregor, Graham	Surma, Kinga
Flack, Rob	McNaughton, Monte	Tangri, Nina
Ford, Doug	Mulroney, Caroline	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Ford, Michael D.	Oosterhoff, Sam	Thompson, Lisa M.
Fullerton, Merrilee	Pang, Billy	Tibollo, Michael A.
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Parsa, Michael	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Ghamari, Goldie	Piccini, David	Wai, Daisy
Gill, Parm	Pirie, George	Williams, Charmaine A.
Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Quinn, Nolan	Yakabuski, John
Hardeman, Ernie	Rae, Matthew	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 35; the nays are 74.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

KEEPING STUDENTS IN CLASS ACT, 2022

LOI DE 2022 VISANT À GARDER LES ÉLÈVES EN CLASSE

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 1, 2022, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 28, An Act to resolve labour disputes involving school board employees represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees / Projet de loi 28, Loi visant à résoudre les conflits de travail concernant les employés des conseils scolaires représentés par le Syndicat canadien de la fonction publique.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Ms. Dunlop, you had the floor this morning. Did you want to continue?

Interjection.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: A historic day in this province: the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and its protections being revoked; human rights, privileges fought for by generations of Ontarians being revoked; and members fleeing home.

Look, let's contrast this from an Ottawa perspective, Speaker, so we have an Ottawa perspective on this debate; I know you'll appreciate that. Today, there are lawyers representing the Premier, the education minister, the former Solicitor General, claiming that irreparable harm will be done to the rule of law if they are compelled to testify to a federal inquiry looking into the convoy occupation in our city—irreparable harm to the rule of law. And yet this government has the temerity to insist that the 55,000 education workers who help our public school system function are threatening the fabric of our society. While they themselves—they themselves—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Please stop the clock. If you'll allow, I'll give a couple of minutes for the movement to finish so that I can hear you properly.

Start the clock. The member for Ottawa Centre has the floor.

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you, Speaker.

So the point I was making is that this government is claiming that the 55,000 education workers in this province who actually make our schools function on the limited budgets provided by this government are somehow flouting our legal traditions, but their leadership at this very moment is sending lawyers to a federal court saying that compelling the Premier and the former Solicitor General to testify in Ottawa would be an abrogation of the rule of law—"irreparable harm," as their lawyers just said. The lawyer's quote in the court today directly was, "It's important that the privilege"—the parliamentary privilege—"be protected when it is under threat." Isn't it interesting, Speaker, to see how quickly this government will act to defend their perception of their parliamentary privilege, but for 55,000 people who work hard in our public school system, what do they do in the context of the last moments of a labour negotiation process? They take away the right to strike.

Speaker, I just want to inform you as well that I'll be sharing my time with the members from Thunder Bay—Superior North, Toronto Centre and Toronto—St. Paul's.

I want to end this, Speaker, with a metaphor, because I think it is a useful one. I want to suggest to you that this

government and its education minister are like the people that light a house on fire and then, when the fire department comes, they suggest the fire department is committing arson. Why do I say that, Speaker? Because the people who are the true first responders, the fire department or education system, are the custodians, the receptionists, the ECEs, the EAs, as colleague after colleague has said here, who put out the fire in every single one of our schools every single day. And what thanks do we give them? Five cents an hour. And what thanks did this government give 44 of its members of provincial Parliament last July, Speaker? A \$16,000 raise—a huge pay increase. I wonder, as I end, Speaker, how it feels to sit in of those green leather chairs and know the fact that that chair is on a sleazy gravy train that distributes unbelievable privilege to the members of this bench, the price for which is their silence when our education workers are under threat.

I also just want to say to workers back in Ottawa Centre, I'm sorry for the terrible situation which this government has put you in, but we are with you. We will stand beside you. You aren't defying the law. This government is flouting the law. You and I, our communities, will stand up for what's right. We will not back down. Thank you so much for your work.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Thunder Bay—Superior North.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: This government has been preparing for at least the last six months to bring in this anti-democratic, anti-Charter-of-Rights-and-Freedoms legislation to create further crises in our education system, and—incredibly—they are using the “notwithstanding” clause as a weapon against the most poorly paid workers in the system.

I've seen first-hand the dedication of all members of school communities, from the caretakers to the educational assistants, the school administrators, the librarians; each one has a crucial role in making schools positive learning spaces for students. However, I've also seen the challenges—really, the impossibility—of addressing the learning needs of all students when there are too many students and too few educational assistants.

Yet the government is bringing a sledgehammer against the lowest-paid workers in the education system, workers who have been through a decade of wage restraint that has put them so far behind the rate of inflation, they are on the brink of poverty.

These workers make a substantial contribution to the publicly funded, publicly delivered education system in Ontario. Believe me, I know first-hand that without these key people, schools cannot function and students will be without the supports they need and deserve.

These workers have been essentially hit by a wage cut of 10.7% because of policies of wage repression instituted by Conservative and Liberal governments and over the last four years of this government.

How does this government expect the public system to thrive given the increase in class sizes and the policies they have instituted that are pushing caring adults out of the system, because they cannot afford to be there?

Well, this brings me to what I think is behind the choices made by this government: privatization. In education as in health care, the attacks on public service workers go back to the Mike Harris Conservative government. The game plan then, as now, is to starve the public system of funding until the system collapses, thus creating a demand for private for-profit schools—and, of course, hospitals—for those who can afford them, ultimately forcing all of us, whether we can afford it or not, to pay out more and more for the services no longer publicly available. As with long-term care, I suspect what we are really seeing is that this government's policies, more than anything else, solve profitability problems for private interests by destroying public systems.

Now I know I'm not allowed to impute motive, but perhaps that could be cleared up if the government were willing to produce its mandate letters. Instead, the public is required to pay for the court costs that this government insists on dragging people through, using up taxpayer dollars for, frankly, frivolous court challenges that they will likely lose, and then, of course, they'll have to pay out compensation and so on.

So, in closing, I would also like to say to education workers: We stand with you. We respect your work, and we will stay with you as long as it takes.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Toronto Centre.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I rise to speak against Bill 28, a draconian and unconstitutional bill. Quality public education teaches young Ontarians compassion, respect and integrity. I wish those who moved this bill from the government side had learned those lessons in school.

When 73 of 83 members of the PC caucus already received a 19% to 42% raise above their base salary, yet they sneer at education workers and toss them a 1.5% increase and tell them to be reasonable, Speaker, it's this government that is not being reasonable. Compare cabinet ministers who make \$165,000 a year versus that of education workers averaging \$39,000—education workers who have to work a second job; a third of them are actually using food banks to get by, and two thirds of them are women.

By cutting public education, Speaker, the Premier is holding wages below the rate of inflation and lobbying constant attacks on education workers. The Minister of Education is putting kids' education at risk.

When the Liberals were in power, they actually didn't help either. They meddled with the bargaining rights of educators and teachers with Bill 115, and the courts ordered the government to pay hundreds of millions of dollars in fines.

When the Conservative government is choosing to repeat the costly mistake by now invoking, and upsizing that horrible mistake, the “notwithstanding” clause—this was never meant to be used in contract negotiations. That is a mistake.

1510

This past September, Church Street public school in my riding saw an increase of over 100 students—

unanticipated—in enrolment. Some of the classroom sizes went to 40 students—40 students versus the board standard of 23 students. The unexpected class increases made the workload barely workable and only thanks to the hard-working education workers. Without an adequate number of education workers, the system would collapse, and that's what we're going to see as they leave in droves.

The education system is weakening, largely based on political decisions. I have a teacher who wrote to me, and she shared, "I have been working my dream job as a full-time kindergarten teacher since 2017. I work closely with CUPE" education workers.

"I would be nothing," she says, "without my team. I have seven students in my class with high needs. Seven." Those students and children require and deserve individualized attention. They deserve to have their needs met. Somehow, her team is able to do it, and they do it with celebration and they do it with love. "They are absolute magicians." She confesses that she would not be able to do her job without the education workers.

Speaker, how can this government listen to the stories of education workers, teachers, parents and even students and not be moved?

How can this government have witnessed a global health pandemic and worked with education workers to help families stay afloat and then punish them with poverty wages?

How can this government pretend to be the friend of unions and working Ontarians and then violate the charter and enshrined collective bargaining rights?

How can this government say that they've exhausted every single option when they've walked away from the bargaining table and then only offer education workers something that's below the rate of inflation?

This is an atrocious bill. It is not supportable, and if we cannot defeat it today, the voters will defeat it and the workers will defeat it in 2026.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Toronto—St. Paul's.

MPP Jill Andrew: I'd like to start by thanking every parent, youth, education worker and ally who reached out to our office to let the Conservative government know how disgusting and how erroneous this bill is that attacks education workers.

I want you to know that education workers work long hours. Many of them are unpaid. Many of them are unsung. What they're asking for is simply to have access to a home and to not have to access food at a food bank. This is all they're asking for. This is what my friends and colleagues are asking for at boards across Ontario, while we sit in the Legislature with MPPs making six-figure salaries, with Ministers of Education making \$165,000, with our Premier making \$208,000—while folks have pennies to rub together.

This government forgets that education workers are people; they're not machines. They are parents. They have qualifications for this job. Many education workers have over 10 years' experience for the work they do. Let's not forget, under this government—and, frankly, previous

ones, too—we have nursing shortages in our schools. Sometimes education workers are doing work that they shouldn't even have to do, but they're doing it because of the love we have for kids. But this government depends on that love and abuses that love and expects people to sit down and roll over? Well, it is not happening. I can tell you, every education worker in Ontario has risen up. Enough is enough.

In St. Paul's, let me tell you something—I did a quick averaging here:

—a one-bedroom: \$2,400, roughly, a month;

—average cost of groceries: \$360 a month;

—average cost of phone and Internet: \$100 a month;

—average cost of hydro: maybe \$50 or so a month;

—Presto card: \$143 a month;

—menstrual products: about \$70 a year—and don't forget those pesky pink taxes;

—child care: low end, maybe \$1,600, or maybe four grand.

Rough total: around \$60,000. That is many thousands of dollars over the \$39,000 that our lowest-paid workers in the education sector, who probably have some of the biggest hearts and who rarely say the word no, are being paid.

Sorry to tell everyone in Ontario, but most education workers, the lowest-paid ones, will never have a one-bedroom apartment in midtown, in St. Paul's, and that is disgusting.

Earlier today, one of our members said that workers' conditions are students' learning outcomes, and that is absolutely critical for us to know. If an education worker is coming into the classroom, coming into the school—the custodian, the driver, the library worker, the education assistant.

One person I know right now is sitting at home with a concussion because of the experiences they've had in the classroom.

People in this room don't understand that there are education workers out there who hold their bladder because they're not able to just leave the room. Do you know why? Our classrooms are so big. The ratio is off.

So I want this government to recognize that they need to get back to the bargaining table. There is no strike. None of us want a strike. This government keeps saying, "Oh, we want to keep the kids in schools." I want to keep them in schools too, but do you know how you do that? You respect the caring adults who show up on buses across Toronto every morning with their brown-bag lunch. You support the people who are helping our kids academically, who are helping the structural environment that they live in, who are making sure that the paper towels are in the bathroom, who are the first friendly face that you see when you walk into a school when you're that new kid or that new parent who's worried that when you let little Maria or little Shelly Ann into the school for the first day, they might not belong. These are the people we need to show respect to.

I want to circle back on something I said about parents earlier today. This legislation does not take into account

that if this government does not do the right thing, if they do not get to the table and pay education fair wages, if they push education workers off the cliff, our kids can't be in schools. What they missed in the equation is, without caring adults, without those education workers, without clean bathrooms, without the lunch person, without that hall monitor who low-key is like a social worker in the school as well because kids come to them and talk to them, confide in them, get advice—without them, there's absolutely no school.

I'd like to share a few of the dozens of letters I got. We didn't quite get our 20-minute rotation, but we're doing the best we can.

Valerie said, "It's time to take education workers' proposals seriously, because they're reasonable, necessary and affordable. Pay workers better. Guarantee increased services for students. Make significant investments into our schools. Ensure adequate staffing levels. Focus on building our schools, not issuing subtle threats to those who keep them working. Don't be a bully. Support kids by supporting education workers." I think we can all agree that Valerie is on to something.

Then there's Christy, who wrote about her daughter Bronte, an educational assistant at a school: "She does not get a lunch break or any break at all most days. She wears Kevlar sleeves and occasionally a Kevlar vest to prevent the significant injuries she has received in schools. She has been bitten. She has been scratched. But she loves her job. She loves her students. They demonstrate their love to her. She does not want to strike. The idea worries her. However, she struggles to make ends meet. This unconstitutional measure taken by the Ford government deeply concerns me. Please, Jill, please continue your advocacy for my daughter and other CUPE members who are working hard for Ontario students."

Sue just wants to express how undemocratic and abusive—how this bill is an abuse of the Conservative government's power. She says she's sure—and I agree that she's right on.

1520

Workers have the right to bargain in good faith, and this legislation takes that away. And make no mistake, this government had that legislation in their back pocket. They absolutely did. Why? Because they've never respected education workers from day one, from—what was it again?—the 10,000 workers they cut, the billions of dollars they've cut from education or withheld from education. We'll have to wait a few years to see the disaster that will cause in classrooms, but we're seeing it already. We're seeing it already as organizations like Fix Our Schools are always crying out for the government to invest in the actual buildings, let alone investing in the people who keep schools running.

With 34 second left, I want to end by saying this: The mental health of our students is critical. The mental health of our education workers is critical. And I assure you that if this Conservative government keeps screwing with our education system, we will bear the consequences of that. They will bear the consequences of that. Our children will bear the consequences of that.

I ask, do you want to keep them in school? Do what's right. Get back to the bargaining table. Stop trampling on their charter rights, their human rights—

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

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Our government knows that students should remain in class. It's beneficial for their mental health and emotional well-being. That is why our government invested \$175 million into school tutoring programs and increased mental health funding by 420% over the former Liberal government. These supports underscore our government's commitment to putting students first.

Madam Speaker, through you to the opposition, why does the NDP insist upon choosing to negatively impact these students right now?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Answer? The member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Joel Harden: I guess I would say to my friend, it's quite a shell game the government is playing. There's the funds you're talking about, but then, as we learned earlier today from the member from Waterloo, there's \$44 billion in an unallocated surplus fund, money your government got from the federal government that you're just sitting on. I think this government may go down as the most avaricious squirrel in Canadian history. You're hoarding funds given to you by the federal government when our kids in our schools need them, and now, member—through you, Chair—they're forcing the lowest-paid workers in this province to continue to go to food banks, to continue to get substandard wages, all so the government can continue to hoard money. We don't buy your shell game here.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Question? The member for St. Catharines.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for giving the opportunity to all my colleagues.

I'd like to direct my question to the member from St. Paul's. We are still here 12 hours later, debating Bill 28, and I believe that some of the education assistance workers have done a good 12-hour shift already, and then they're going to another job. They've gone from the lowest-paid job—and it's mostly women in this field—to another job so they can continue to put food on the table for their children and get them those special things that every child asks their mother or their father for. Now these children are waiting for their mother to come home, but they're going back to another daycare where somebody has to look after them. We're not talking about teachers; we're talking about education assistants.

Let's be clear here: The government is trying to portray it as this is teachers. It's the education assistants; it's the custodians; it's the secretaries. It's the lowest-paid in the sector.

My question to my colleague would be, what do you think is wrong? Why do you think this is immoral? Why do you think this legislation is legislating poverty and is it the wrong way to—

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

MPP Jill Andrew: Thank you to our member for that question. Thank you for also recognizing that most education workers are women. We also know that many educational workers are BIPOC folks. We also know that many education workers are struggling because we are living in a time of a housing affordability crisis—an affordability crisis across the board. Why is it immoral? Because, frankly, it tramples on charter rights. It tramples on workers' rights to bargaining, to being at a bargaining table to bargain; to having human rights; to being able to state their cause, state their needs and trust that the system will work. The system hasn't worked because the Conservative government is not at the table.

So what needs to be done? Listen to the education workers. Listen to the parents. Listen to the students. Listen to the kids who recognize the invaluable resource that their education workers are and need to see them in the classrooms all the time—better paid, protected, working in good working conditions.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: As I've said earlier today, and I'll say again: Every provincial government has had their run-in with education workers and the education sector, and as we've been talking about earlier today, the previous NDP government froze education workers' salaries and made them take 12 unpaid days off. We talked earlier about the former Liberal government and their 0% pay increases for that.

I was wondering if I could ask the member from Toronto—St. Paul's if our offer of a 10% increase for the lowest-paid education workers over four years is a better deal than what those previous governments gave?

MPP Jill Andrew: Well, I think I'll ask the government member a question in response—

Mr. Will Bouma: So you're not going to answer the question, then?

MPP Jill Andrew: Would the government member—the Conservative responsible for legislating education workers, who are also parents, into poverty—tell us if they're willing to live on \$39,000 a year, before taxes? Are you willing to do that, doctor MPP? Let us know that.

Mr. Will Bouma: So you won't answer the question, then?

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

MPP Jill Andrew: Are you willing to live on \$39,000?

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

More questions?

Mr. Chris Glover: I'll ask my question of the member for Ottawa Centre, and I appreciate the comments that have been made. I'm going to tell a couple of quick anecdotes and stories that I've heard: from an early childhood educator who is currently homeless and lives in her car and sometimes in shelters; about an education assistant who regularly uses a food bank to feed her three children; and

about a special-needs assistant who's over 70 but can't retire because he can't survive on what this government describes as “a rich pension.” This government has described wages of \$27 an hour, but in the Conseil Scolaire Viamonde, the starting custodial wage is \$17.25 an hour, and then it goes up to \$18.24.

So my question to the member from Ottawa Centre: When this government is offering 2.5% when inflation is 7.5%, they're actually offering an inflationary cut of 5% in this year alone. Do you think people can survive on \$18.24 an hour, and why doesn't the government recognize that that is not possible to do?

Mr. Joel Harden: I want to thank the member for his question, because this is an MPP who goes in the community deeply, to look into people who are living under bridges right now, living in community shelters, and that's the reason we get the question at all. So I want to thank him for bringing this question to the Legislature.

But I also want to say this, because you've pointed out the actual wage scale. What I heard earlier in the debate—I saw many chilling things today, Speaker, but one of the things that I heard today was the Premier, at one point, blurt out, “It's not 13,000; it's 56,000.” And do you know what the subtext of that is, Speaker? Because you can't count part-timers in the wage. What message is that to the person the member is talking about? If you're doing a shift and that's all you're allowed to do, you don't count to the Premier of this province? If you only got a contract to be an EA two or three times a week, you don't matter to the Conservative government of Ontario?

The NDP is very clear: We are on the side of workers, not opportunistically. We're on the side of workers all the time. You folks are waking a sleeping giant. I can't wait for it to stomp all over you. I honestly can't.

1530

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

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Madam Chair, our government is providing one-of-a-kind tutoring programs. We are providing Ontario's Plan to Catch Up. We are investing in mental health, and we are increasing the supports to increase math performance.

None of this matters if school is disrupted. Every few years in this province, kids' classes are disrupted, and this uncertainty is unacceptable. Madam Chair, through you to the official opposition: What do you tell parents who need their kids in the classroom?

Mr. Joel Harden: Let's talk about disruption. The member is part of a government whose leader refuses a summons to go to Ottawa, to appear before an inquiry that has asked him to come. The rationale, Speaker, is that it would be irreparable harm, injurious to his parliamentary privilege, disruptive to his day to actually participate in a process that other elected officials have participated in. Meanwhile, they're perfectly comfortable ripping up charter rights and human rights legislation for 55,000 workers in this province.

Do you know what's interesting, Speaker? As I was saying earlier, you've awoken a sleeping giant. Joseph

Mancinelli, a union leader who has done some photo ops with this government, sent out a tweet a few moments ago; I encourage the members to check it. Mr. Mancinelli is saying that if it comes to be, the labourers of Ontario are going to stand with the education workers. How many other announcements are you expecting, member? They're going to come out, because people don't appreciate hard-working folks in this province being pushed around. They will stand up and they will fight back.

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

M. Ted Hsu: Madame la Présidente, je partage mon temps avec les députés de Haldimand–Norfolk, Don Valley-Ouest, Don Valley-Est et Beaches–East York.

Madam Speaker, this Conservative government has disrespected education workers who are amongst the lowest-paid in that system and are the most vulnerable to inflation. We have the highest inflation that we've had in decades here in Canada, and this is a time when we should be protecting those of us who are more vulnerable and those of us who, at the same time, provide such essential services for the education of our kids, for their future.

I want to tell you a story about 2011, Madam Speaker, when there was a Canada Post strike and the then Conservative government, the federal government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, introduced back-to-work legislation. Now, governments of all stripes have introduced back-to-work legislation in Canada, and even Stephen Harper's government introduced back-to-work legislation which contained arbitration. If you take away the workers' power to bargain, they're entitled—they have a right—to arbitration. This is something that has been established by the Supreme Court.

What is totally unprecedented here and what makes this so appalling is that this government has used the “notwithstanding” clause to take away that right, to not replace the bargaining power with arbitration. It's important to realize that they're not even as good as Stephen Harper's government in 2011.

I'll yield my time to the member from Haldimand–Norfolk.

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

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I guess as an independent, I have the unique opportunity—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Just a second, please. I apologize. According to the standing orders, the shared time is only among the Liberal members.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I apologize for that. The independents have a separate time slot than the Liberals. Is there another Liberal member who wants to take over? The member for Don Valley West.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I am rising today to speak against Bill 28. It is disappointing enough that this government is forcing a contract when we know that we have the funds to bargain fairly with education workers. But it came as a further disappointment and shock when it

became clear that the government was using the “notwithstanding” clause in order to avoid a court battle that they will most certainly lose. They will lose this case because it has already been defined as a right of all Canadians to bargain collectively.

This move is evidence that this government has little regard for the charter rights of Ontarians. I'm not sure from where this government believes it has the moral authority, as the Minister of Education is talking about, to override the rights of all Ontarians. CUPE had an 83% voter turnout, with a 94% strike mandate. Only 17% of the voting population of Ontarians voted for the Conservatives. Do they feel that that 17% gave them a mandate to trample the rights of all Ontarians? And it is all Ontarians, because this government has chosen to put the rights of some Ontarians over the rights of others. That is wrong.

Ontario has room to grow when it comes to equity before the law, and we strive to improve that. This bill would be the greatest assault on the charter in its 40-year history. The charter is meant to protect our rights, yet here is the government of Ontario legislating our rights away.

The Minister of Education stood today and proclaimed that the decision to override the rights of Ontarians was in the best interest of the children, but we know that the first thing that this government did when they took office was drastically cut education funding. They cut pharmacare for youth, they cut free tuition for low-income families and they cut the funding streams for school nutrition—and despite claiming to have expanded that program, we have not seen that program keep up with inflation.

In my riding of Don Valley West, cuts were made to an after-school cricket program in our lowest-income area. Violence here is on the rise, and what we need is for schools to provide safe and productive activities for kids.

This bill hurts an important pillar of our education system—the education workers—and I cannot see how that is in the best interest of our students. Much like Bill 124, which drove nurses out of our health care system, this bill will drive education workers out of our education system, hurting students.

Speaker, this bill hurts all Ontarians. It will hurt our children by driving out the workers who care for them, and it will hurt Ontarians who wonder when their rights will be violated next.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I woke up before sunrise this morning to come down to Queen's Park and proudly represent the people of beautiful Beaches–East York in this chamber. Regardless of any bizarre hour proposed by this government for debate, I will always stand up for my residents and make sure their voices are heard.

It actually made me think of all the people across Ontario working as education workers in our schools, and the sacrifices they make on a regular basis. They wake up early and go to sleep late in order to provide a good life for themselves, their families and our students, with over 50% of them working multiple jobs to do so.

We all agree that schools cannot function without education workers: our early childhood educators, custodians, special needs support workers and administrative staff. They are burnt-out, underpaid and underappreciated. They deserve fair wages that are reflective of the inflation rate and they deserve respect—R-E-S-P-E-C-T; I wish I could sing that.

Education workers are the lowest-paid public education sector workers in this province. It is no coincidence that the majority of these workers are also women. This government is building a surplus on the backs of Ontario women and the working class, under the false guise of keeping kids in school. I'm hearing from many, many of my constituents—education workers, parents and concerned residents. This much is clear: They do not support this bill.

This all could have been avoided. There are still days left that the Premier and minister could spend at the negotiating table, creating a fair deal that benefits both children and education workers. The government is making a mockery of education workers' roles in our schools and classrooms. This act applies despite the Human Rights Code. Why are we violating the Human Rights Code? Workers have the right to bargain collectively and the right to strike. The people of Ontario deserve better.

Will this government keep using the “notwithstanding” clause whenever they wish? The people of Ontario see the unjust and unfair nature of this government's actions.

1540

Education workers, we are here for you, and we are with you.

Students, we want you in schools, getting the best education you can. This requires respecting all staff.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Don Valley East.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Madam Speaker, I was proud to come in this morning at 5 a.m. to defend the rights and freedoms of workers and, more broadly, every single citizen across our province, but I was also saddened by the fact that what got us here was a bill that threatens to trample the rights of workers and, I worry, besmirch our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I was saddened that we didn't come in to discuss the crisis in our hospitals, in our long-term-care homes and amongst our burnt-out health care workers. These things have never been enough to get this chamber to come together at 5 a.m. In fact, for six weeks over the summer, there was complete inaction. It is only the opportunity to trample on worker rights that convenes us at 5 o'clock in the morning. This government, I fear, has now turned its mismanagement towards another sector, and that sector is our education sector.

Much has already been said about the folly of this government's treatment of education workers, but I am happy to summarize. It's heartless and cruel to not work with education workers—some of the lowest-paid in our province—to help them secure better wages. It is disingenuous to walk away from the bargaining table when there are still five days remaining to negotiate. It's just not

right to nickel-and-dime a low-paid, female-dominated group of workers while sitting on a massive surplus that is expected to grow to over \$44 billion by 2028. And it's not right in the middle of a pandemic, when there are no protections in our schools apart from, to quote Dr. Moore, “enhanced environmental hygiene measures,” to cheap out on the cleaners and custodians who guarantee those environmental measures.

I would actually like to turn my attention to something that has not been addressed yet. What does it say about a government that repeatedly proves itself incapable of governing by consensus—a government that can only accomplish a deal by threatening \$4,000-a-day fines to union workers so that they don't exercise their constitutionally protected rights? What does it say about a government that can only clear hospital beds by charging our most vulnerable patients \$400 a day so that they can't have their right to autonomy or confidentiality—a government so brazen that, as we speak, one of its ministers stands accused today of being in contempt of the Legislature; a government that has cycled through four ministers of long-term care in as many years but still thinks it's someone else's fault for those failures?

Madam Speaker, leadership is an act of service; it's not one of ambition, nor one in the pursuit of victory at all costs. We owe it to each other and to Ontarians to work together, to negotiate with respect, not ultimatums, to defend some of our lowest-paid workers and to protect our fundamental rights. So I urge this government to lead with honour, with respect and with consensus and to get back to the bargaining table instead of trampling the rights with this egregious bill.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: I listened to all the members across, from Don Valley West, Don Valley East and Beaches—East York, and they all talked about the best interests of the children, the teachers. The latest salary increase that our government provided was 2.5% for employees with salary grids below \$43,000 and 1.5% a year for employees with a salary grid above that. I would remind and ask what their opinion is of a previous government that froze salaries and required teachers and everyone else to take 12 unpaid sick days—just a thought.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): To answer, the member for Don Valley East.

Mr. Adil Shamji: What I would remind the member across is that when we talk about percentages, these are proportional. When we think in terms of absolute terms, the amount of money that these salaries are increasing by is negligible.

We're talking about workers who are resorting to food banks. We're talking about people who cannot afford to pay their rent. We're talking about some of the hardest-working, lowest-paid members in our society who deserve to be treated with dignity—and not ultimatums.

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

MPP Jill Andrew: Thank you to the Liberal independent who spoke with regard to the government's bill.

I'm sure we can agree on the fact that we all want kids to be in school and we want kids to be supported as best we can at school.

Before we got elected, the former Liberal government had Bill 115, which I believe attacked teachers and their rights to collective bargaining. Granted, they weren't in the House at the time, but I'm wondering if the member can share any thoughts they may have, any cautionary tales or any wisdom they may have for the Conservative government, who, instead of learning from the Liberals' mistakes—which they honestly admitted to and were very humble about it. What has this government learned? Have they learned anything from previous governments? And why are they hell-bent on ramming through legislation that's hurting education workers, students, and their families?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Don Valley West.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you for the question.

I think our member from Ottawa South put it very well when he said that the Liberal Party admitted its mistake and encouraged the government to learn from that mistake. I think it is a demonstration of humility, and humility is a wonderful element of leadership. I think that this is the opportunity to say that this tactic has been tried before; it did not succeed, and it was not in the best interests of teachers. We've learned that the hard way, and we would again encourage this government to learn from our mistakes and do the right thing going forward.

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

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Our government is investing in children, through mental health investment, to increase math performance, and through the largest children's program in the province's history.

However, the former Liberal government imposed a deal on education workers with zero increase to their salaries. Our offer is in line with most public sector settlements in the province. Why do they say that our offer is unreasonable? Why should we take advice from the former Liberal government that imposed zero increase to workers?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): To answer, the member for Beaches–East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you to the member across the aisle. I'm sure you were listening to the member for Don Valley West's answer right now, when we said we admitted responsibility. The four of us were not here at the time—we're all new, as you know—but we know, from our interim leader mentioning it, that we admitted our mistakes and showed humility with our past track record. We're hoping the Conservatives will learn from that.

We're going forward, and there are a few days left for you to negotiate, to come to the bargaining table and negotiate fairly, respectfully, kindly. These workers help raise our children—our most vital possession. So why wouldn't you want to come to the table and have those extra days to do it properly and do it right and respectfully,

instead of this heavy-handed, as the member from Guelph has been saying, chainsaw approach to this legislation?

So I would just learn, as we mentioned, what went wrong with Bill 115 and do the right thing.

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

MPP Lise Vaugeois: This question is to the member from Don Valley East. In 2007, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that engaging in collective bargaining was a charter right. That means, unlike in the US, it is not simply a legal privilege that could be arbitrarily restricted or legislated away. Rather, it is a fundamental freedom.

1550

So my question is: Do you have any concerns about the precedent that is being set by overriding our fundamental rights to collective bargaining?

Mr. Adil Shamji: Of course I have deep and profound concerns about what is being proposed here and the implications that it has for future opportunities for bargaining with workers across the province.

I think it's deeply disturbing—when there are opportunities available, when there is time available, when there is goodwill available—for anyone to resort to heavy-handed tactics, especially heavy-handed tactics which we know are categorically in violation of charter freedoms.

It's premature. It's wrong. I believe fundamentally that it's unethical, and I urge everyone to come to the table in good faith, to govern and lead and work together by consensus as opposed to ultimatums.

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

Mr. Kevin Holland: I've heard a lot of talk today about respect and fair treatment and our children's best interests.

This bill is about government's commitment to keep our children in schools. The union gave notice of their intention to strike starting on Friday. Our children need to be in school learning.

Speaker, shouldn't bargaining have continued without beginning the strike countdown clock?

Mr. Ted Hsu: Madam Speaker, one thing that could have happened is that if the government realized that these were essential workers that had to keep working, they could have said, "Okay, you've got to keep working, but we're going to have an arbitrator. We're going to go to arbitration so that you have some equivalent replacement for the bargaining power that you gave up by going back to work." That is something that could have happened, but this government chose not to do that.

Instead, it's going down this slippery slope of using the "notwithstanding" clause. And this government is now getting into the habit of using that. Who knows what other rights we're going to have to give up in the future, as long as this government is in power and not willing to do the hard work of reaching a consensus on important issues?

It's just too easy for them to push the button and use the "notwithstanding" clause. We are potentially giving up a lot of important rights in the future.

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: A question for my friends: The government has done this five days before a strike was possible, and anyone with any experience in collective bargaining knows that that's the exact time when you get a deal.

I've negotiated many, many collective agreements, working in the labour movement. Whether it's before a strike deadline or before an interest arbitration process, that's the exact time when you get a deal.

So can you give your thoughts on how sincere this government really was in arriving at a fair collective agreement?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Beaches–East York, for a quick reply—30 seconds.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you for the question. It's deeply disappointing.

As you mentioned, deals are often struck at the very last minute. So why not show some respect—as my colleague says—do the hard work, roll up your sleeves and have the hard but important conversations to get to a deal together that's respectful of our education workers, our students and all Ontarians?

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

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: I'd like to begin my remarks this afternoon by paying tribute to and thanking Ontario's educators, school staff, parents and, most of all, our students for their incredible patience and their goodwill that they demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As we all know, the pandemic was a very difficult time for all Ontarians, but it was an especially trying time for our young people, who, now more than ever, deserve a normal school year without disruptions.

The most important function of the education system is to prepare our young people for the jobs of tomorrow. But school is also a time to make new friends, hone one's athletic skills, play in the school band or take advantage of any number of extracurricular activities. The pandemic taught us that online or remote education certainly has an important role to play, but it can never take the place of in-person learning or the full educational experience for our young people. In-person learning is essential for student well-being and overall success, which is why our government has provided school boards with over \$3.2 billion in COVID-19 resources since 2020 and made major improvements to air quality and ventilation in schools across the province.

Today, the children, the students, our teenagers are safely back in school and the 2022-23 academic year is anticipated to be a full year of in-person instruction. Students want to enjoy the full array of extracurricular activities that are expected from our education system, including after-school clubs and sports.

When I speak to students and parents in my riding of Durham, I hear the same thing over and over again: Students want to learn alongside their friends and have a normal in-person school year. I have met with many parents and I have heard their concerns and their anxieties.

Simply put, while many are pleased with our government's actions for Ontario to remain open, they are tired of the fearmongering and the union threats of using children as pawns. Parents want their children in the classroom and Ontario students want to be in their classrooms. Kids deserve a normal academic year, and their parents deserve predictability and stability. These are elementary rights, it seems to me, Speaker.

School closures are especially tough for parents who work outside the home, because they cannot venture out to the workplace without knowing their child will be well cared for. The good news is that a new academic year is well under way, and families are enjoying a stable, normal and enjoyable return to school.

Unfortunately, many students feel that they have been set back by the pandemic and they are unsure about their next steps in life. We needn't look much further than the latest student assessment data that was just released by the Education Quality and Accountability Office. When we look at that data and the data to come, we know that even the most recent information shows significant declines in math scores. This is not surprising after two years of learning disruptions.

Jurisdictions across the Western world have experienced similar learning losses. In the state of Massachusetts, math scores in grades 3 to 8 fell by seven to nine percentage points. In California, that state witnessed a 10% drop in the number of grade 3 students who met or surpassed the expected math standard. In Colorado, only 27% of grade 3 students tested in the spring of 2021 met or exceeded state math standards. To put that into perspective, 67% of grade 3 students here in the province of Ontario met or exceeded the provincial standard in mathematics. So yes, we are doing better in Ontario, comparatively speaking, when looking at other jurisdictions and data from those jurisdictions, but we still have much work ahead of us to overcome learning losses created by the pandemic.

I am proud to say that this government is meeting this challenge with Ontario's Plan to Catch Up. This includes the largest tutoring program in the history of the province of Ontario. We are investing \$176 million to expand access to free school-based tutoring, so that thousands of Ontario students are able to utilize learning resources in their communities to help them succeed. I'm pleased to report that since April of this year, over 150,000 students and over 18,000 special-education students have accessed school board-provided tutoring supports.

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After-school tutoring will make a big difference for a great many students, but we must acknowledge that the past two years were deeply unsettling for our young people. Simply put, that period in our history has left significant emotional scars that will take time to heal. For that reason, we are delivering a \$90-million investment in student mental health supports. That includes \$10 million in new funding, and it represents a 420% increase in funding compared to the previous Liberal government's plan in 2017-18.

Let's be clear, Speaker: Mental health is health, and our government is serious about supporting Ontario's young people as they prepare for their next steps in life. Many parents have invested in their own tutoring supports for their children, which is one reason why we recently announced the availability of catch-up payments for families.

Our government was elected to make life more affordable for Ontario families, and we are delivering on that promise. During the pandemic, we provided over \$1.6 billion in direct payments to parents through three dedicated support programs to help families cover the costs of child care and at-home learning created by the pandemic. We are going further by investing \$365 million in direct financial relief to parents who could use some support in uncertain times to help their kids catch up.

Through this program, parents with school-age children up to 18 years old will receive \$200 for each child, and parents with school-age children with special education needs up to 21 years of age will receive \$250 for each child. As of today, then, Speaker, over one third of eligible students in Ontario have made applications for the catch-up payments. Applications for catch-up payments will remain open until March 31, 2023, but I do strongly encourage parents to apply as soon as possible.

Time and again, this side of the House has supported parents in affording school supplies and tutoring supports, to better their position and to assist their children in catching up on learning. As life returns to normal, we remain focused on helping students catch up in their studies, and we will continue to put money back in the pockets of hard-working parents, where it belongs.

I will add that my friend and colleague the Minister of Education recently outlined some next steps in Ontario's Plan to Catch Up that respond to the EQAO assessment results and prepare students for the future. More specifically, our government is focused on math recovery that builds on our previous investments to ensure students have the support they need.

Currently, for 2022-23, \$50 million is invested as part of our previously announced math strategy. We are going further by ensuring that students have access to even more digital math resources, including elementary math course packs provided by TVO and TFO, and access to the grade 9 math course for additional review and practice.

Ontario is also providing school boards with an extra \$15 million to support digital math tools that align with the Ontario curriculum, including through province-wide access to tools such as Knowledgehook, which is an Ontario-based, effective and evidence-based professional program that supports learning for our young people. And the Ministry of Education will work directly with school boards through a new math action team that will have expertise in promoting the use of high-impact math teaching practices in Ontario classrooms.

Speaker, our plan focuses on early reading that furthers our response to the Ontario Human Rights Commission's Right to Read report. This includes a \$25-million investment in evidence-based reading intervention programs and professional assessments.

Beginning next year in the 2023-24 school year, students in year two of kindergarten to grade 2 will be screened for reading using evidence-based tools. Ontario will be the only province to take such action at an early stage to identify any learning gaps sooner and to invest in evidence-based approaches to ensure students catch up.

Our government will continue to modernize the curriculum, including a focus on math, science, computer studies, business studies and technical education, to ensure students are prepared with the skills they will need to get good-paying jobs of tomorrow. This will include a regular curriculum review to ensure our curriculum is up to date and relevant to important job and life skills, supported by a curriculum review guide for greater transparency for students and families.

Speaker, our updated plan to catch up will continue our focus on creating pathways to the skilled trades so that students have more opportunities to learn about the trades early, making it easier for them to enter these lucrative and rewarding careers.

It is critically important that we assist students now and for their futures. For that reason, we are working with school boards to create provincial expectations for how boards can help students with attendance difficulties, and enable more students to benefit from consistent classroom learning.

And this government will review teacher education and training to make sure teachers are prepared with the skills to help students succeed, particularly in math and literacy. This school year, nearly 5,000 more staff are funded to provide direct supports in schools, including more math educators, mental health workers and educational assistants.

Now, more than ever, in-person learning is essential to catching up. Our government has been clear: We will not tolerate further learning disruptions of any kind. This is why we are putting forward this bill, the Keeping Students in Class Act. Students deserve and students have the right to a normal academic year with the full school experience, and parents deserve stability and predictability.

Let me say this, Speaker: Parents in Durham have told me consistently and repeatedly, in no uncertain terms, that they are incredibly disappointed in the Canadian Union of Public Employees, or CUPE, for threatening a strike that could put 55,000 education workers—custodians, early childhood educators and administrative staff—on the picket lines very soon.

I want to be clear that these individuals perform very important jobs within our education system, and our government values the incredible work that they do every day. We do, however, take issue with the leadership of CUPE threatening strike actions and making completely unrealistic promises to their members.

An education strike is the last thing that Ontario families and students need right now, and so I hope that my friends opposite in the NDP official opposition caucus can support us in keeping students in class, as they say they wish to do. Keep them in class where they belong, averting any further unneeded disruptions. This will set our

students back if this is allowed to go ahead, and I urge immediate action to support this bill and to pass it swiftly.

Education unions have subjected parents and students to cyclical strikes every few years for about half a century. They have done so irrespective of the party or Premier in power. So let us unite and stand up for parents and students across Ontario, and do the right thing by swiftly passing this bill. Historically, we know that David Peterson's Liberals, Bob Rae's NDP, Mike Harris's and Ernie Eves' PCs and, yes, the McGuinty-Wynne Liberals, in part aided and abetted for three years by the NDP, all faced numerous instances of union disruptions in the classroom. In fact, the total number of strike days over the course of the last nine governments totals 2,244 days, and out of those 2,244 strike days, 137 of them were illegal strikes. That's over four and a half months. Let's not let history repeat itself.

During those strike days, more than a million educators walked off their jobs. The impact on students and parents alike was severe on many occasions because of classroom disruptions, financial scarcity to find proper child care and, of course, the emotional and mental struggle of having to reconfigure parental work schedules to care for children. Working families simply can't afford to go through that again.

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We hoped that CUPE's leadership would bring forward reasonable requests that focus on students staying in class, not demands for a nearly 50% increase in compensation. Unfortunately, much of what we have heard so far from the CUPE leadership has not been reasonable, which means Ontario families could be facing an education strike at the worst possible time. CUPE is once again trying to disrupt in-class learning by refusing to compromise on its unreasonable demand for a nearly 50% increase in compensation, which amounts to a nearly \$19-billion price tag for Ontario taxpayers. This academic year, we are providing school boards with \$26.6 billion in total funding. That is a record-high amount. We're making the investments. So it goes without saying that demanding an extra \$19 billion, as the CUPE leadership is doing, is unaffordable for families and taxpayers. An increase like that would be unheard of. But it's not just a matter of money. Our top priority can and must be our children.

According to a 2013 study by University of Toronto economist Michael Baker, long strikes that last 10 or more school days "have significant, negative effects on student performance in reading and especially math." He found that the impact of a strike in grade 6 was a 29% reduction of math test scores for the standard deviation of scores across school and grade cohorts.

I want to assure the parents in my riding of Durham and across this great province that our government and this Premier are committed to staying at the negotiating table to secure a fair deal for parents, students and educators, and one that hard-working families of Ontario can afford. We have never left the negotiating table, which is why we've agreed to private mediation. We are offering workers affiliated with CUPE a four-year deal for additional stability, and the details have been repeated already

in this House. This government has in fact made the last offer, moved from our previous offers. CUPE leadership refuses to budge from their position at all and has announced, without negotiating further, strike action.

Now is not the time for education workers to strike. After two years of learning disruptions caused by the pandemic, students need a chance to stay in school and catch up on their studies, and parents need that stability and predictability. We are laser-focused on preparing students for the jobs of tomorrow. And let's face it, the reason behind this bill and the urgency of this bill is that parents and our students deserve a break.

So I say to CUPE's leadership, let's give Ontario students an uninterrupted school year with the full school experience, including field trips, extracurricular activities and in-person learning from now continuously to June 2023. Let's get back to normal. Let's keep it normal. Let's put the children and the students first.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a letter from Aven McMaster from my riding. She wrote to express her "strong opposition to the provincial government's new legislation to remove the right to strike from education workers. I am appalled by the invocation of the 'notwithstanding' clause to override fundamental charter rights, and to go against the Ontario Human Rights Code. To use such extreme measures in this situation—to score political points and take an ideological stand—is outrageous and deeply unethical.

"I would ask you to convey my anger to the government, if I thought they would listen—but I do call on them to drop this attack on labour rights and return to good faith bargaining, to give these workers the living wages and basic support that they deserve and need in order to support our children. My kids are both in school and I certainly do not want their schooling disrupted—but I would absolutely prefer that they lose a few days of school if that's what it takes to make sure that schools are fully staffed by properly compensated workers, and that they can grow up in a world where their own right to fair labour practices has not been eroded to nothingness."

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: In response to that inquiry from the member opposite, I want to say that our Premier and this government have been crystal clear to all Ontarians, and in particular, to parents: Their children, our children, have a right to learn. The member opposite speaks of rights? Our children have a right to learn, and that means in-person learning and the full educational experience.

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

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Our government is taking action to make sure kids remain in school. We have an obligation to children, to the next generation, and parents who pay the bills to ensure kids remain in class.

Madam Speaker, my question to the member from Durham: How will this bill help parents in Durham and across the province who pay the bill to ensure that their kids remain in class?

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Thank you to my colleague for the question. This is a commitment, a promise. We were re-elected with a larger majority on June 2 of this year because the citizens of this province trust us with fiscal responsibility, with being fair, with balancing competing interests and rights. So our government, as promised, indicated it would never waiver in our resolve to keep all students in class. We're keeping that commitment. Particularly after two difficult years for everyone, students have been finally back in class for two months. We don't want anything to change that. We are disappointed, and the parents and students in my riding, many of the young people in grades 7 and 8 and in high school, tell me they're disappointed that CUPE is jeopardizing the progress that we've made.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to direct my question to the member from Durham. He and I share Oshawa, but obviously we don't share a respect for collective bargaining rights or the rights of workers to strike, because what we have in front of us is a piece of legislation that the member, as a lawyer, would well understand. But the implications of using the "notwithstanding" clause to override charter rights—it says here, "it will apply despite the Human Rights Code." These are big moves. This is a big hammer this government is using. Let's not forget that 96% of the education workers voted to strike. That is what they are willing to do.

I'm hearing from community members—and that member obviously is getting different emails, according to what he's saying, because all I am hearing is from people who are saying things like:

"Students aren't getting the one-on-one support that they require, because we have a lack of ECEs in the kindergarten classes and EAs are being forced to cover several special-needs students at one time inside and outside the schools. Many of these students can be violent, some are runners, and many require regular diaper changing at all age groups.

"Many custodians are covering two areas...."

They are painting a picture that this government is pretending is not there, and I would like to know if this member really is able to turn a blind eye to what is happening in our education sector in our schools and is really able to applaud the education workers, but not to pay them or respect them or give them the resources that they are demanding?

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: In response to the member opposite, I spoke earlier, when I asked questions of the opposition members, about facts. Let's make sure we have our facts straight. Keeping—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I apologize. I must interrupt.

Pursuant to standing order 50(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceeding and announce that there has been six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed

adjourned unless the government House leader directs the debate to continue.

The Minister for Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Continue the debate.

1620

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Continue the debate.

The member for Durham has the floor to continue his response.

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Thank you, Speaker. Let's get the facts straight: What does the Keeping Students in Class Act, 2022, actually do? It ensures stability for students and parents through a four-year contract, enabling a refocus of the education system on learning loss and mental and physical health. It increases CUPE education workers' salaries by 2.5% from 2% for those who earn below \$43,000—that was increased from \$40,000—for each year of the contract. It increases CUPE education workers' salaries by 1.5% from 1.25% for employees who earn over \$43,000 each year. It increases benefit contributions, resulting in a \$6,120 annual contribution per employee by August 2026, and it strengthens the integrity of 120 days of short-term disability leave—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We'll go to further questions.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: As an independent, I have the unique opportunity to see both sides of the many issues before this House, and Bill 28 is no different. I believe in being fair and equitable to the province's underpaid and hard-working education workers. These are the very people who keep our schools running efficiently. I am also concerned with the education of our children being disrupted once again. And I may remind some of the members opposite that, throughout the pandemic, I was the political staffer advocating for the return to school, the return to sports for the mental health of our young people. My words seemed to fall on deaf ears, and yet, today, the very same arguments I used are now relevant or convenient.

That being said, there are taxpayers in this province who have grown tired with over 30 years of education unions and various governments playing politics with the system and with our students.

Using the "notwithstanding" clause is a huge concern for me, and I'm going to ask the member from Durham whether he will unite and encourage and advocate for a better way forward than what has been laid before us.

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Thank you to the member opposite for her question. This, again, requires an understanding of the facts. As I've said when I've debated in this House on other bills, please read the bill. I ask members opposite: Please read the bill very carefully. It's 20 sections and a fairly lengthy schedule. It's not difficult. I urge you to do it before we vote on second reading.

Also, as you read the bill, remember these facts: Education workers in Ontario are the highest paid in the country. CUPE custodial staff earn more than their equivalents in a hospital and they collect the most generous pension and benefit plans in Canada. Their wages are

comparable or above others in the private sector. And while CUPE continues to claim the average education worker makes \$38,000, they fail to mention that that includes part-time workers.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I heard the member thank the education workers, who do such an important job in our education sector, and they're the lowest-paid workers supporting our students. The government says that their offer to the education workers is so generous, but if you look at the numbers, it really is a 5% inflationary cut.

If your offer is so generous, I want to ask the member why it is that they have to use the "notwithstanding" clause and strip away education workers' rights. The other part of my question is: Can you explain why the right of the Premier of parliamentary privilege is more important than workers' rights?

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: The member opposite speaks of rights. As I said earlier, students and children have the right to learn in person; the right to access the best education system, I believe, in the world; the right of parents to expect stability and certainty. As a society, we must all live together. We're all on this journey together. The Charter of Rights is our supreme law. It includes the right to a conversation between branches of government. If you would read the charter, you would see that. Read it very carefully and read about the grand compromise that made the charter possible.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We don't have time for another question, so we're going to further debate. I recognize the member for Scarborough Southwest.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you very much, Speaker. I will be sharing my time with the member from University-Rosedale.

I am proud to stand on behalf of the good people of Scarborough Southwest, which is why I was here at 5 a.m. to speak for the many people who have reached out to me, to stand up for the students, for the parents and for our education workers.

Before I begin, Speaker, these education workers, the 55,000, over 70% of them are women. There was a survey done: More than 84.2% of them make less than \$50,000, and more than 96.6% of them make less than \$60,000. These are the workers we're talking about. Meanwhile, this government gave themselves raises over the last couple of years—but that's besides the point.

So when we talk about this relationship—and before I even begin, let me ask a question. What do you call someone who seeks to harm people like these individuals, who are some of the most vulnerable people, and intimidate them?

Interjection: A bully.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you very much—and that is what we're seeing right now. We are seeing this bullying attempt on some of the most vulnerable people in our province. These workers, these people that we're talking about, they're the lowest-paid workers in the education

system: the custodians, the administrators, the education assistants, the special-ed assistants, the ECEs, who are extremely important to how students function and learn and to their success in our classrooms. Our schools would actually fall apart—for cleaning, the entire system relies on these workers to be maintained and making sure that students, especially those with special needs—their success depends on these workers.

The legislation that has been introduced is not about ensuring that our kids—which is what this government will claim—get the best learning in our classrooms. Because what you're doing right now, you're setting up barriers for these students from having access to the well-resourced and functioning classrooms, because we're going to be driving a lot of these workers away from these professions, especially when they're making low wages and some of them are working two jobs just to keep up. This government wants to pit parents against education workers, which is why over the past—what, almost 12 hours—we've heard many government members talk about the \$200 they have given to parents.

Over the last 24 hours since this bill has been introduced, I have heard from many people across Scarborough Southwest, and I'm sure that members opposite, members on this side of the aisle, everyone is getting phone calls and emails. Dozens of parents and students have been reaching out as well. Parents want their kids to be in school, but they also want to make sure that these kids get the support and the care in the classrooms from qualified workers like our education workers. They want to make sure that these people who help their children on a day-to-day basis get a fair wage. They want to make sure that they have the best for their children so that they are able to become people who grow up to do the great things that we want these kids to do. Unfortunately, we're breaking the whole system of education by actually trampling on the rights of these educational workers, who are so important to our education system.

The language of this legislation, which says "to resolve labour disputes," actually imposes on contract terms, financially penalizes workers. It also penalizes workers for taking job action and antagonizes labour organizations—none of these are resolved, Speaker. These are unconstitutional. It's a blatant disregard for the rights of workers and the right of collective bargaining that is protected by our charter.

I want to just start with this example: A year ago, my team helped a young mother whose daughter at that time was six years old and who was having difficulty with managing virtual learning and needed support. Because the school had an educational worker who was able to support the student, we were finally able to get this six-year-old the support that they needed. Imagine what this six-year-old and so many other kids would go through, even if the schools are open, and those educational workers are not there. That's what we will face.

So I want to use the rest of my time—because we have such a limited amount of time because this government wants to ram through this bill—and share some of the

actual quotes I received over the last 24 hours, because I know that these people won't have a chance to come here and deputize. A lot of these organizations, for example, who want to speak to it won't have the ability to do so. So instead, I'm going to speak their words and share them in this House.

1630

Rachel Switzer from my riding wrote this: "I'm very concerned that" the Premier "is threatening to legislate education workers back to work. This is unfair and undemocratic. He needs to allow bargaining to happen in good faith, and he needs to offer employees a fair deal.

"I am a long-time Scarborough Southwest resident, raising my two ... kids, five and three, with my husband here in this beautiful community.

"I work as a supply EA with the TDSB. I love my job. I've done this for almost 10 years. We are in desperate need of more staff. There are constantly jobs left open, with no one to cover, which negatively impacts students. The students I work with are disabled, many of which use wheelchairs. If we are short on staff, it means they have to wait longer to be fed their lunch, to go to the bathroom, or to get in and out of their different mobility aids."

And she goes on to share, but because I have such limited time, I'll move on to Cassie. Cassie Grant also called in and shared this. She's an education worker, and she talked about how she's actually—throughout the week, she works as an education worker, and during the weekend, she works at FedEx because she just does not have enough.

She used to be homeless growing up, Speaker, and she finally felt like she had been given the opportunity to be able to make enough. She wrote, "We support staff make an average of \$40,000 annual. I have a second job" just to keep up. "We work all PA days. We do get winter and March breaks off. However, this is paid with our vacation pay. Which means we can't take vacation unless unpaid at any time of the year. We are limited to travelling or visiting family outside of the peak travelling time which means it's usually more expensive to travel which means we don't" usually "travel....

"We don't get summers off. I work until the middle of July and start back in the middle of August." And then she continues on, Speaker.

I want to end with the last part that she said, which really broke my heart. She said that this government is offering a 1.5% wage increase over four years, which will likely be about \$8 per month. However, they gave themselves about a 9% raise.

Christine wrote to me. She said, "I am one of your constituents" as well, and "I am furious that the Conservative government is trying to take away my right to strike! Please help us tell"—and she said the Premier, Doug Ford, and the Minister of Education—"that we demand better. We will not be bullied by their intimidation tactics." I'm not the only one who thinks that this is a bullying tactic.

"I have been an education assistant for almost nine years. I love the work I do, and I know it is important. I support students with exceptionalities and different

learning abilities. My two colleagues and I support the most vulnerable students in our school. We are the first faces our over 300 students see as we greet them at school every morning." And then she goes on to talk about the work that she does and the staff shortages.

There's Barbara, who called and said this government needs to reconsider what they're doing—and Barbara is a parent, by the way. This government will tell us and try to spin this as about education workers and only those 55,000, but there are hundreds of thousands of people across this province who are not happy with what's happening.

Tracy wrote to me as well, and said children are her main priority and she's worried about the right to fair bargaining. Christina wrote as well. She's livid with the government's treatment—another parent. I could just go on. But because of the limited amount of time, I just want to say that there are piles and piles, and I'm sure members opposite have the same thing.

Listen to your constituents. Listen to the parents. Listen to the many students and education workers who are begging you to reconsider, because this is not what we need to do. Right now, we have an education system that needs our support, that needs more funding, that needs more support. Our students went through hell over the last two or three years during the pandemic. They need that support right now. They need the care right now. These education workers are the ones who provide that care.

In conclusion, Speaker, I will say that even the worst bullies learn to do better and they make amends. And I hope that this government will do the same as well. They have over \$44 billion, according to the FAO, of contingency money that this government is sitting on that they could use right now for this bargaining. They could go back to the bargaining table. They could do the right thing: They could make sure that they negotiate in good faith, respect the workers' rights, and don't trample on Ontario's most vulnerable workers. Stand up for the lowest-paying workers of our province. Some of these people make \$32,000, \$29,000, \$39,000, and that's what they've been making for years and years. We've got a whole sheet telling us exactly how much they have been making. When it comes to the past decade, these people haven't had proper raises.

Go back to the bargaining table, do the right thing, negotiate with them and bargain. This is the simplest thing possible. I cannot believe that we are at a point here of fighting for this.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: We've been here since 5 a.m., and today is the day that the Ontario government decided to introduce a bill, the Keeping Students in Class Act, and use the "notwithstanding" clause for the second time in Ontario's history.

What I find so hypocritical or confusing about this piece of legislation and how it's named is that since this government got into power, they have conducted an assault on public education, which has been extremely concerning. Shortly after the government got into power,

they moved forward very quickly with an attempt to increase class sizes from an average of 23 to 1 to an average of 28 to 1, which would have meant that there would be high school classes of upwards of 40 children, because special-needs classes and other classes have smaller ratios. That would have significantly impacted learning.

This is also the government that pushed aggressively to privatize learning and bring in mandatory online learning. So high school students would be required to learn online, even though the pandemic has taught us very clearly that learning outcomes are significantly harmed by virtual learning. Kids, especially our younger kids, do not learn online. They do not learn well online. That is extremely concerning.

Then we hit the pandemic and this government was always late on introducing measures to make our communities safe, our workplaces safe and our schools safe. They were late on introducing HEPA filters and improving air ventilation. They were late on acknowledging that we needed to wear masks. They were late in bringing in workplace protections and workplace standards, so COVID spread wildly in workplaces, especially low-income workplaces, in factories, in grocery stores. It had an impact on schools, and it resulted in our schools in Ontario being closed for 27 weeks, the longest closures in the Western world.

So I find it a bit rich when I hear members get up again and again and again saying they're doing this for kids, when for the last four and a half years this government has systematically worked to attack schools, to encourage people to move to private schools, to cut funding, to increase class sizes and to move to privatized mandatory online learning. That has been your agenda and kids have suffered as a result of that.

It is very concerning to have this government, at the eleventh hour, introduce legislation that harms our lowest-paid workers in the school system. These are our education workers. I want to spend a bit of time explaining who our education workers are. I have two children in the public school system. These are people whose names we know. We know them by their first name. These are the people who look after our children during lunch. They are the custodial staff that clean the school grounds before, during and after school. These are the ECE workers that provide additional support to our little kids who are struggling to learn, as well as support for kids who have accessibility needs, who are on an IEP, who are on the spectrum, who need extra support and care. These are the people that provide that extra care.

On average, education workers earn \$39,000 a year. Many of them have two jobs. The majority of them are women. Some of them use food banks because they cannot afford to live in one of the most expensive places in North America. With food inflation and inflation going up and up and up, they are resorting to food banks. Many of them can't afford child care.

1640

This government is choosing to force a four-year contract on these education workers when there is a better

alternative. Negotiations were meant to be taking place today. Why are we here? Why aren't we negotiating a better deal that would benefit everybody? It's extremely concerning.

We're not the only ones who are expressing concern about this. Many parents and education workers and teachers have reached out to our offices to express their concern about this government's decision to move forward with this very draconian legislation that violates our charter-protected rights.

These are some people who have given us quotes. This person says, "I cannot get my son, who has ASD, the services he needs to thrive." This is an individual who lives on an early childhood educator's salary.

Then we have an educational assistant who says, "I have to work an extra four to five hours at another job, several times a week and also most weekends, to be able to provide for my family. These hours are after I've worked all day with students with severe needs and behaviour, and I'm exhausted. I barely get to spend time with my children. I have tried to go back to school to get a job in another field, but I can't afford the time away from my part-time job to go to night school. My heat, hydro, and grocery bills have tripled in the last two years alone. I can't repair my car when needed, which leads to more repairs. I can't afford to take it in. I am a single parent."

These are the kind of stories we are getting from people who cannot believe this government is choosing to take education workers and violate their rights, their charter-protected rights, instead of doing what they're supposed to do and bargaining in good faith.

I want to read a statement from the Ontario Federation of Labour. It says: "The Keeping Students in Class Act is an attack on every union member, every worker, every student, and every parent in this province. If we allow" the Premier "to get away with it, all other workers will face the same threat: contracts imposed by law instead of free collective bargaining. We won't let it happen. We will defend the right to fight for our schools, good jobs, decent wages, and a better life."

The reason why I bring this up is because it's not just OFL that is expressing concerns about your decision, this government's decision, to invoke the "notwithstanding" clause; it's LIUNA. This is a union that supported the Conservative government in the last election. LIUNA is now publicly saying you can't go down this path because it has significant consequences on the rights of workers all across Ontario.

That's a call for this government to revisit this law and to vote against it. That's a call for this government to go back to the negotiating table and bargain in good faith, because everybody wants kids in schools. Nobody wants a strike. But in order for that to happen, this government, who has a funding surplus, needs to get back to the negotiating table and negotiate a deal that's good for our kids, that's good for education workers, that's good for peace and stability. That is what we need.

And while you're at it, this government should also move forward with reinvesting in schools, because

education is extremely important. That means lowering class sizes. It means providing more mental health supports, bringing in extracurricular activities, and dealing with the school repair backlog so our kids can go to schools that are well maintained, where there's no lead in the pipes, where the schools are cool in summer and warm in winter.

This is what we should be doing. We shouldn't be here debating this bill, for nearly 12 hours now, to use a "notwithstanding" clause to violate education workers' charter-protected rights. That is the wrong direction to go. We will be voting against this bill, and I urge you to do the same. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further debate? Oh, we don't have time for further debate. We'll go to questions.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student achievement has been consistent with global trends. We know that students have lost ground in education in the last two years of the COVID-19 pandemic. The recent release of EQAO results clearly demonstrates that Ontario students need to remain in class without interruption, with a special focus on catching up in math, reading and writing.

My question to the official opposition: Will the NDP stand up with parents and students who want stability, and could bargaining not have continued without threatening parents?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member from Scarborough Southwest to respond.

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the member from Rouge Park for his question, because I know for a fact that he's getting a lot of phone calls and emails in Scarborough from Scarborough parents who are writing to me as well. So I'll share from two parents and residents in Scarborough who wrote to me, and this is what they said. This is from Alanna Minogue, who said, "Ultimately, the kids are the ones that will suffer as we will lose good people to other jobs which pay better." This is from Alanna.

Dave P also wrote, "Please know I will be standing on the lines with the support workers as my sister is an ECE in an Ontario school. I know the low wage she receives and the abuse inflicted now by the Ford government and" his "leadership. I have heard about the hardships of some support workers as they are bitten, kicked and spat upon by uncontrollable students."

Speaker, there are students who need supports and these support workers are the ones who are there to care for them. I know that he's hearing from parents and families who need those workers to be there in those classrooms.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch for the presentation. Good afternoon. Just a quick question on reading the explanatory note—I just wanted you to expand and add the impacts on this one: "The Act is declared to operate notwithstanding sections 2, 7 and 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the act will apply despite the

Human Rights Code." When you look at the legislation itself, can you elaborate on the impacts of this legislation?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): To respond, the member for University–Rosedale.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you very much to the member for Kiiwetinoong for your question about this bill's impact on our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Our Charter of Rights and Freedoms is extremely important. It has many sections that are fundamental to giving us the human rights that we exercise, from freedom of conscience, of religion, of thought and expression, freedom of the press, freedom of peaceful assembly and association; in section 7, "the right to life, liberty and security of the person"; and sections 8 to 10, the protections against "unreasonable search and seizure," "the right not to be arbitrarily imprisoned or detained," the right to counsel in habeas corpus.

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms is fundamental to Canadians. It is important that we do everything we can to uphold it and protect it, and you don't just violate it on a whim because you don't want to spend a surplus on helping education workers make ends meet and care for our kids in the school system.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you to the member across, our University–Rosedale member outlining this valuable information on the charter. I would also remind the member that with a strike, child care centres would close within schools, child care centres that allow parents who are also trying to earn a living—they would also fall by the wayside. I would ask that member to consider those parents. When you look at this in a holistic way, they would also be in a position where they would be unable to earn a living.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Many child care workers happen to be members of CUPE. Many of them work in the school system during the day and then work in child care centres in the afternoon. Many child care workers happen to be parents. Many education workers happen to be parents as well. That is why we are calling on this government to go back to the negotiating table, keep kids in school and bargain in good faith.

1650

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: We look at the educational workers we have, who are providing the care. We trust them with our children in schools—55,000 of them across this province. They're professionals. But we forget one thing: They're moms and dads as well. They have children to care for as well. And these low-wage policies that this government has been putting in this province that are affecting our educational workers, that are affecting our front-line workers, are forcing these individuals to food banks. Some of these parents, who should be focusing on their children—which they do, but during the day they are dealing with the stresses of, "How am I going to feed my kids? How am I going to put clothes on their back? How am I going to be able to provide for my own family?"

Some of these educational workers are partnered, so both of them are in this field, both of them are having to work, both of them are struggling, both of them are dealing with those stresses. How much more are they going to be expected to do? I put the question to the member from University–Rosedale.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Just speaking about my school, education workers do so much. They come in early, they clean our fields, they clean our classrooms, they look after our children during lunch break, they monitor children when they're at lunch, and they look after children who are on the spectrum or who need extra attention. They are critical to helping little kids in the JK and SK classes get the learning that they need so that they can learn how to read and write and socialize well. They are absolutely essential to the functioning of a public school, of any school.

That is why this government needs to go back to the negotiating table and bargain in good faith. You have a surplus. You have the money. Investing in education, investing in our kids and in our schools is the right thing to do. It's your responsibility to get it done and do it.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: Speaker, through you to the member from University–Rosedale: We've heard this afternoon how the member from Ottawa South has stated that it was a mistake on the part of his government to freeze education workers' wages.

Of course, we're increasing the lowest-paid education workers by 10% over four years.

I was wondering if the member from University–Rosedale would go as far as the member from Ottawa South to say that the NDP government of the day, back in the 1990s, was wrong for freezing education workers' wages.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Scarborough Southwest to respond.

Ms. Doly Begum: Since we're a team, I'm going to take this one.

I think I was two years old when the last NDP government was in power, so I will take no responsibility for their actions.

But what I do want to say is that this government and what they're doing—they're going to be just like what the member from Ottawa South, John Fraser, talked about, which was remorse, regret about what they did.

Let me tell you what Beverley Plouffe wrote to me. She hasn't gotten a raise since 2014, and before that, for four years when the Liberal government was in power, they had 0% raises given. She said, "A 1% raise is less than pennies on the dollar, and last I checked, you can't use a penny at the stores anymore." That's what they're offering right now. This government is always using percentages, so I'm going to give the real numbers: What they're offering right now is a 5-cent-to-55-cent increase. That's what they're offering. Do you think that's something that you're going to be proud of? I don't think so.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We don't have time for another question, so we'll move on to further debate.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: It's an honour to rise here today.

We speak a lot about keeping Ontario safe and secure. I know in my narrative, I say everyone has a right to feel safe in their own homes and in their own autos and in their own communities, and our children have a right to be in school. As someone who strongly believes in education, there is no better place for a child to be than in a classroom, and I think we all agree on that—a classroom with caring adults and supporting peers. The classroom is where children belong. Les enfants doivent être dans les salles de classe.

We believe that the children are our future, and I think we all agree on that. We believe that we have a responsibility as parents and as a society to educate our children, and the Keeping Students in Class Act is focused squarely on one and only one objective: supporting our children.

With respect to our educators: As a newly elected MPP, especially, from York Centre, I visit my schools in my riding regularly, and I hear from the parents. I knock on doors, as I did in the election. I knocked on over 38,000 doors, and everyone said, when education came up—and it was universal—that the kids need to be in school.

Having a child in public school during the pandemic myself—actually, I had three children home during the pandemic; two were in college and university, but one was completing her grade 12 year in a school in our riding, in York Centre—I saw first-hand the disruptions and the uncertainty that students experienced. We're here to honour our commitment to the students and to the parents across the province that this will be a school year free of disruptions, because it's not fair to them.

This bill is about being fiscally responsible and being fair, and we cannot in good conscience burden future generations with debt and with learning loss. It's our responsibility as parents to educate our children, and it's our duty as MPPs to look out for our kids' best interests. We cannot sit by while our kids are at risk of losing yet more time in the classroom.

I'm sure many of us can tell the story during the pandemic of our children at home who missed their friends, who missed their teachers, who missed the extracurricular activity and lived with uncertainty as to how to learn online. So I call upon all of us here to stand with us in support of our children.

We tell our children to dream big, that they can be anything they want. We live in a world of imagination and science and technology. Earlier today, there was a class school trip, just in the lobby, and they asked me, "How do you get elected? How do you have a career that would enable you to become an MPP?" It was an amazing thing. They were in grade 5, and I said to them, "You've got time. You can wait. But the one thing I can tell you is that the world when you grow up will look so much different than it does today, because of what you will learn in school."

Our government has invested historic amounts of funding in our public education system. This is something I'm very proud of. We've expanded schools and built new ones, and we've enhanced funding for programs in the arts, in sports and in skilled trades, so students can find their passion. We've added learning and mental health supports, to make sure that all kids can succeed.

This progress is at risk if students face another disrupted school year. Students deserve to be in class, with caring adults, alongside their peers, and I think we all agree to that. We're standing by our kids, madame la Présidente, parce que nous croyons en notre province et en notre avenir.

Our government recognizes the work of students, parents, teachers and education workers to make the best of a challenging situation during the pandemic. They did as well as they could. We know it's time to get back to normal, back to in-person and back to school for our kids. We need to be focused on a stable, successful school year. We have to protect our kids' future. Nous devons protéger l'avenir de nos enfants.

Madam Speaker, when I go to the doors in York Centre with the enthusiasm of having been elected on June 2, I hear a lot about the challenges that parents face on a daily basis. There are a lot of stories that come to mind. There's a story about a young father whose wife passed away from cancer and who left two school-aged children in the early grades. He's working hard as an electrician to do the best he can, and he depends on that school to be open so his children can go day after day to learn.

1700

Depression, anxiety and social isolation are things that we have to watch out for that are exacerbated when schools are closed and parents have to worry about their kids. The past couple of years have been difficult on students, and I've spoken on that, but it's also been difficult on the parents who face the uncertainty as to which parent could go to work on any given day and which parent had to stay home. Madam Speaker, when kids are at home, it makes it difficult for parents to go to work and earn a living, and it puts a real strain on the family.

And the story in my riding is not universal just to York Centre. It's wherever we go: from the streets in our ridings, from the conversations that we have, from the visits to our schools, from the satisfaction of visiting our schools and seeing our children enjoy being in school, especially now, especially after these two years. I've made one simple promise to our parents: that I would always stand up for our children. It's a simple fact that when we step into this House, we need to be ready to lead, and leadership means standing up for our children.

Madam Speaker, I've always promised, and I said this in my inaugural speech, that I believe very much in the concept of service over self. I've had a lot of conversations with members throughout this chamber, on all sides, and as MPPs we can honour our commitment to our students by supporting this bill, by keeping our kids in school.

Our government believes in fairness. Our government has stayed at the table over the past number of months with

education workers. I believe that we've come to a point in time where we need to define what the issues are, and the issues are our kids: They're my kids and they're your kids. I hope that people in this chamber will remember, at the end of the debate, which my friends across the way remind me in the halls that you can have a spirited debate—and that's what we're here for. And I like that. I like to hear and I like to listen, and I'm not afraid to listen. But now is the time for stability, it's the time for fairness and, most importantly, it's the time for our children. Let's pass the bill.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We'll go to questions. The member for Spadina–Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My question to the Solicitor General, through you, is: After this debate, you are going to be asked to vote to suspend the charter rights of the people of this province, including the fundamental freedoms—the freedom of speech, the freedom of religion, the freedom of conscience, the freedom of the press. You're going to be asked to suspend the legal rights, including life, liberty and security of the person and security from arbitrary detention and a whole list of other rights. Can you in good conscience, as a lawyer, vote to suspend the fundamental rights and the charter rights of the people of this province?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Well, I just want to clarify: I'm not a lawyer. What I can say is, I believe that we have to stand with our children, and that what we have to do is make sure they're the priority. This is a hard choice, but we have to have stability for them. I'm thinking of them. This isn't about us; this is about our kids.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: To follow up what my colleague just asked the honourable member from York Centre: Service over self—it's a valuable concept. Knocking on 38,000 doors—nice to see other door knockers in this building, Speaker. But as someone who's following the speech from the member for Ajax, I understand that member to be one of the province's recognized lawyers—

Interjection.

Mr. Joel Harden: Durham—pardon me. Thank you. What exactly is being accomplished with a piece of legislation for our children in suspending fundamental human rights and legal rights? Particularly, I ask the member, through you: In a context where you have an unallocated surplus of \$44 billion, according to the Financial Accountability Officer, and you have at least \$23.5 billion in potential surpluses over the next six years, what is being accomplished? What message are you demonstrating, apart from allowing laziness in bargaining and disrespect to the people who make our public education system work? What message are you offering—

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Madam Speaker, from Confederation to the time the party opposite was in government—between the time they were in government, from 1990, approximately, to 1995, they doubled the

provincial sub-sovereign debt. From the time that the Liberals were in office, the debt almost tripled. So when we look at an hourglass, we have to look at what our children will have to pay back, and that's why it's important for them to stay in school now and it's important for us to respect their future, and that we won't burden them with a debt that they can't pay.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. A question from the member for Brantford-Brant.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you, Speaker. Through you to the minister, I was wondering if he could explain further why the government feels that this is a good deal for CUPE workers and not as horrendous as we've been hearing from the opposition.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Madam Speaker, it's actually quite simple. When you walk the streets in a riding, all over—and I respect where the members' ridings are—there are small businesses, there's people that suffered during the pandemic, and there are businesses that went out of business. What I feel, to reply to the member opposite, is that the offer that is being made is a cumulative offer, which means, year after year, for the next four years, they know exactly what the increases are. Small businesses don't know that. So I feel the offer is fair because it guarantees them the increases that have been negotiated.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): A quick question, the member for Oshawa.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: We're talking about standing with the children. When the EAs and the education workers go to work every day and love the kids that they support and they don't have the respect of the government, what would you say to them? Because we're talking about standing with children and you're acting like that's not what they do every single day.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): A very quick response, the Solicitor General.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: You know, I think the kids want to be in school, and this is what it's about. We can't have a situation where parents don't know which one is going to work on Monday. We can't have a situation—what grandparents can babysit? We have to have the surety that we know where our children will be. They need to be in school.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am glad to have the opportunity to stand and take some time, rather than just in the questions and comments, to share voices from community members on this issue we're debating. Actually, it's been a full 12 hours that we have been talking about the Keeping Students in Class Act, this piece of legislation, this Bill 28.

I have already spoken about the need for this government to have that sober second thought and realize that the hammer they are bringing to this situation is an overreach. What they are doing with the “notwithstanding” clause, overriding sections of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, what they're doing here—I don't know if it's page 1 or

before page 1; it's the explanatory note that says that this act “will apply despite the Human Rights Code.”

For the folks at home, whether they are up on education issues or have parents in school, or just folks if they're tuning in: to have a piece of legislation that, on page 1, says, “Despite the Human Rights Code and notwithstanding the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, we're going to go ahead and do this thing”—and there's more in here. It will limit the jurisdiction of the Ontario Labour Relations Board and tribunals and folks who would otherwise challenge them. That puts this piece of legislation pretty far above the law. I guess it is law, but it's changing the rules of the game and I think everybody on the playground understands that that's not fair.

1710

What I'm going to do is sum it up. This is a bill that violates workers' rights to collectively bargain. I'm going to say that that's a right. The right to collectively bargain and the right to strike are not inconvenient things; they're rights. This government has been talking about these issues as though they don't matter. The government says, “We're making a decision and we're going to do it anyway.” That is a problem because these rights have been hard fought and they have been hard won. There has been blood spilled to gain these labour achievements and they are rights. It's an NDP-Conservative divide, maybe. I haven't met too many Conservatives that are like, “Rah rah, labour is great and we believe that workers have collective power.” They seem to say, “Yes, in theory, but not when it comes to us and what we want. Those are pesky things we need to outmanoeuvre.” But that's not how we do things in Canada. It is, unfortunately, how things are being done now and it's a problem.

It removes the incentive for employers to negotiate in good faith. Other folks are going to see this—and I think that's the point, right? You're making a heck of an example of education workers, who are the lowest-paid education workers, some of them making \$39,000. The government doesn't like us to talk about part-time workers. There are a lot of part-time workers who are seeing themselves in this legislation and realizing that they don't matter to this government.

Education funding has not kept pace with inflation or population growth. This is just one more opportunity for this government to undermine public education. I wish that they would take a different course. I will say something and I hope you hear me: The working conditions for these educational assistants, for the custodial staff, for library workers, for all the staff in schools are the learning conditions of students in Ontario. When you are forcing people to work in unsafe work environments, when you are not listening to them when they say that they need sick time or they need cleaning supplies, whatever it is that they say they need—smaller class sizes; that's something we've heard before—and they can't have it, those are the learning conditions of these students that suddenly today we're hearing this government saying that they care about.

Let's hear from some of the parents who have been writing in. I will acknowledge that there are education

workers who are also parents. There's this neat Venn diagram—conveniently this government has been talking about parents as though they are folks over here standing up for education. Well, you have educators standing up for education. You have education workers who are parents and this is an attack on them.

Here's someone in the community, Taylor, who says that the Premier's "use of the 'notwithstanding' clause to impose collective bargaining terms on education workers is a gross overreach and the first time the clause has been used to attack labour rights in provincial history...."

"If the Premier is allowed to get away with this he will use this power to crush public sector unions across Ontario. Education workers have been underpaid for a decade, working in unsafe conditions and doing an essential and very difficult job. They deserve our solidarity. This legislation must go no further."

That's just a community member.

Another community member, Jemma, says "There is simply no way the current government can spin back-to-work legislation as an appropriate way to avoid collective bargaining and strikes. The only ethical way to get education workers back to work is to sit at the bargaining table and hammer out a deal. If people want to reduce wealth inequality and strengthen our economy, the bare minimum we can do is treat our workers like human beings."

What a novel concept.

Thomas is a Whitby father, and I won't read some of the words that he's used a bunch of symbols for, but I will read the other ones. Thomas, a Whitby father, says, "I just wanted to express my utter disgust at our government's underhanded and bad faith negotiations with CUPE and its failure to pay our public citizens a basic living"—blanking—"wage...!"

"No consultations, no reasonable negotiations, abdication of responsibility during the pandemic, continued failure to fund our health care and education system, I'm completely exhausted and sick of it."

That's just Thomas.

I'm sharing the folks from out in the community because I want the education workers in the province to understand we are all hearing from parents and neighbours who stand with them.

So I have a pile of education workers that I will happily read. I wish I could set the clock back and have a bit more time, but it's important that they know that despite how they're being painted by this government, the people support them.

Here's one from Sarah, who says, "As a parent with a child who attends school in Ontario, I am disgusted at the government's attempt to"—I don't think I can say that. Okay, I'm going to add some words here: "the government's attempt to" give parents money "by offering us a \$200 payout for education reimbursement vs. seeing those funds allocated towards paying our education workers a livable wage. Obviously, if schools are forced to shutter doors without the support of these workers, then they are worth more than the 32-cent raise the province is offering them. These people keep our schools running and tasked

every day with keeping our kids safe. Give them their raise. They deserve it.... They are asking to earn enough to stay above the poverty line.

"Parents are not against CUPE getting raises. We are against" the Minister of Education and the Premier "thinking they can buy our goodwill. That money could have settled this!"

"Thank you," says Sarah.

I will actually read from CUPE Local 218 president Dennis Gibbs, because he sums it up and I'm not going to have time to get all of the voices of the education workers on the record. He says:

"This government has been talking about education workers as if they're not parents. They've been talking about them as if they're not constituents. They've been talking about them as if they're not concerned community members who want what is best for their families.

"I know that's not the case because I actually listen to members of my community. I've heard from countless education workers, parents, and constituents. They're paying attention—and they're mad. They know that students need us to do better and that workers deserve more.

"This legislation tramples on worker rights and harms students. It won't solve the staffing crisis at our schools so it won't help students get the supports they need. It won't end the poverty wages workers are living with, so it won't help them feed their families without relying on food banks."

Speaker, in the last minute or so, I'm going to reminisce a tad. I had the esteemed privilege of being a teacher in a classroom, and I remember when I first started teaching and I had educational assistants who were able to assist educationally, who were able to help kids with their academics. It was actually really great to have another adult in the room, another caring adult who was able to sit and maybe do small group or work with a kid to do a couple of assessments while I was doing other things, and the classroom worked. It was great.

Then things started to change in the schools. With the last government, it started. It's continued and it's gotten worse in terms of behaviours and violence and mental health needs and challenges, and we are pulled in all directions. Educational assistants now are following kids who are runners. They're working with behaviours. They are not able to do that educational assisting.

If we actually took some of the money that went flying out the doors to the parents for textbooks or tutoring or whatever the government said that was for, if that was invested in education, we could have had more educational assistants, we could have had more supports and services. There are other ways. There is such a thing as collective bargaining, which all of you are learning about, some of you for the first time, as we're having these discussions. But collective bargaining is supposed to be happening right now, and 96% of the CUPE members voted in favour of a strike, if necessary, and you took away that right. That is shocking and shameful.

That is my time. But please, invest in public education. Don't disassemble it.

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

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: We can collectively agree that parents of this province recognize that their kids have fallen behind during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is consistent with the global trends. Even students want to stay in class, where they belong.

Madam Speaker, as a Legislature, we have a moral obligation to stand up to keep kids in class, because school provides a positive social impact; it provides friendship and normalcy for kids. Young people are profoundly impacted by school closures.

My question to the official opposition is: Why does the NDP insist upon choosing to negatively affect these students by supporting the strike?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Actually, I'm going to answer that with a letter from Mette. Mette has worked as an educational assistant for 22 years. She's noticed that the job has changed significantly. Why I'm choosing her letter to answer you is that you're talking about disruption.

Mette says, "We have a Premier and an education minister who do not care about the safety of our students in the public system. If they did, they would be willing to spend the \$2.1-billion surplus that is sitting in the education fund on something that would actually benefit the education system, like more staff to ensure your children are getting the education they deserve."

1720

She also went on to say, "So far, this government closed the schools for 27 weeks straight during the pandemic (longer than any other province). They have maxed out classrooms to the point that there is barely room to walk, let alone clean, and they have reduced funding by \$800 per student!"

I'm answering your question with that, because your record of investing in education has caused unbelievable disruption. Your refusal to reduce class sizes has caused irreparable harm and significant disruption. So maybe stop that.

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

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I'd like to thank my colleague for her excellent presentation. Before I ask my question, I just want to note that she has been a teacher, in her former life before entering politics, and has seen first-hand the impact of cuts to education and the issues we have faced around staffing in the education system.

Given that this bill not only tramples on the democratic rights of education workers—this is ultimately about suppressing wages, wages of the lowest-paid workers; it is about taking away what little benefits they have. These workers are the backbone of our education system. I'd like to know from the member, what effect will this have on the education system, particularly when it comes to staffing?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I think I'm going to also answer that with the words of someone named Jennifer. Jennifer is a school secretary and a parent and would like

to thank anybody in this room who is standing up for education workers and opposing this bill.

Jennifer says, "I see the state of our education system daily as both a worker and as a parent. I'm tired of watching it crumble. The \$200 payments recently offered to parents were such a slap in the face to those of us who work in education and know what that money could do if it had stayed in the public education system. We can't expect a strong future for our children if everyone around them is overburdened, and overwhelmed and schools continue to be chronically underfunded."

She goes on to say, "It breaks my heart to think about leaving a job I love, but I have to take care of my family and future." That's from Jennifer.

In response to your question, I worry about the future of our classrooms, of our schools, when caring people will not go into this field because they know how they're going to be treated and how they will not be compensated and so many are being forced to leave.

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

Hon. Jill Dunlop: To the member from Oshawa: Our government has put forward a deal that includes a 10% increase over four years plus maintains the most generous set of benefits, sick leave and pension. My question is, what do you consider a fair deal?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm going to start with—maybe let's talk about the fact that pensions and benefits are not some gift bag from the government. You don't pay those. And the educational workers, the educational assistants that we're talking about, are not teachers; they don't have those benefits and pensions. They're some of the lowest-paid in the province. Some of them are making \$39,000, and you guys are throwing other numbers at us, pretending that part-time workers aren't real people, aren't working their keisters off in our schools.

As single mother Nicole has said, "Lastly, I feel strongly that I am worth more than the 'pieced together to look good' percentage this government feels I am worth. The children I support and those I should be supporting are also worth more than this government feels they are worth."

That's how the workers feel. Those are their words. Do a better job convincing them that you care.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Nickel Belt for the next question.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I wanted the member to share with us—she comes from the education system. She has been there; she has been a teacher. What happens when a group of workers, education assistants, early childhood educators—they have voted to push their union to negotiate a new deal. They are not happy with the deal they have now. They want negotiations to continue so that they get a better deal than what the government has put forward.

What do you figure will happen in the classroom if this piece of legislation goes through and those people are legislated back to work and have a deal that they are not

happy with? What does the human side of this look like in the classroom?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I feel badly for the education workers, who are seeing themselves represented as lazy or greedy. The way that they're being portrayed, and their union, is shameful—because they are their union, CUPE; you can't separate the two. The 55,000 members are their union.

So your question about what it could look like on the human side after this—I'm hearing from folks like James, who is a custodian. He said, "I now barely earn enough to support myself let alone help my mom who's 75, also still working as a part-time custodian because she can't afford to retire as it won't cover the cost of living because my school board job doesn't pay me enough to pay for the rising costs of living." He's very concerned. He said, "My co-workers and I earn on average \$39,000 and can't afford to live on that. We want our students to have the services they need in our public schools. I am asking you to give us the improvement on wages and working conditions that I need...." If that doesn't happen, if James and everybody else don't get what they need to pay the bills and stay in the fields that they love, they will be forced to go elsewhere. We're going to lose the caring adults that we have—or they stay and they continue living in poverty, which should not be an acceptable outcome.

Right now, this week, we're supposed to be watching this government bargain. We're supposed to be seeing bargaining happening, and you guys have said, "Nope," and that's too bad. I feel badly for James and his colleagues.

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

Mr. Vincent Ke: We are here debating Bill 28 because CUPE has asked for a higher-percentage salary raise, even though they are among the most well-compensated in the country in the same sector. And yet, CUPE consistently insists on their unreasonable demand for a nearly 50% increase in compensation. This represents nearly \$19 billion in tax dollars if extended across the sector—the entire education budget of every Atlantic province combined; the entire budget of the province of Saskatchewan; almost twice the budget of the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities; and the combined annual education budget of British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. So my question is simple: Is this reasonable and sustainable?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It's interesting that the member asked me, "Is this reasonable and sustainable?" I don't know that I have come across a government member today who has talked about reasonable or sustainable and that we share that definition—because when we are sharing the voices of committed education workers, we are hearing that things are not sustainable. These are workers who cannot do it anymore. They cannot continue to work however many jobs. I've got folks who are writing in, saying, "I love my job. I don't want to be forced out of it." Is it sustainable for single parents to have two jobs when they are working full-time?

You gave me a laundry list of every dollar you've spent compared to everybody else. So I'm going to tell you that the money going into the classrooms is insufficient. The money going into education is not sufficient. If you're setting money on fire with \$200 here and there—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We're out of time.

Further debate?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'll be sharing my time with the member from Nickel Belt.

I've always said that I want to bring the voices of individuals from Algoma-Manitoulin to the floor of the Legislature. We've heard a lot of discussions today from a variety of our members on a variety of topics and issues and everything that we needed to cover. I think the one thing that I want to do is to bring the voices of the good people of Algoma-Manitoulin.

I want to start with Mrs. Carol Boulianne. Mrs. Boulianne starts—and I will be editing some of the colourful language that has been expressed by the constituents and I will be replacing them with my own words, but I do want to try to do my best to express their concerns that they have raised to me and through my office.

1730

She starts off by saying, "I am disgusted and appalled by" the Premier and the minister, their "latest generous offer.... I am tired of working for peanuts. What is wrong with you people? Get rid of the bill that caps government workers to 1%. I am sure" the minister and the Premier "would never accept a 1% wage freeze. Never. And for them to legislate us back to work.... I have not been able to buy new clothes for work in years. I barely have enough money to buy gas and food. I am tired of you" bleeping "Ontarians with your \$250 cheque for parents" and "with your licence-renewal fees being given back. Where are your morals? ... Shame, shame on both of you."

And that's from Carol Boulianne.

I also have one from Lexi Ferguson: "As an educational assistant, I work for 10 months a year.... We are underpaid" and "unappreciated."

One of her co-workers had indicated to her that "she can't even feed her kids" with the money that she is making right now.

I have this one; she's requested that her name remain anonymous, but she goes on to say, "I am an elementary school secretary and library maintenance clerk at" the board which will remain nameless. "I personally earn just over the provincial average, but that is only because I took a second position with the school board, as my pay as a school secretary did not allow me to pay for the rising cost of living. Even now, with the wages I am receiving, I am still living paycheque to paycheque, never getting ahead with inflation rising.

"Yesterday ... the Conservative government tabled a bill to pass legislation that takes away my rights to freely negotiate a collective agreement, and they did this by using the 'notwithstanding' clause. Using the 'notwithstanding' clause substantially interferes with meaningful collective bargaining.

“My co-workers and I earn on average \$39,000 and cannot afford to live on that. We want our students to have the services they need in our public schools....

“My oldest son ... was diagnosed with autism.... Having an EA in his class has assisted him tremendously, and he made great strides in his learning. The cuts to public education, he no longer has the option of having an EA with him.”

This is from Richard, who is a custodian on Manitoulin Island: “I am a custodian with the Rainbow District School Board on Manitoulin Island. I am writing to you as my member of Parliament to relay my disappointment in the government’s horrible treatment of us at the negotiating table and their inability to negotiate in good faith to gain a new collective agreement. I hope our voice is being heard in the” Legislature.

These are just some of the views that I have brought to the floor. I have many, many more. But I thought it was important that we actually hear from the people about these choices this government is doing and imposing on individuals across this province, and the negative impacts that they’re having on them.

And I cede my time to—

M^{me} France Gélinas: No, no, no.

Mr. Michael Mantha: No, I’m not going to cede my time, so I will continue on.

Speaker, I have time now to read on behalf of an additional constituent, and she’s from Echo Bay. This is Debbie. Debbie and her husband are writing to me expressing this particular point of view: “We are both in our middle sixties and aren’t sure how we are going to be able to keep our home unless I go back to work. I’m not saying we’re poor, but the government needs to give their head a shake. EAs and care staff are the heartbeat of the schools and are always the eyes and ears to what’s going on in the schools. I can only speak for myself but I loved each and every student, always keeping the school the way I wanted my home to be, clean and healthy....

“I just want to be heard and seen as a hard-working caretaker, that with no fault of my own had to go on a disability pension. My husband is still working and he’s hoping to retire soon after 35 years but can’t.

“Please, please fight for the children. I would really hope that the government can reach a reasonable contract. Our children are our future ... and with all the kids that need extra help give each child an EA and watch them flourish. I know you are on our side and I have so much to say given a chance!...

“My grandson was diagnosed with a disability and thank God for the one he had in high school. She believed in him and he ended up at the top of his graduating class in 2021....

“His EA was his lifeline and without her he wouldn’t be in college today taking mechanical engineering.”

I have a few more, Speaker, but I do want to talk about a few other things. This is what people are really feeling. These are the impacts. These are the voices of those that are working and taking care of our children in our schools. Does the government have the ability to go to the table and

negotiate a fair agreement? Do they have the financial capabilities of doing it? Well, the FAO just came out and identified a \$44-billion reserve. So they do have the ability. Why is this government holding so tight on these policies, denying not only schools, not only our students, not only education workers, but all of our health care providers, as well? Why are they using this hammer—and it’s more than a hammer; it’s a sledgehammer, is what they’re doing. It’s taking away their democratic right.

I’ve been at the negotiation table many a times. And yes, the negotiations are tough. Yes, there’s a lot of pressure, but that pressure comes to a boil. And here we are; we’re Tuesday today. We had Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday before that last hour, and it’s always, always been in those last hours where you push, and people are basically put into a position of: “What can we do at these last moments? What is that last ‘i’ that I need to dot? What is the last ‘t’ that I need to cross? What will make them happy and make us happy?” Those discussions happen all the time and collective agreements are signed. Over 98% of the time they are successful.

So I look at this government: We’re still here in those last hours. Are you at the table? Why aren’t you there? I’m told that the union is sitting there, waiting for you to come to the table and negotiate a fair agreement. Ontarians are all looking at us. Children are expecting us to do better in this House. I think it’s up to us. We have that ability; we have the tools. You didn’t have to go down this route. You have chosen to. Don’t waste these last few precious days that you have to negotiate something.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We’ll go to questions.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you to the member from Algoma–Manitoulin for his statement with respect to salaries and fighting for the rights of the children. As a parent and a community member, I reflect and I understand what you’re saying, but the latest salary of 2.5% for employees with a salary grid below \$40,000 and 1.5% a year for employees with a salary grid above that—this is the latest offer our government has put forward. Not to mention that our government has invested \$175 million into school tutoring supports, increased mental health supports, far more than what any other previous government has ever done. Our government is fighting for children by keeping them in school. Children are better served by staying in school. Can the member please reflect on the impacts of our children being pulled away—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. The member for Algoma–Manitoulin to respond.

1740

Mr. Michael Mantha: Every single person in this room wants the children in our schools. Every single person wants to make sure that we can come to an agreement so that both sides can claim a win.

What this government has done, and the Kool-Aid—sorry; I shouldn’t do that. The points that you’re making are just not reasonable for the parents who are having to go to a food bank in order to surplus their cupboards, who are struggling with getting to and from work because

they're having a hard time putting gas in their vehicles, who are struggling with putting clothes on their backs. Not only are those educational workers taking care of our most precious ones in our schools, but they're parents as well, and they have a lot of pressure on them to take care of their children. So the pittance that you are offering, as far as percentages for these individuals who are working this job and other jobs just to make ends meet, is not enough.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question.

Mr. Joel Harden: I want to thank my friend from Algoma–Manitoulin for his remarks.

I want my friend to react to something. As he was speaking, I want members of this House to know that folks who have been organizing—members of this particular union—had a visit with the labour minister down the street, as I understand it. They were trying to encourage the labour minister to get to the bargaining table instead of a \$1,000-a-plate fundraiser, which apparently is the priority of the labour minister of this government.

I heard a lot of flowery words about, “What are we doing for the kids?” Through you, Speaker, I ask my friend from Algoma–Manitoulin: What message is this government sending, as the deadline for this approaches, in suspending civil liberties, suspending human rights associations and hosting sleaze fests down University Avenue when our public education workers deserve a fair deal? What's the message for our kids in that?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to thank the member from Ottawa Centre for his question.

The message is a slap in the face; this is what this is to those individuals. There are so many educational workers—do they want to go out on strike? No. Do they want a fair collective agreement that is going to be negotiated? Absolutely. Do they want to be in a classroom? Do they want to be on the picket line on Friday or on Saturday morning or over the coming days? No. They want to be in the classroom because that's what their passion is, that's what they want to do and that's where they thrive. They know how the work they do in those classrooms impacts the lives of the students they serve.

This message, as far as what this government's priorities are, is not being received well. I'm trying to use respectful language, but it's hard, because we can see the time that is being wasted right now, when this government could be sitting and coming to an agreement with the union so that it will benefit our students.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We'll go to the next question.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Madam Speaker, we want uninterrupted, September to June—kids in class without interruption. That is the message that we are hearing.

My question to the official opposition is, do you believe a strike will cause less turmoil? Could bargaining not have continued without threatening parents?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to thank the member from Scarborough–Rouge Park for his question.

I don't know if you've participated in negotiations before, but this is a normal process of negotiations. What

it does is it actually puts pressure on both sides. It puts a time limit that both of us have to come to the table, so there are no ifs, ands or buts: “This is the deadline. Let's negotiate.” And it pushes not only the members, but it gets to a resolution; it comes to an end.

Is there anybody on strike right now? No, there's nobody out on strike right now. Should we be taking advantage of the opportunity that we have right now to come to an agreement? Yes. Why are we debating this? This is something that happens each and every time during negotiations. Some go cordially. Some need a little bit of pressure, which is why you have the strike mandate that is imposed and why you move negotiations much more aggressively, much quicker and you get to a better resolve.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you to the member from Algoma–Manitoulin for your comments today.

This government keeps trying to create the impression that a strike is inevitable, that there's no other option. But as you've said yourself—you've been involved in negotiations—there still are days to negotiate a deal. That is not what this government is doing here. There is a way to avoid a strike, and that's just to negotiate a deal, but this government actually walked away from the negotiating table and wrote a 175-page bill that strips workers of their charter rights.

I got involved in politics when I was fighting Mike Harris's education cuts in 1997, when his Minister of Education said he was going to create a crisis in our public education system in order to privatize it. I'm wondering: Is this government's goal to actually create a crisis in our schools in order to privatize them, just as they have said they are privatizing our public health care system?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to thank the member from Spadina–Fort York. I wish the government would have spent as much time in negotiations as they have spent on putting this facade out there that unions are bad and this is what they're doing, instead of being at the table and negotiating. I wish this government would have spent as much time putting messaging out there to protect students and making sure that that's where their priority was, instead of talking about a strike—and there's still no strike. These are precious moments they are losing.

I heard a member from across the way saying that they are at the table. I'd like them to inform us where that table is, because the union is waiting for them. I'd like to know, if they're at the table, are they in the same room? Are you actually listening? Are you actually discussing? Are you coming to a resolve—because at the end of the day, we need to get this right for the students.

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

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Many members have mentioned today that a high percentage of education workers are women, and child care centres are likely to close down in schools during a strike time. So I want to know what you say to parents, and specifically to moms, who rely on child

care centres being open and able for those women to get to work?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'm sorry. I heard some buzzing in my back here and I totally missed your question. I apologize. I'm going to try to answer it. I think—

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Child care.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Child care?

Interjection: And women.

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's funny you mention child care, because there are two of those child care centres that are within my riding right now—they've totally lost them. Because of the low-wage policies the government has put forward, they have lost three of their staff. They have now had to inform over 14 parents that they cannot care for their children—because of the low-wage staff and those individuals that were in the child care sector just had to make a different choice and, unfortunately, went on to other jobs.

This is something that many of our child care centres are facing across this province. Again, I'm looking at this government: You have the surplus. You have the money to pay our child care centres, our teachers, our front-line workers. Do the right choice and pay them. You have the room to do it.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We'll go to further debate.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It has been a long day, and a lot of points have been made forward that I will try to summarize.

The first narrative coming from the government side is really that the last two years of the pandemic have been really hard on everyone, including children going to school. It has been really tough on children to be locked out of their schools for 27 weeks in a row—not able to see their friends, not able to have fun, not able to see their teacher, sitting in front of a screen. Think about it: How hard is it for a five-year-old to sit in front of a screen for 27 weeks?

1750

Ask the member from Sudbury's wife. She is a kindergarten teacher, and she did miracles during those 27 weeks, like every other teacher and teaching assistant did, but it was tough. But do you know what, Speaker? It shouldn't have been that long. It shouldn't have been that tough. The choices that this government made are what led us down to 27 weeks of children looking at a screen, trying to learn. No other jurisdiction in Canada—no other provinces, no territories, not even the States—kept their schools closed as long as Ontario did. Why was that? Because the government refused to spend the money to keep our schools open. Even the money that was coming from the federal government—they refused to spend that money to keep our kids in school, where we all know they needed to be.

Because the government kept our kids' schools closed for 27 weeks in a row, our kids suffered. And now, they're using the fact that our kids suffered—is it true they suffered? Absolutely. My granddaughter is not in the same grade as all of her friends anymore. She cannot look at a

screen for six hours a day; she's just incapable of doing that. Is she a good student? Absolutely. Bring her in the classroom with a qualified teacher and an education assistant, and she just thrives. Sit her in front of a screen, and she fails. So now, all of her friends have moved on to a new grade, and she didn't. She hates school now. It is a struggle every morning to get her to get up and go to school. She used to love school. Now she hates it, and she is one of many, many students who really had it hard.

Had the government used the money that came from the federal government to bring smaller class sizes, to make sure that rapid tests were available, not just to the private schools that had enough rapid tests to last them a year—the rest of our public schools had to wait another three months to get a box. Had the government taken the time to fix our schools so that we had better air circulation, all of this would have made sure that our kids didn't suffer the hardship that they did.

We agree our kids had a really hard time. It could have been prevented. A lot of it could have been prevented. You could have done better, and you did not. You failed all of those kids, including my granddaughter, and now, you say, "We can't close our schools anymore." Did the educational assistants close the schools? Was it the early childhood educators who closed our schools? Was it the janitors who closed our schools? Was it the secretaries who closed our schools? It was the decision of the Conservative government that kept our schools closed for 27 weeks, and our kids suffered for it.

Now, we have a bill in front of us that says our schools cannot close any more. "We will punish the lowest-paid women who work in our educational system so that they keep our schools open. We will take away their basic rights."

We have a bill here that uses the "notwithstanding" clause again against the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a bill that will apply despite the Human Rights Code. So now, not only did the government's decision make our kids suffer longer than they should have, we also have a government who will now make all of these women—because 70% of them are women—suffer. We will take away their basic Charter of Rights and Freedoms—we will take away their basic human rights, as written in the code, so that they can keep the schools open.

Do you know what, Speaker? There's another way to keep our schools open: Go to the bargaining table right now. CUPE is waiting for you. Listen to what they want and bring forward a deal that nobody likes but that everybody can live with. You won't like it and CUPE won't like it, but you will all be able to live with it. This is what negotiation is all about. Negotiation is not, you win, you get to decide what CUPE members want, you get to decide what education workers want, because you know way better than them—no, you don't. Listen to them. You will find this is what negotiation is all about. And anybody who knows anything about negotiations will tell you that most of those agreements that nobody likes but that everybody can live with happen in the last 24 hours before a strike is about to start. You don't need to take away

people's rights. You don't need to disregard the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. You need to sit down and listen.

Those people haven't been on strike in a very long time. They have always found a way to negotiate a deal that nobody likes but that everybody could live with. Why aren't you doing this? Why didn't you use the 13 hours that we just spent here today listening to what the union had to say so that we don't end up with a strike, so that we end up with a collective agreement that nobody likes but that everybody can live with, so that the schools stay open and the kids continue to have access to all of those educational workers?

We're all human beings, and when the government takes all of the powers away from you, you react like every other human being. When it's time to volunteer for that soccer game or volleyball team, you're not going to volunteer anymore. The government doesn't care about you, so why should you care to volunteer for your school?

When it's time to take the school trip and you need people from that school to volunteer, will you be surprised if they say, "I'll put in my 35 or 37.5 hours and then I'm not putting in anything else, although I love my students and I know they need me and I know that would be good for them. The government doesn't care about me. I'm going to go and work my second job so that I can pay the rent and feed my kids"?

All of this could be avoided. Go back and listen to the workers. Listen to what their union has to say and bring forward a deal that nobody likes and that everybody will work with. That means, don't impose your ideas of what a good deal is—because you are not them; they are. You need to listen to them. That's what bargaining is all about. Why is it so hard for you to understand that?

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, I'm sure that if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to allow the member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock to respond to the late show from the member for St. Catharines to the government House leader.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The House leader is asking for unanimous consent to allow the member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock to respond to the late show that was addressed to the government House leader. Agreed? Agreed.

1800

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

NURSES

Ms. Patrice Barnes: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should continue to build on the progress that we have made working with the College of Nurses of Ontario and Ontario Health to expand the Supervised Practice Experience Partnership program

and to reduce the financial barriers that may be stopping some internationally educated nurses from receiving accreditation and the number of internationally educated nurses accredited annually should be posted.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Pursuant to standing order 100, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Ontario has an ongoing nurse shortage, and we need to work to address it immediately. This is an issue of fairness and health care equity. I've spoken to many constituents about this issue. In fact, having a shortage of nurses causes fear and anxiety. We need to continue to do more to address this problem by looking at solutions available within our province.

Excellent work has been done researching this problem and identifying ways to fix it. There's also much that we can build on and that we can support that will help alleviate the nursing shortage in Ontario and ensure all residents have access to primary care. We need to listen and continue to consult with people that are on the ground today doing the work and identifying the challenges for internationally trained nurses.

Before I continue I want to highlight that access to primary care is not just an issue of physician shortages. Doctors do incredible work and quite often they do it as part of a team of medical professionals. This ecosystem of care is critical for delivering excellent health care to patients, with registered nurses, registered practical nurses, nurse practitioners, PSWs and all the other health care professionals who work together. Each professional works within their scope of practice and is so very important.

I would be remiss not to mention that the Plan to Stay Open: Health System Stability and Recovery takes the necessary actions to further boost Ontario's health care workforce, free up hospital beds and ease pressure on emergency departments. The plan will add more than 6,000 additional health care workers, temporarily remove exam fees for internationally trained and retired nurses, expand 911 models of care to provide better, more appropriate care away from emergency departments and free up over 2,500 hospital beds to significantly reduce the current hospital bed shortage so that care continues to be there for those who need it and Ontario stays open, now and in the future.

Today, simply put, Ontario needs more nurses. We need them to improve our health care efficiency and outcomes. During the seventh wave of COVID, at least 14 hospitals in Ontario operated without key services at some point due to exhausted and depleted nursing staff. The shortages have been hitting hospitals for months. This is a problem across Canada and internationally—many function with the minimum number of nurses. The head of the nurses' association in the past has spoken about the pressure the nurses place themselves under because they care so deeply for their community and their patients. There's a risk that many of the nurses are overworking and are at risk of burning out. Nurses may have to retire or cut their hours or leave the community altogether.

A solution is required, and this government, under Premier Ford's leadership, is making great investments in nursing. The government is investing in initiatives to improve the supply of nurses in the province. We have \$35 million to increase enrolment in nursing education programs in publicly assisted nurse colleges and universities. The new spaces will introduce approximately 1,130 practical nurses and 870 registered nurses into the health care system; up to \$100 million to add an additional 2,000 nurses by 2024-25 by supporting the training of thousands of personal support workers and nurses who want to advance their careers in long-term care.

The fall economic statement includes investments of \$342 million that will add over 5,000 new and upskilled nurses to the system over the next five years.

Starting in spring 2023, the government will launch a new Learn and Stay Grant for up to 2,500 eligible post-secondary students who enrol in priority programs, such as nursing, and work in underserved communities in the region where they study after graduation.

In March 2022, the government announced that it was expanding the Community Commitment Program for Nurses, which will provide an incentive of \$25,000 for up to 3,000 nurses in 2022-23 and 2023-24 in exchange for a two-year commitment to work at a hospital, long-term-care facility or HCC agency in a high-need area of Ontario.

To retain nurses across the health sector and stabilize the current nursing workforce, the government is investing \$764 million over two years to provide Ontario nurses with a retention incentive of up to \$5,000 per person.

To build on the 8,600 health care workers added to the system since March 2020, the government is investing \$230 million in 2022-23 to enhance existing programs so that hospitals and the health care system have the staff they need to support additional capacity.

There are innovative programs such as the internationally educated nurse pathway program at Sunnybrook to support internationally educated nurses to meet the Canadian nurses' association requirements. Sunnybrook Health Science Centre, one of Canada's largest academic hospitals, has launched a new IEN career pathway. This will help internationally educated nurses start their careers in health care and transition into registered nursing positions, both RNs and RPNs.

I applaud these investments and programs, and ask that this government continue to work with the College of Nurses of Ontario to help internationally educated nurses join the workforce in our health system.

Currently, there are about 6,000 active international applicants in Ontario. Internationally trained nurses bring with them a variety of skills and expertise as well as a diversity of culture and knowledge. Immigrant nurses come to Canada, sold the dream of safety and possibilities, and when they arrive they are robbed of the opportunity to work in their field and build a successful life sustained by their career due to barriers to accreditation such as the long period of time and difficulty it takes to have their licenses recognized by the College of Nurses. Canada, especially Ontario, is missing out on the depth of knowledge and skill

that these nurses could bring to our health care system. I ask our government to continue to be purposeful in removing barriers for these nurses to get into the workforce.

Yamaan Alsumadi, a nursing student attending Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, wrote an article for CBC. She wrote, "One of my friends is a registered nurse from France with 15 years of experience in the intensive care unit. She has all the skills she needs to go into an emergency room right now, yet here she is sitting in a classroom, learning skills she has practised thousands of times before.

"Another friend is a cardiothoracic surgeon who couldn't find a school to complete her residency in Canada; she is now a personal support worker, with a limited scope of practice in comparison to registered nurses, let alone a physician.

"For most nursing positions in Ontario, the minimum requirement is a nursing degree from a Canadian university or Ontario college. Though there is an option for nurses trained outside the country to have their credentials recognized, some nurses report wait times lasting years"—therefore robbing our system of their talent.

My caucus has a strong commitment to health care access and equity across Ontario, and I strongly appreciate that the College of Nurses of Ontario is working with our government to make strides in speeding up this process and introducing programs that allow internationally educated nurses to practise under supervision. I call on this government to do more to solve this problem and remove these barriers for these nurses.

Every day, I hear from constituents who have had long wait-times and lack of care. As I said before, we need to start moving on solutions to our nursing shortage.

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I've spoken to nurses and other health care professionals in my riding. According to them, the major components of this are training and recruitment. I call on all members from all parties to support this motion to call on the College of Nurses of Ontario and Ontario Health to expand the Supervised Practice Experience Partnership program, and to reduce the financial barriers that may be stopping some internationally educated nurses from receiving accreditation, and the number of internationally educated nurses accredited annually should be posted on their website for transparency.

One last thing I want to include is the role that addressing this issue with internationally educated nurses will do for our economic development. Access to health care is a key part of attracting new business and new residents to our region. We all want to see increased economic development and prosperity in the northwest. Businesses know that their employees need to have access to doctors and health care, and it's critical that they get it. We know that things must change and that we must move forward toward solutions.

This isn't something I've raised on my own. Many others are calling for us to address the nursing shortage, as well as to improve the process for internationally educated

nurses to become licensed. We know there's a problem and a barrier for them, and we must waste no time in moving forward with solutions. The residents of Ontario deserve a strong health care system, and our immigrant population deserves to work in a field they were trained to do.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: It's funny, eh? This is really funny. I actually want to say LOL the entire time. You know when you're really tired and you go on and on forever on something, and then someone comes back and says the same thing to you and you're like, LOL? That's the mood right now. That's L-O-L.

In all seriousness, here is the motion we have. I just want to say thank you very much to the member from Ajax for bringing this motion forward. Everything she spoke about, Speaker, and I know you know that as well, that we agree—on this issue, when it comes to recognizing internationally trained professionals, especially internationally trained health care workers—actually, I should go further and say this motion is specifically for nurses. It ignores doctors and many other health care professionals that I have been advocating for. I have been bringing forward these issues forward in this House; I have called on this government for them. I have brought bills forward in this House and argued and asked questions in this House for the past four years, and I know some of my colleagues on this side have done it for years before that as well.

For the past four years—I know that this member just got newly elected so I don't blame her, but her government was in power with a majority government and they did nothing to help these health care professionals who are internationally trained until very recently, when we were able to finally push through and just put a small dent in it. There are thousands of workers who have come from around the world with years of skills and experience and who are now driving Ubers, for example, who are now working in custodian jobs. And no jobs are bad jobs; no jobs are disrespectful. But let's say, for example, a doctor comes to this country with the hopes and dreams of making a good income, of having enough to sustain their family and with the hope of practising in their field, being the doctor that they are. That's something that our government—not just this government, past governments—has failed to do.

For the past four years I have asked this government to focus on this because it would actually address the labour shortage crisis that we're facing right now, as well as the health care crisis that we're facing right now. Our hospitals need staffing. They need nurses. I know that the member from Ajax spoke about the need for nurses in our hospitals right now, in our long-term care. We need PSWs. However, when we look at this motion, what it actually does—the exact wording asks to “continue to build on the progress,” which means the little dent that this government made—it just asks to continue doing whatever they're doing right now. Which, really, does not improve or increase the need to help them with practice-ready

assessment. It does not support them with the financial barriers that they're facing, and it does not address the experience of discrimination that they face when it comes to getting a job.

So I want to thank the member for bringing this motion forward and her intention, but I really wish, as a government member, she could have done more to actually put some action. Because what this motion is, is the conclusion of my bill that I brought forward in the past, which actually has actions outlined. It actually has specific steps outlined for how we make sure that this works. And then, in the conclusion, it was specifically about making sure that we recognize these workers, including internationally trained nurses.

Let me just go a little bit more and say that if we're actually addressing the crisis that these people are facing—and since I have one more minute left, I want to share with you something that I received just recently, just earlier this week, Speaker. One of the things that I received was from a couple, Dr. Farzana and Dr. Muhammad, who are both international medical graduates. They've been waiting now for over five years to get their credentials, and one of the things they said to me was, “Unfortunately, as we are working hard to join in clinical practice in Canada, we can realize the real scenario is not in favour of international medical graduates. Many international doctors, after passing all the exams”—and these people actually have passed everything; now they're just waiting to have the residency—“are not able to join in clinical streams, in spite of the crisis of manpower in the health sector. Many IMGs feel discouraged to even try for a clinical career while looking at the disappointing situation here.”

Another award-winning radiologist from India, for example, wrote this—and he's a highly accomplished radiologist who has practised in numerous countries. He's passed the exam with the Royal College and finally received a job offer, Speaker, but he's waiting for another exam from the CPSO and cannot practice in the meantime, just because he's waiting. These are the type of barriers that they actually face. They wait for—the timeline is horrible, so they're not able to get through it. They're not able to get the practice that they need. There is practice-ready assessment that we have talked about in this House that this government could introduce that we still don't have enough of.

The other thing that the Ontario Nurses' Association talked about is allowing for retired nurses to come back and supervise. We need that supervision, for example, because without that supervision, you cannot get those nurses to get the practice they need and to show their skills so that they could become certified and get in the health care sector. It's like a chicken and egg problem: You have a shortage, and you have internationally trained professionals who want to get the experience and they need supervision, but you don't have nurses to supervise. There are retired nurses who want to help, but you have bills like Bill 124, for example, which doesn't respect workers, doesn't respect health care professionals, so

they're not able to do so. You need to fix all of these different parts of the problem in order to have internationally educated nurses finally be recognized so that they can contribute.

I appreciate the intention. I appreciate the attempt to continue the efforts, but you need to go way beyond that to address the crisis that we're facing in our health care sector and really support and allow for these internationally trained nurses and other workers to be in their fields.

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

Mr. Adil Shamji: Madam Speaker, the members opposite stand here congratulating themselves on expanding this program and making it easier for internationally trained nurses to join the health care system, when all this while, the government does everything in its power to disenfranchise the nurses who already work here. This government has cultivated an environment that is hostile to health care workers. With Bill 124, they made nursing no longer worth it to thousands of Ontario nurses. This wage-capping legislation has created a mass exodus of health care workers at a time when our health care system is more precarious than ever before. This government's aversion to collective bargaining was made clear then, and it was made clear yet again here in the chamber today. The absolute lack of foresight has created a health human resource crisis. It has.

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Now this government wants to stand here and pat themselves on the back for minor solutions to a major problem, if you can call it that. It's like they're on a sinking ship full of leaking holes, and this motion is akin to the crew scrambling to plug them all up with scotch tape and bubble gum. Should they be congratulating themselves?

That's not to say that internationally trained nurses are not valued. They are valued and they are needed as much as any other nurses who might contribute to Ontario's health care system. The problem is how we got here. When this government's disdain for nurses led to so many retiring early, changing careers or leaving en masse, this government did the bare minimum in response. Their retention efforts were unsuccessful because they were insincere.

Then came the temporary for-profit nursing agencies who, all too often, would poach nurses from their hospitals, promising to pay them double the hospital rate only to source them out to the same hospital they came from, and charging that hospital three to four times the rate they were able to pay their nurses when they were hospital staff.

So according to this government, hospitals can pay private, for-profit temporary nursing agencies three to four times nurses' wages to rent nurses' services, but they can't pay nurses better wages directly. What kind of logic is that? Who is benefiting from that, except for the temporary for-profit nursing agencies' executives and their board members? Yes, this may be delivering health care in a

different fashion, as the Premier referred to it, but whatever you want to call it, it's completely nonsensical.

With hospitals paying unsustainable, exorbitantly high rates to these temporary, for-profit nursing agencies, who control the supply of nurses while exploiting the demand of our health care system, we find ourselves in a health human resource crisis.

The unprecedented ER closures we witnessed this summer and continue to witness now are a direct result of this government's inability to keep health care staff in the health care system. In recent months, scores of Ontarians have been turned away at emergency room doors in record numbers. It's an outrage, and it's occurring all across the province.

How can the members opposite stand here in good faith, applauding their party's efforts to expand the Supervised Practice Experience Partnership program and reduce financial barriers for internationally trained nurses, when they continue to pretend like our series of health care crises don't exist? It's peak cognitive dissonance.

Less than three weeks ago, I released data that showed the reality of our health care system, and this government didn't make a peep. This August, wait times, emergency department lengths of stay, ambulance offload times and time for an admitted patient to move to an in-patient bed were all the worst they've ever been compared to every other August—every other August—since 2008. Some 10% of admitted patients had stays in the ER longer than 44.1 hours, and every morning in August, an average of 883.8 admitted patients lay in ERs across Ontario waiting for beds. I find it absurd that we would pass this self-congratulatory motion when this government has not even begun to do the work needed to keep our health care system afloat.

So when it comes to this motion, can I support it? I think it could be a lot more far-reaching. I think it could commit to repealing Bill 124. But I will gladly support any progress made working with the College of Nurses of Ontario and Ontario Health to achieve these measures.

Sure, I'd love to see the number of internationally educated nurses accredited annually posted, but I would also like to see the number of nurses leaving the profession posted annually as well. Highlighting the successes while ignoring the failures—

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: It's always a pleasure to rise in this chamber and represent the residents of Mississauga–Malton. Today I would like to first thank the health care professionals in Ontario and across Canada for their hard work and resilience during the pandemic, most notably, the nurses, who have worked grueling shifts in hard and uncertain times—the constant attention you paid to our most vulnerable residents, the personal sacrifices, such as many times not seeing their families and loved ones for the sake of protecting our communities, as nurses worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic. So I just want to say thank you for carrying that burden. Canadians owe a great

gratitude to the nurses and health care workers of Canada and Ontario.

Madam Speaker, immigration is a key pillar of Ontario's and Canada's economy, as well as our labour force. In 2021, more than 8.3 million, or 23% of the people, were landed immigrants or permanent residents, like me, in Canada. Last year alone, over 400,000 people chose Canada as their new home. Out of this, over 210,000 chose Ontario as their new home. So I just want to say thank you to them.

Mississauga–Malton, my riding, is home to many foreign-trained health workers; 61% of my constituents are born out of Canada. Many of the new immigrants are nurses, with education and experience from around the world. However, in order to be recognized as a nurse, these professionals face many challenges, including the financial costs of licensing exams and non-recognition or devaluation of foreign-acquired credentials.

As we all know, due to the aging population, overwork, or thanks to the government of Ontario for increasing the health services offered to Ontarians, Ontario has an ongoing nurse shortage, and we need to address this immediately. Madam Speaker, these foreign-trained nurses can help us to fill that shortage. A solution is required, and this government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, has introduced outstanding programs in nursing and procuring employment for foreign-trained professionals across the board.

The government is investing in initiatives to improve the supply of nurses and foreign-trained professionals in the province. We have pledged \$35 million to increase enrolment in nursing education and programs in publicly assisted colleges and universities. The new spaces will introduce approximately 1,130 new nurses and 870 registered nurses into the health care system. Furthermore, we are funding up to \$100 million to add an additional 2,000 nurses by 2024-25 by supporting the training of thousands of personal support workers and nurses who want to advance their career in long-term care.

Madam Speaker, seeing the work that was put in by nurses, doctors, PSWs and health care workers over the last two years and beyond, it is touching. I saw Canadians come together for a common cause, a valiant cause, and that is why I wholly support investment in foreign-trained professionals and ask the government to continue to work with the College of Nurses of Ontario to help internationally educated nurses, along with other accredited programs, guaranteeing placement for our internationally educated professionals.

As an international professional myself, I empathize with the new immigrants. I was one once. Speaking with experience, I can tell you it wasn't easy.

Interruption.

Interjection: Turn off your phone.

Mr. Deepak Anand: When you're a new immigrant—is it my phone?

When you're a new immigrant, you basically have to pick between wanting to go to the job but you can't get it, or you wait for your licensing and hold on and don't

provide food for your family. This is a vicious cycle. What comes first: Is it the experience or the job? For the job, you need experience, and for experience, you need a job, and that's a hassle that we all go through.

Madam Speaker, that's why we need to make it easy for internationally educated immigrants to be employed in the regulated professions. For an example, despite this fact, in 2016, only 25% of the internationally educated immigrants were employed in their regulated professions compared to 53% of the Canadian-born who studied in Canada.

I'm pleased to stand before you and say that we have made strides in addressing these issues in many non-health professions. Our government has eliminated the duplicative language testing requirement. We have also ensured that the applications are processed faster, within a six-month time limit to process for foreign-trained professionals and 30 days for individuals registered in other provinces.

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Madam Speaker, in conclusion, the government of Ontario should continue to build on the progress we have made working with the College of Nurses of Ontario and Ontario Health. Expanding the supervised practice experience partnership program and reducing the financial barriers is a step in the right direction. Our government's plan to help internationally trained professionals settle in and become active members of our economy and communities as well as find their dream job is an initial step in the right direction.

I want to say thank you to my colleague the MPP from Ajax for introducing this important motion that is close to my heart. I am looking forward to the progress in better health care for Ontarians, and I urge everyone in this chamber to support this motion.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm happy to speak to the motion on the recruitment of internationally trained nurses. As was mentioned before, it does very little to say that we will continue to build on the progress that we've made. Let's face it: Our health care system is facing a health human resources crisis. In hospital and residential care there are 32,000 job vacancies, and there are 10,000 job vacancies in ambulatory care, for a total of 42,000 nursing job vacancies right here, right now in Ontario. So it wouldn't matter if every single internationally trained nurse who is presently living in Ontario was to start practising today; we would still be at 30,000 or so vacant nursing positions.

I would like to put into the record a letter I received from Donna Williamsson. Donna wrote to the Premier and to the Minister of Health, Minister Jones, and she copied me. She is from my riding: "I am writing to you today, as a registered nurse and front-line health care worker, to express my opinion on an extremely important matter that is occurring in our hospitals and our health care system.

"I have years of experience working in this field. I graduated in 1991 in Timmins and began working at the

Sudbury Memorial Hospital the following year. Throughout my career, I have worked on medicine, general surgery, the intensive care unit, and I am currently in the only emergency department at Health Sciences North. I have loved every aspect of my nursing career, even when I have had to deal with emotionally difficult situations, such as when we are saddened by an unexpected death. And, even with the risk of violence, like during the very frequent code whites, which is a violent person, I love nursing.

“I have never spoken up about how unfair nurses are treated until now.... I am 62 years old, and I hope to continue working for another three years, both because I am not ready to retire and to earn a better pension than is currently available to me.

“Nurses are definitely overworked and very underpaid. Bill 124 is insulting and demeaning; it is discouraging for myself and my colleagues to do the work we do—which is emotionally difficult and physically demanding, important work—and be offered a measly 0.9% raise. Wow, why even bother?”

“I was finally pushed over the edge, and I felt like I needed to speak up.... I would go on strike for what I believe in, to try to get better pay and better working conditions for myself and other nurses, but we cannot strike.

“Although management has tried everything, within reason, of course, to create incentives to keep nurses working, such as offering double time for any overtime we work, for example, we are always working short-staffed. We should not have to work overtime to earn a livelihood and decent pension.

“I believe rushing foreign nurses into Ontario is not a quick fix, and, while I do agree that it should be easier to start work here, I also believe that nurses who are already working should be respected and taken care of too. New graduates have an incentive to continue working, as after working for a specified amount of time and putting in so many hours, they can rise up the pay scale ladder. However, experienced nurses like myself have absolutely no incentive to continue working in these trying times.”

I want to put this letter into the record to show that the crisis in health care, the health human resources crisis we face, is serious. When we’re talking about 42,000 vacant jobs, this is serious. And when all the government is bringing forward is a motion that says we will “continue to build on the progress that we have made”—hmm.

This is a very small step. I have nothing against small steps. I have nothing against making it easier for the internationally trained, but even within the bill the only thing the bill talks about are things that are already there.

The College of Nurses has asked for regulatory changes to grant temporary licences. Those regulatory changes are things that the government has to do. They cannot do this without the government doing that. They’ve been asking for this for years. None of that is in the bill.

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Madam Speaker, it’s an honour to rise in the House today and speak on the motion that was put forth by my colleague the member from Ajax, and I want to thank the member for bringing forward this very, very important motion.

The contents of this motion really speak to the journey that new Canadians have here in Canada. Many people immigrate to Canada because they want to have a better life, and part of that immigration process is relying on those skills and those work experiences you have acquired in other countries. As someone who is from the Iranian community and immigrated from Iran, I know many community members who have a health background from Iran, or who have health and education backgrounds from other countries. They have work experience in other countries, and yet for several years now—the previous government was in power for 15 years. They did absolutely nothing to support new Canadians. They did absolutely nothing to make sure that those people who are immigrating to Canada based on their particular skills in the health sector—specifically the nursing sector. They did absolutely nothing to support these people, these Canadians, who are coming to Canada to build a better life for themselves.

So I want to thank my colleague for bringing this important motion because this really speaks to the heart of what our government has campaigned on and what our government is doing, and that is supporting the people of Ontario, getting Ontario back on track and focusing on our plan to stay open. This motion speaks to the fact that our government is taking a holistic approach to support health care and to fix health care—not just to support it but to fix it because, unfortunately, we all saw during the pandemic back in 2020 the cracks in the system that were left by 15 years of neglect and mismanagement by the previous government.

While opposition members criticized the member for Ajax for not doing more, my question to them is, where were they? Where were they for 15 years when the previous Liberal government neglected the health care system? Why are they now standing up and criticizing the member from Ajax who has brought forward such an important and critical motion?

This motion speaks to the heart of what it is to be a Canadian. We attract world-class people from around the world, and we are blessed to live in a free and democratic society here in Canada, and yet when people come here, there are barriers—barriers to allowing them to get meaningful employment. Our government has taken steps in the past and will continue to take steps moving forward, because we are a government for the people, and that means all people, Madam Speaker. That also means new Canadians. That also means people who are experienced in health care and who are facing financial barriers or economic barriers or educational barriers and cannot work in their field.

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Madam Speaker, I find it shameful that the opposition members would stand up and say that this motion isn’t

going to be helpful because not all of the people who are qualified would fill the gaps. Does that mean they're saying that they shouldn't do anything at all? This is just one step, Madam Speaker, and it is an important step, and it is a critical step. I'm glad that I'm speaking about this, and I'm glad to be supporting the member on this piece of legislation, so thank you for bringing this forward, to the member from Ajax. The work that you are doing for your constituents—I know they must be incredibly proud of you, and I can only imagine how thankful everyone in your riding of Ajax is that this is the first motion that you are bringing forward in your capacity as a member of provincial Parliament. Congratulations.

It is so important, it is so meaningful, and I'm so proud to speak to this today, because this is just one step in the whole package. This is just one part of the holistic approach that our government is taking to fixing health care, to supporting health care workers, to supporting patients and to making sure that Ontario stays open.

Because at the end of the day, Madam Speaker, the people of Ontario gave our government a supermajority. They supported us so much that there's not even enough room for all of us to sit on that side. I have to be on this side of the legislative chamber. That's how much support we have from the people of Ontario. And so I'm proud and honoured to be part of a government that supports the people of Ontario and supports fixing our health care system.

Thank you to the member from Ajax for bringing forward this motion. I'm proud to speak to it and I'm proud to support it.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member has two minutes to reply.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: I want to thank all the members who spoke in support of the motion—and even the opposition, because I do understand that they understand the spirit of this motion, and they support the idea that our internationally trained nurses need to be helped and for the barriers to be removed that we're facing in our health care system.

We want to speed up the accreditation process, expand the Supervised Practice Experience Partnership program and continue to reduce the financial barriers. That will mean more nurses. More nurses make it easier for the ambulances to off-load and get back to the road to serve our communities. More nurses mean more patients are receiving care. More nurses mean a stronger health care system.

More internationally trained nurses mean immigrants who have chosen Ontario as their home can now use the skills and expertise they bring with them to create a successful career, to support themselves and their families, contributing to the economic development of Ontario. Posting the amount of internationally accredited nurses, I think, creates transparency and accountability with the Ontario College of Nurses, and I call on the House for your support in passing this motion.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Ms. Barnes has moved private member's notice of motion number 6. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Pursuant to standing order 36, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

PUBLIC ORDER EMERGENCY COMMISSION

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Ottawa South has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Premier. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the member for Whitby may reply for up to five minutes.

Mr. John Fraser: I'm really looking forward to the response to my late show. Yes, I am dissatisfied with the Premier's answer to my question of last week, and it's kind of fitting that today the Premier is in court with government lawyers, fighting for privilege to not testify in front of the inquiry into the use of the Emergencies Act. It's interesting that we have a thousand people on the lawn who are talking—more than talking; we can hear them in here—about how this government and this Premier are actually trying to get around the courts while they're in court, by using the “notwithstanding” clause.

Nevertheless, last February, the citizens of Ottawa endured more than three weeks of an occupation. Women didn't feel safe walking to work. Families couldn't enjoy their neighbourhoods. Businesses were shuttered. Chemos were cancelled or postponed for children. Nurses couldn't get to work. And for two weeks—two weeks—the Premier of Ontario did nothing—nothing. Four days in, we couldn't even get someone from the Premier's office, while all this was going on, to write a statement—not a word, not a peep. When we did get a peep, the peep was really, “Hey, you folks, you should go home.” And then the next thing that we heard was from the Solicitor General: “There are 1,500 OPP officers on the streets of Ottawa.” And then we found out subsequently, and we heard in the testimony recently, there were only 50 or 60—50 or 60. That's a big difference.

So the Premier and the Solicitor General should be testifying in front of the inquiry. I will go even further to say that in that testimony, what the Premier should be saying is, “I didn't act. Here's why I didn't act for two weeks. It was the wrong thing to do. I should have done better. I apologize.” What's so hard about that? Other leaders who are testifying in front of the inquiry are saying that. Every leader in this circumstance knew they came up short. The most important thing, I think, is for people to be open and transparent.

Now, the Premier is using privilege, hoping for him—hopefully not—the courts will rule in favour of the

inquiry, from my perspective. There are three Premiers in the history of this province, that I can remember over the last 30 years, who, when they were called to testify before an inquiry, a committee, in court, didn't use privilege, and they didn't use privilege because they knew it was their job to do that. It was their responsibility. It was what they needed to do to build trust in government. That's their job. They didn't shirk their responsibility. By not testifying, the Premier is shirking his responsibility, his responsibility to build openness and trust with the citizens of Ottawa, especially. What's there to hide? Other leaders are testifying.

Two things: The Premier said, "I don't direct police." But I've been around here since this government was elected, and I do remember a time when a close friend of the Ontario Premier was being put forward by the Premier to be the commissioner of the OPP. That's a lot of direction.

And the last thing is, the Premier, in his answer—he was really quite animated—accused me of hiding in my basement. Here's what I want to say to the Premier: If the Premier came to my house and looked in my basement, he'd realize that that was physically impossible, because I have three children over 30 who have never come to pick up any of the stuff they've left there, some of them for a decade. If they're listening right now, that's a small hint.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker, and good evening. As the parliamentary assistant to Premier Ford, I'm pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the member from Ottawa South. As we have said all along, and as we have seen during the testimony to the Public Order Emergency Commission, this was a policing matter. What is apparent to everyone but, it seems, the member from Ottawa South, is that the federal government made the decision to invoke the federal Emergencies Act.

Now, Speaker, we're provided hundreds of documents, including cabinet documents, to assist the commission's inquiry. As you would expect, we're ensuring that the Deputy Minister of Transportation and the Deputy Solicitor General are made available to the Public Order Emergency Commission.

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It bears repeating, Speaker: Politicians do not direct the police. Politicians do not direct the police. This is a federal inquiry into the federal government's use of the federal Emergencies Act. From day one, for Ontario, this was a policing matter; it was not a political matter—not a political matter.

Top officials from the Ontario Provincial Police who were running the operation in conjunction with municipal police agencies and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police are testifying at the Public Order Emergency Commission.

Again, this is a federal inquiry into the federal government's decision to use the federal Emergencies Act. We will continue to assist the Public Order Emergency Commission as it investigates the federal government's use of the federal Emergencies Act.

I thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to respond to the member from Ottawa South.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next, the member for Scarborough Southwest has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

Ms. Doly Begum: I just want to pause for a moment. This is what workers sound like, solidarity sounds like. They're right outside.

To those of you who are watching and to those who will watch after, I just want to say that we stand with you in solidarity, and even though I'm in here, from here, all of us are with you. Thank you for everything that you're doing, for standing up for your rights. We will be there with you 100% of the way.

These few minutes that I have are also about essential workers, a term that we gave them throughout this pandemic because of how important they are, because of how necessary they are, for them to be in their workplaces. That's why, Speaker, I was dissatisfied with the answer, and not only dissatisfied with the answer from the Minister of Labour but also the lack of answer from the Premier, because I specifically asked this question after the Minister of Labour had failed to answer my question multiple times. Let me tell you, Speaker, why that is.

On April 29, 2021, I asked the exact same question to the Minister of Labour. I asked: Throughout the pandemic, we are calling them "essential workers" when referring to many workers who are from communities like mine in Scarborough or areas like Brampton, people who are marginalized—racialized communities, people who work minimum-wage jobs—who are stuck in low-wage policies and trying to make ends meet. A lot of these people are taking public transit, for example, exposing themselves to the risks, forced to go to work. I asked the exact same question. It was very simple: Just define what is essential work. Define "essential workplace." What does it mean? What are the criteria that are set to define essential work? Just simple criteria, Speaker—I'm not asking much.

I want to thank the reporter Sara Mojtahedzadeh as well as the workers and the many investigators and reporters who have talked about this and health care workers. Health care workers online took to the media to talk about this, because they just could not understand what essential work was as defined by this government, and let me tell you why. I was in this House talking about workers who were making chocolates, making makeup like foundation, lipstick and things like that. This investigation also reported that there were workers who were making floor tiles, bubble gum, jerry cans—just some of the examples. These were the workplaces they were forced to go into and work because they were identified as essential workers.

And guess what, Speaker? Even more than the hard-working, embattled health care workers, essential workers we've defined—more of them died during the pandemic. They lost their lives because they had no other choice. They had no option but to go to work—some of them made \$16, \$17 an hour—just so they could feed their families, they could pay the bills, and a lot of them died in doing so. The other thing that a lot of health care workers and community leaders pointed out is that some of these workers, when they came back to their communities from their workplaces, brought in COVID, and the reason why COVID spread so much is because of the lack of action and the policy failures of this government.

So yes, I'm dissatisfied. And I have no faith whatsoever that the parliamentary assistant will get up and give me a response that will actually define what essential work is. I will stand up and salute if they're able to give me the criteria that this government used in order to define what essential work was in Ontario throughout the pandemic. That policy failure, that policy decision was actually determining what these people's options were, and it was about life and death for them, which is why I'm dissatisfied. And it goes beyond that, because when the Minister of Labour of a province cannot do that, when the Minister of Labour and the Premier of our province cannot answer such a simple question as that, not only is it deplorable, disgraceful, shameful, but it is very dangerous, because you are the ones with the majority government, making the policies that are supposed to protect these workers.

I thank you for this time, Speaker, and I appreciate this—

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: Madam Speaker, the last two years have been extremely tough.

Today I rise in the House to speak about essential workers, who kept the lights on, kept food on the shelves and kept our province moving forward each and every day.

Workers are the backbone of this province's economy. We rely on them every day to make sure we can go about our day without interruption. This government stands shoulder to shoulder with those workers. That is why we have increased our investments in health and safety training for all workers in this province, including our essential workers.

Everyone deserves to come home safely at the end of a hard day's work. Injury should not be and will not be a cost of doing business in this province.

In our last mandate, our government hired 100 new health and safety inspectors to keep people safe on the job. Now Ontario has more than 500 field inspectors visiting workplaces across the province every day to keep our workers out of harm's way. Our health and safety inspectors have been performing proactive inspection blitzes to make sure that risks can be identified prior to a workplace injury occurring. This summer, for example, Ministry of Labour inspectors proactively blitzed tower crane work sites, and over 3,900 orders came out as a result, including 450 orders to halt work at these sites.

These types of inspections are necessary for preventing injuries and making sure that everyone is able to come home to their family at the end of a hard day's work.

Since our government took office, the government has made historic investments in the health and safety of workers. Last year alone, our government invested over \$96 million in health and safety initiatives and training to make sure that our workers are safe while on the job. That is an increase of over \$7.5 million since the government was formed in 2018.

Madam Speaker, our government is stepping up for our skilled trades, for example. That is why we're investing a historic \$1.5 billion over the next four years directly into the skilled trades. This investment is necessary. Why? Because, by 2025, one in five new job openings will be in the skilled trades, and Ontario will need over 100,000 workers in construction alone. The government created Skilled Trades Ontario for that very reason.

To the workers of our province and to everyone here—I want to assure that our government stands shoulder to shoulder with all workers, including the everyday heroes who perform essential work. We're going to continue to make the necessary investments in our workers, workplace safety and the skilled trades.

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Madam Speaker, we're going to continue our efforts to make sure Ontario is the best place in the world to live, work and raise a family. And we are by the side of our workers. Thank you.

SEXUAL ASSAULT

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next, the member for St. Catharines has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the government House leader. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock may reply for up to five minutes.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Yesterday, I made a point of dissatisfaction with the response from the government. I am well into my fifth year in this House and my second term, although it is, in fact, the very first time that I've requested a debate like this one. Why? It's not because the member from Markham—Stouffville responded to my question when it was directed to the Minister of Health. It's not because the response was vague. It's not because the response was a pivot from the issue, then spun on to what the government wants to talk about for the day.

It is because the response was entirely incoherent. The member opposite had kept referencing the Strengthening Post-secondary Institutions and Students Act, 2022, which has nothing—nothing—to do with the lack of staff for sexual assault kits in the hospitals. It has nothing—nothing—to do with dignity for survivors. It has nothing to do with survivors being turned away from our Niagara hospital response programs because they lack the funding to support locally.

It is fine if you pivot or spin or provide a non-answer. To be candid, I am accustomed to that. However, this is a serious question that comes at little, little cost to this government, and because of that demands a serious answer.

Will this government ensure that no survivor is ever turned away when they are seeking sexual assault evidence kits in Ontario? Will this government ensure hospitals can encourage nurses to do this work so all hospitals in Ontario have enough staff willing to support this program?

What does that mean? That means allowing hospitals to compensate health care workers properly to do the work—in reality, something they can't do because of Bill 124 from this government.

What does that mean? It means supporting Niagara Health's proposal for an additional \$183,000 to create mobile units in Niagara and ensure better coverage for their staff. That amount is a drop in the bucket for the ministry, and yet that amount might ensure no survivor is ever turned away, so that value is incalculable.

This is a government that prides themselves on justice, but their response yesterday makes it clear that they want justice so long as the justice does not cost them anything. If this government refuses to answer these questions again, the cost is clear: There will be no justice for the families or women.

My Niagara colleagues and I met with Niagara Health, and we heard that over a hundred survivors did not receive a sexual assault evidence kit within the last three years. Of that group, nearly 30% of them had been sent to Burlington from Niagara because we did not have the staff or the resources to serve them.

Niagara Health has the sexual assault evidence kits to help survivors, but they need support to ensure they have the trained staff to administer them.

This may sound like a platitude, but this is a non-partisan issue. And if making women's health and survivors' health a priority costs us \$183,000, then that is a drop in the bucket for the ministry that has the largest budget in the province. So I have three questions that deserve to receive a direct answer:

(1) Will this government approve the Niagara Health proposal for the additional \$183,000 in funding support to ensure survivors are supported in Niagara?

(2) Survivors being turned away to another hospital is catastrophic. Is this specifically a Niagara issue? And can this government confirm that this issue is not happening in any other region in Ontario?

And finally, (3): Last week, New Brunswick announced sweeping changes after a similar situation occurred in their province, when a survivor was turned away. After seeing systemic changes for the better in New Brunswick, we know that change is possible here in Ontario as well.

We are determined to work together and ensure support for survivors of sexual assault. Will this government address this problem of survivors being turned away?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock to reply.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I want to thank the member from St. Catharines for her passion in the fact that women who are survivors of sexual assault need to have all the assistance that we can possibly give them.

I know that the member from Ajax had just done a private member's bill which spoke about internationally trained nurses and accelerating their ability to work in the province of Ontario. I think this is going on not only in Ontario, but all across Canada, that we do need more nurses, and the fact that the member from Ajax has brought a private member's bill to get internationally trained nurses up to speed and able to work in the province of Ontario.

I sincerely thank the member for St. Catharines. This has been, I know, a long-standing issue. I have stood up for many women that have been victims, either through human trafficking or domestic violence etc. So the member from St. Catharines is correct: This is a non-partisan issue. I know the Minister of Health has really done an excellent job in working with the College of Nurses—and the College of Physicians and Surgeons, but in this respect I think the College of Nurses—to address how we can get more nurses into our health care system, which—

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I know. The member has a dollar figure over there. I think that you'll see collaboration. The Speaker in the chair is also the member from Ottawa–Vanier and I know she's very passionate about issues dealing with victims of human trafficking, which is also sexual assault. So I think that you'll find co-operation.

I know that the government does fund 37 hospital-based sexual assault and domestic violence treatment centres across Ontario. They provide comprehensive support to women, children and men who are survivors of sexual assault and/or domestic violence.

We do need more health care professionals specifically trained to deliver direct patient care to survivors of sexual or domestic assault through our emergency departments or expert medical, forensic and acute counselling services and follow-up care.

The Ministry of Health is engaged and provides \$3.8 million in base funding to the sexual assault and domestic violence treatment centres across Ontario, top-up funding sources for nursing and counselling and funds to the Ontario Network of Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Treatment Centres to provide coordination and training.

Is this ongoing? Yes, it is. Do we need more specially trained nurse? Yes, we do. Do we need to help our hospitals by getting them more nurses? Yes, we do. As I said before, the Minister of Health has already worked with the College of Nurses to get more nurses into our health care system. We need to make sure adequate numbers of nurses are trained, so I appreciate that, too. We owe the nurses out there in general a great big thank you. It has been a very tough time in the last few years and there are lots of ways that we are continuing to improve the situation of getting more nurses into our health care system and get the training.

I think I'm pretty genuine in the fact that we're going to continue to work to do that. I think the member across knows I can't commit to any dollar value at this point in time, but her question makes me happy, because it is a non-partisan situation and we can all do better. We are making steps and we are always willing to listen. We do not want survivors turned away. It is not just in Niagara region. I know that it happens everywhere across the province. We are very aware. We are taking a collaborative approach to trying to get more nurses involved and more nurses trained. I'm going to speak to the Speaker also because she has brought forward discussion points and private member's bills to that effect. I think that we can all continue to work together. We do not want survivors or victims left in any more vulnerable or hardship situations

that exist, and I'm very hopeful that you'll see more things coming forward.

I really do appreciate the member for St. Catharines, her passion for her area, listening for her hospitals and for standing up for her constituents. I thank you for that.

We aren't going anywhere for three and a half years, all of us here, so we'll continue to work on this issue. I thank you for the time and allowing me to speak to this issue specifically tonight. Thank you very much for that.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): There being no further matters to debate, pursuant to standing order 36(c), I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried.

This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1910.

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French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Fullerton, Hon. / L'hon. Merrilee (PC)	Kanata—Carleton	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
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Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
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Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
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Hsu, Ted (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
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Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
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McCarthy, Todd J. (PC)	Durham	
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McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York / Beaches—East York	
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Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Associate Minister of Housing / Ministre associé du Logement
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Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Mines / Ministre des Mines
Quinn, Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
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Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	President of the Treasury Board / Président du Conseil du Trésor
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Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
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Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
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Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
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
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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	