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CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Thursday 23 February 2023 / Jeudi 23 février 2023

St. Thomas-Central Elgin Boundary Adjustment

Act, 2023, Bill 63, Mr. Clark / Loi de 2023 sur la modification des limites territoriales entre St.

Thomas et Central Elgin, projet de loi 63, M. Clark

Mr. Deepak Anand.....	2339
MPP Jill Andrew.....	2341
Mr. Nolan Quinn.....	2342
Mr. Chris Glover.....	2342
Ms. Jess Dixon.....	2342
Miss Monique Taylor.....	2342
Mr. Mike Harris.....	2343
Mr. Mike Harris.....	2343
Mr. Peter Tabuns.....	2346
Mr. John Jordan.....	2346
Miss Monique Taylor.....	2346
Ms. Jess Dixon.....	2346
MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam.....	2347
Mr. Aris Babikian.....	2347
Second reading agreed to.....	2347

Your Health Act, 2023, Bill 60, Ms. Jones / Loi de 2023 concernant votre santé, projet de loi 60, Mme Jones

Mr. Ric Bresee.....	2348
Mr. Aris Babikian.....	2348
Mr. Billy Pang.....	2348
Mr. John Jordan.....	2349
Ms. Jessica Bell.....	2349
Mrs. Robin Martin.....	2351

MPP Jill Andrew.....	2352
Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy.....	2352
Mr. Chris Glover.....	2352
Second reading debate deemed adjourned.....	2352

Correction of record

Mr. Deepak Anand.....	2352
-----------------------	------

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS / AFFAIRES D'INTÉRÊT PUBLIC ÉMANANT DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

Protection from Coerced Debts Incurred in relation to Human Trafficking Act, 2023, Bill 41, Mme Collard; Mr. Glover; Mr. Schreiner; Ms. Scott / Loi de 2023 sur la protection contre les dettes contractées sous la contrainte dans un contexte de traite de personnes, projet de loi 41, Mme Collard; M. Glover; M. Schreiner; Mme Scott

Mme Lucille Collard.....	2353
Ms. Jess Dixon.....	2354
Mr. Chris Glover.....	2355
Mr. Stephen Blais.....	2356
Mr. Mike Schreiner.....	2357
Ms. Laurie Scott.....	2357
MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam.....	2358
Mme Lucille Collard.....	2358
Second reading agreed to.....	2358

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 23 février 2023

Report continued from volume A.

1620

ST. THOMAS-CENTRAL ELGIN
BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENT
ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023 SUR LA MODIFICATION
DES LIMITES TERRITORIALES ENTRE
ST. THOMAS ET CENTRAL ELGIN

Continuation of debate on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 63, An Act respecting the adjustment of the boundary between the City of St. Thomas and the Municipality of Central Elgin / Projet de loi 63, Loi concernant la modification des limites territoriales entre la cité de St. Thomas et la municipalité de Central Elgin.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Mississauga–Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: It's always a pleasure to rise in this House and talk about the important issues, what matters most to our Ontarians.

Before I start, I want to take a moment and thank the residents of Mississauga–Malton. I just want to say thank you for your trust. Thank you for your confidence in giving me an opportunity to be the voice of Mississauga–Malton right here in the province of Ontario.

Bill 63 is An Act respecting the adjustment of the boundary between the City of St. Thomas and the Municipality of Central Elgin. I just want to touch base on what we're doing and why we're doing it in this bill.

I want to start with something called a vicious cycle. A vicious cycle, as the name suggests—let's take a little example. If somebody is not feeling well, they stop eating. When they stop eating, their body becomes weaker. As their body becomes weaker, they feel more pain. One action leads to another in the same direction. There are negative vicious cycles and there are positive vicious cycles.

What I want to talk about is a vicious cycle that we saw in terms of the auto industry in the province of Ontario. The province of Ontario has always boasted that we are a champion of automotive in Canada. But I want to give you some of the data from 2003 to 2018. When we talk about what happened from 2003 to 2018, employment, production, investment, plant closures, market shares—everything went in a negative direction, and we saw that vicious cycle.

Time and again I talk about how I came to Canada on January 15, 2000. My first full-time job was at Novaquest, which is an automotive company. We were doing metal

finishing. I started as a lab technician. I do remember that around 2003, and after, we saw a spiral of reduction in the autos we were carrying. One of the key reasons was that it was becoming difficult for the auto manufacturers to keep up with the cost.

What was happening—simple mathematics, again: If you're doing business and if your cost is \$10 and your expenses are \$12, what choices do you have? Either you have to reduce the cost or you have to go somewhere else. I'll talk about the data in a minute.

Employment in the auto sector in Ontario declined by 25% between 2003 and 2018. The industry employed 142,000 workers in Ontario in 2003, and this number fell to 107,000 in 2018. Auto production in Ontario fell from three million vehicles in 2003 to around 2.2 million vehicles in 2018. You see a spiral down. Investment in the auto sector also declined. It fell from \$5.9 billion in 2003 to \$3.6 billion in 2018.

Well, several auto makers closed their Ontario-based plants. For example, in 2005 General Motors closed its truck plant in Oshawa, resulting in the loss of approximately 2,600 jobs. Ontario's share of North American auto production fell from 20% in 2003 to 16% in 2018. These indicators clearly suggest what we experienced between 2003 and 2018.

The Minister of Economic Development and Trade talked about one of the conversations which happened with Sergio Marchionne, who's very well respected in the auto industry. Back then the Premier was asking him, "We need more investment. We need more auto manufacturing," and his reply was very simple: "Look, this is not what I would call the cheapest place. You need to create the conditions to be competitive."

What was he talking about? He was talking about making sure that when your income is \$10, your expenses are not \$12. Your expenses have to be less than \$10. You can do it by offering to reduce the hydro rates, reducing red tape, reducing taxes—fixing the mess that was created.

That is exactly what I'm talking about: a vicious cycle. When you're not feeling well, you stop eating and you become even worse. The best way forward is to break that cycle. You take bold action. You push yourself. Eat soup, for example—easy to eat, doesn't hurt the body, but at least you get some power. When you get that energy, you're feeling better. When you're feeling better, you eat more, and you feel best. And as you're feeling best, you can come out of this illness.

In the same way, thankfully we have a government who broke this vicious cycle. We increased the rate of production, we created the jobs, we invested in the research and

development, and we actually increased the exports. Vehicle production in Ontario increased by 3.5% in 2019. This growth was driven by increased production at GM and Fiat Chrysler. We ensured the creation of new jobs. For example, in 2018 Toyota announced that they would invest \$1.4 billion in Ontario's operation, which would create 450 jobs; in 2019, another investment of \$1.4 billion to build electric vehicles in Ontario, which would create 500 new jobs. This is how we're creating a positive vicious cycle. We prioritized increasing our exporting power. In 2019 alone, the value of motor vehicles and parts exported from Ontario increased by 7.2% compared to the previous year.

1630

Overall, Madam Speaker, we can proudly say thanks to this government, thanks to the members of this side, and of course the hard-working Ontario workers. Together, we are able to show that the auto industry has started to increase.

Madam Speaker, we proved to Ontarians that when we take a job, we get it done and we will continue to get it done. We know that there is a labour shortage and, of course, I have to put this labour shortage piece in between because we know all of our members—every time I talk to them or they talk to the minister, they talk about how difficult it is for them to find people in their riding, to make sure that there are jobs and the jobs are filled with qualified people. And that is why, like all businesses and manufacturing projects, one of the biggest hurdles to investing is finding a suitable location for a potential manufacturing or production site.

We want to increase the job opportunities for Ontarians. To do that, we need to have more jobs. In order to create those jobs, when we go out, we say, "We have a wonderful place where you can come and invest"—and some of the examples. We talk about the vast, young and diverse population of Ontario, we talk about a stable and competitive business environment, and we talk about being tolerant, inclusive and connected.

When we talk about this, Madam Speaker, we see the numbers. When we see the numbers, the numbers are pretty clear. We are the second-largest automotive manufacturer in North America, we're the second-largest IT cluster in North America, we're the second-largest financial hub in North America, and the list goes on. Madam Speaker, all these investors, when they have a choice, look to Ontario as a choice of their preference. But we need to respect that. We need to be competitive. We can't just expect them to come and not do our homework, and that is what this Bill 63 is doing. We are doing our homework.

We want to make sure, when any of these investors come with a big investment to create jobs, to create prosperity, that they're going to look for two things. They're going to look for a project timeline which is definable, and the cost of development of shovel-ready production sites, so that they can come here and they do not have to spend time in finding—if they're able to find, they want to stabilize their production, and that's where the production starts and the prosperity starts.

That is why, Madam Speaker, the proposed legislation, the St. Thomas-Central Elgin Boundary Adjustment Act, is a crucial component of our capability and competitiveness in the labour market. It is a step forward in the direction of getting more good-paying jobs in the province of Ontario. We want to make sure there are better jobs and bigger paycheques for our Ontarians, and this is what we're doing. And we want to make sure that by doing this we're not just open for business, which we've been having as a slogan in the past, and then we said we want to be open for jobs. Now, we want to demonstrate to the world we're not only open for business, we're not only open for jobs; now, this province is actually not just open but ready for businesses to come and invest. The legislation proposed by Minister Clark is designed to strengthen this competitiveness by creating a new investment-ready mega-site in St. Thomas.

Madam Speaker, I'm just going to talk a little bit more about this, but I want to say one more thing. It's not that we're trying to do something different that we don't know about. We've seen, when it comes to the competition, these mega-projects are going to probably go look for different sites in the US. We want to make sure that we're competitive, that we can tell them that we're ready for this investment. I was actually in Hamilton, and Jennifer from the city of Hamilton said it so well. She said it's not about competition. When it comes to having these investments coming in, it is about collaboration, it is about making sure that what is the best place for their value—that they can achieve the best value for their investment. And what we're trying to do is to make sure that their costs are lower. By reducing the costs, by increasing the revenue, they can take the difference and invest back into Ontarians, and that is why it is important to make sure that we keep the costs down.

As we all talk about, we are in fierce competition. We want to make sure that what we saw in the last 15 years in the Liberal government—we saw 300,000 manufacturing jobs leave the province. By making sure, when we reduce the cost of doing business, which the minister talked about earlier, by reducing the cost of business by \$7 billion every year—again, going back to the analogy of vicious cycles—what we're doing is we're reducing the costs. When we reduce the costs, the businesses become competitive. When the businesses become competitive, they invest more into Ontario.

That is why we've seen—on one side, we look at it: 2003 to 2018, 300,000 jobs going. Now, in last four-plus years, we have seen 600,000 jobs coming in, more than what we had in 2018. And this is not a fluke, Madam Speaker. It is because of the policies of the leadership of Premier Ford. What we've done is we have reduced the costs and we have increased the competitiveness, and we have seen the result.

Our government's aim with this legislation is to jump ahead of the curve and anticipate challenges and find the solution. I heard somebody say, why are we doing it now? What is in there? What's the secret? Well, the secret is simple. When there is an investor looking for a site, if we

start working at that point in time, by the time we've finished the work, the investment will be gone. So rather than waiting for them to leave, we want to be ready to accept that. And this is what we're doing through this bill. Our province is striving to be an ideal place for large-scale projects and new businesses to come and open here and call Ontario home. As I said earlier, this is the bill which will make sure we'll tell the world. The bill announces our intent to be loud and clear that Ontario is ready for business.

Madam Speaker, we are revitalizing our auto sector, making it future-ready by building an end-to-end EV supply chain in Ontario. In the last two years, \$17 billion in investments have been agreed to be poured into the automotive and EV sectors. And we are getting ready. Not just for the sites; we're making sure we're ready for our workers, for the workforce. That's why we're investing a historic \$1.5 billion in skilled trades to make sure that we have the workforce ready to work and to deliver. Part of this push is 388 training programs backed by SDF, the Skills Development Fund, and these projects have helped more than 400,000 job seekers, taking up careers in in-demand industries.

In 2021, manufacturing accounted for almost 660,000 jobs in Ontario, more than 10% of the province's gross domestic product. I wish Mr. Sergio was here, that he would have seen what he said was the benefit of being competitive and showing and seeing the result of competitiveness together thanks to that advice, thanks to this government for acting on that advice and making sure that we have those results today.

Madam Speaker, I just want to quickly take a second. When I go across and I do look at people, one of the things that stood out, always, is the strength of our young people. I just want to take a moment to thank my OLIP intern—today is her last day—Esma Boztas. Esma, thank you for all your help. You've been amazing. Well, they always say one person's loss is a benefit to the other, so she'll be going to another MPP. I wish you the best of success. You will do well in your career.

Back to the bill, Madam Speaker: Over this past few years, Invest Ontario has worked tirelessly to attract large-scale, high-quality investments to help drive our economy. Its certified site program has created an inventory of locations and—somebody on the other side said, “Oh, we didn't even know about it.” The best way to know is to go to Ontario Newsroom. What you can get is all the information, whether it is talking about—some of the examples I can say: on February 8, “Ontario Names Newmark as Site Selector for Canada's First Job Site Challenge.” So this is not something happening overnight; we've been working on it. And if you go to February 22, there is a news release which says, “Ontario Strengthening Competitiveness to Attract Investment: Proposed Legislation Will Consolidate an Investment-Ready Mega Site in Southwestern Ontario.” So I highly encourage all Ontarians, including all the MPPs here, to subscribe to Ontario Newsroom. You will know what your government is doing to make sure that your province is growing and is a great place to live and thrive.

1640

Madam Speaker, in 2022, Ontario was number one in Site Selection magazine's Canadian competitiveness rankings, ahead of Saskatchewan and British Columbia. Among Canada's 10 largest cities—oh, my goodness—Mississauga is the only one that ranks number five or higher in industry size and concentration across seven sectors, including auto. I've been thinking, “Why did I move to Mississauga?” This is certifying that Mississauga is a great place. So if you guys are looking for investments, please remember Mississauga, too.

Finally, to conclude, the proposed legislation, the St. Thomas-Central Elgin Boundary Adjustment Act, 2023, would change the municipal boundary so that the site would be fully located in St. Thomas and reduce the red tape to help ensure the site is shovel-ready, as is required to attract large-scale manufacturing investments in today's global, competitive marketplace.

This is our government fulfilling our plan to build Ontario and lay the foundation for the province's long-term economic recovery by sending a strong signal to future potential investors that we are on a positive vicious cycle.

We want to make sure that when you come here, you have a government ready for business. You have a government who believes in making sure that the people of this province have bigger paycheques and better jobs. Ontario is serious about doing all it can to support investment in the province of Ontario.

Our economic vision is not just getting it done, but getting it done with everyone, for everyone, together. That is why I'm supporting this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): It's now time for questions.

MPP Jill Andrew: I'm glad to be able to lend my voice to the government Bill 63.

We've seen a history of this government abusing MZO and essentially using their power to approve questionable land usages—so I'm wondering why the speed on this particular bill. I'm wondering why it has been done so quickly, without thorough consultation. I know that this bill has bypassed the normal annexation processes described in part V of the Municipal Act—and I'm really just wondering why so fast, with less consultation. It's hard to trust this government when it comes to their land uses, based on the history of how they've used their MZO and their impact on our green spaces.

Mr. Deepak Anand: First of all, thank you to the member opposite for that question.

I can say this: For any investment—you're talking about the speed; sometimes, it's actually the opposite. If we do not react, if we wait—I said that in my remarks as well, and many other members already talked about this question. Sometimes if we wait to start doing something and we do not act timely, we will lose that investment. That is the reason we want to make sure that we have a mega job site ready and we do not lose to the competition and we do not lose this opportunity. That is why we want to make sure that rather than sitting, we act—proact—and

work to make sure that these investments can come to Ontario. We want to give a clear message to—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Question?

Mr. Nolan Quinn: One of the most common concerns I hear from my constituents, and I'm sure this is something that my colleagues on both sides of the House can relate to, is that they're worried about their futures. With inflation, the cost of living, speculation about a global recession and layoffs dominating headlines, the people of Ontario are worried about their jobs and are uncertain about the province's economic future.

Can the member expand on how this proposed legislation helps support Ontario's economy and secures jobs for workers?

Mr. Deepak Anand: I want to say thank you to the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry—is that correct? Perfect. Thank you for doing an incredible job. Thank you for that important question.

As you know, Ontario is in active discussions to secure more than \$20 billion in projects that are requiring large-scale sites ranging from 100 to 1,000—sometimes 1,500—acres of industrial land. Unfortunately, there is a critical shortage of shovel-ready sites, as we already know, needed to house these manufacturing and industrial projects.

As I said earlier, the reason we're doing this is we want to give a clear signal to the world: If you're looking for an investment, there's no place better than Ontario because we are, in Ontario, ready for your business.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. Chris Glover: I'm from Oshawa. We all want jobs. We want auto jobs to be located in Ontario. I understand as well as anybody in this room how important the auto sector is to our economy. The problem with this government is you're rushing through another bill. The last bill that you rushed through this House was Bill 28, which stripped education workers of their fundamental freedoms and their legal rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms using the “notwithstanding” clause, and then four days later you had to repeal that because you realized what a horrible mistake you'd made.

In the riding next door to me, in Toronto Centre, the demolition crews rolled in to destroy the foundry a year and a half ago. And the government also passed a bill on broadband, which was great, to expand broadband, but it also included paving over the Duffins wetland. This government has betrayed the trust—and you look at the greenbelt. In September, developers bought land that was protected by the greenbelt. Six weeks later this government brought in legislation to remove the greenbelt protections.

The question is, how can we in the opposition and how can the people of Ontario trust this government when they are rushing through legislation, when they haven't built up a record for that trust—to deserve that trust?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the member from Spadina–Fort York for the question. You talked about trust. Madam Speaker, we went to the people of Ontario on June 2, 2022, and the people of Ontario, with a resounding voice, said, “We trust you.” And you don't have to

look further, Madam Speaker. You can look around, and that's the answer.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Ms. Jess Dixon: It's certainly encouraging to hear about the ways our government is continuing to attract new investments in Ontario. We hear a lot about the talent present in Ontario: skilled people in the trades, people in STEM, entrepreneurs. We obviously have a great workforce here. I would ask if the member can expand a little bit on the type of investments that Ontario has attracted thanks to this edge that we have.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the member, my colleague from Kitchener South–Hespeler, for that important question. I was actually in your riding last weekend. I have to admit, I loved it, and I'm looking forward to coming back again.

Talking about the investments, there's been nearly \$2 billion in investments by global biomanufacturers, including Sanofi, Roche pharmaceuticals; \$17 billion in transformative investment by global automakers and suppliers of electric vehicles right here. If you name any big automotive, they're right here investing in Ontario, whether it's LG, GM, Honda, Ford, Umicore, Magna.

1650

Madam Speaker, we're leaving no stone unturned when it comes to attracting investments and companies in every sector. I again speak and say the same thing: If you're looking for an investment, there's no better place than Ontario, because we are ready for business.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm happy to have a little bit of input today on today's debate. But I want to start with voter suppression, with people not being happy with the outlook of government. That's why we see a supermajority government with 18% of the actual electorate voting for them. So it's a serious problem and not something that we want to see continued.

When we see bills being passed through so quickly, of course there are concerns. The people of Ontario have a lack of trust in governments these days, and we see that at every level of government. Is your government willing to ensure that there's a fulsome process? New Democrats have already said we will support this bill on second reading, because we also believe that jobs are important, and bringing good jobs to the township of St. Thomas, which is a very small community, is quite important, and making sure that those jobs are there and that we're doing our part to help that process along.

Can you guarantee us, as the official opposition, that your government will ensure a fulsome committee process to ensure that there is lots of opportunity for the public to be able to come to voice their concerns, if any, before third reading? So, can you tell me, will there be a full committee with lots of consultation—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Back to the member.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I just want to thank the member opposite for that question. I want to assure each and every Ontarian that we will make sure that this government will make sure that when a big investor is coming to Ontario and they're looking for mega job sites, it is ready for their investment. We will make sure it will be ready for them. If you're looking for an investment, there's no better place than Ontario, because we are ready for business.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Final question?

Mr. Mike Harris: The member touched a little bit on what has happened in Mississauga over the last few years and the investment that has been made there. Obviously, those are fantastic things for his community. I wonder if maybe he would just talk a little bit about what that could mean for the city of St. Thomas and the people of Elgin county and how the investments made in Mississauga have lifted up the people of Mississauga and what these types of investments in a small town, as the member opposite had mentioned, can mean to a community like St. Thomas.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): The member has 10 seconds.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Prosperity, prosperity and prosperity: That's what it will mean to the city of St. Thomas.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Nicely done.

Further debate?

Mr. Mike Harris: Listen, last on the docket, maybe, today but number one in our hearts, I think, is really what we're trying to achieve here.

Of course, it's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to participate in debate for second reading of Bill 63, as we've talked about, the St. Thomas-Central Elgin Boundary Adjustment Act, 2023. Before I begin my remarks, I would like to thank the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade and his team for the hard work they do every day to make sure Ontario is competitive with other jurisdictions around the world.

Opportunity may only knock once, Madam Speaker, and Ontario will be ready to open that door. We saw the effects of years of missed opportunities as the Liberal government—happily propped up by our friends across the aisle, the NDP—drove manufacturing out of this province. They may not have been driving the car off the cliff, but they were certainly happy to ride shotgun as off it went. As a result of this mismanagement, Ontario lost over 300,000 manufacturing jobs during the McGuinty-Wynne era. Of course, that means they undid all the work the Harris and Eves PC governments did to keep those jobs here in Ontario. Not only did Ontario lose jobs that were already here, but we also lost out on critical investments that could have been brought to this province.

Things had gotten so bad under Liberal leadership that industry experts continuously called them out.

I want to take a couple of moments here to look back at some comments that were made by the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters. In 2017, they released a report on Ontario's manufacturing future, and things looked pretty bleak: "To start with, Ontario has, for years,

been lagging the rest of the country in several critical areas—most notably in output and export growth. In 2017, the province was the worst performer in the country on both counts. Manufacturing sales growth was three times slower than the national average...." Can you imagine that? Ontario, the economic powerhouse of Canada—and dare I say, if we were a sovereign country we would be the 19th-largest GDP output, at a trillion dollars—was lagging behind the rest of the country in economic growth. Wrap your head around that for a second, colleagues. It's kind of crazy to think about. "Ontario had the dubious distinction of being the only province"—the only province in Canada—"to see manufactured goods exports fall that year," in 2017.

In their final budget, the Liberal government showed that they had not learned a thing. The industry remained unimpressed as the lame-duck Liberals were about to be shown the door. The CME, the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, said, "We remain concerned with the continued lack of focus on the declining investment competitiveness in the province...."

"This budget missed out on an opportunity."

Our government will not allow Ontario to miss those types of opportunities. When Premier Ford and our team were first elected in 2018—that's a year after these quotes—we got to work undoing the damage of Liberal neglect and started to make Ontario more competitive.

Let's compare the previous reactions of the CME to comments on our government's record. Here are a couple of quotes—this is from our first budget in 2019. This is roughly a year and a half, probably, after—you heard the previous quotes from 2017: "Ontario's overall strategy to drive manufacturing growth by focusing on the three pillars of reducing the cost of doing business, supporting innovation, and driving investment is the right approach." What a difference just a couple of years makes. Our government set the tone from day one—we will cut the cost of doing business and make Ontario a better place to invest.

After four years, we were re-elected with a larger mandate to continue this critical work. Once again, we sent a strong message that Ontario will remain the engine of manufacturing in Canada. Again, industry experts like the CME took notice: "Today's speech from the throne placed manufacturing at the core of the government of Ontario's economic agenda—exactly where it belongs." That's a bit of a shift from the tone from before that we heard.

Finally, fast-forward to their reaction to the fall economic statement of 2022: "The Ontario government's fall economic statement (FES) today signalled its continuing commitment to help build the province's manufacturing sector, reducing business and energy costs, and providing targeted relief for Ontarians as they battle historic inflation and a projected economic slowdown."

So, Madam Speaker, when it comes to making Ontario an attractive place to invest, two things are very clear: The Liberals and the NDP were happy to chase investment out of Ontario and oversaw historic decline. And the Ontario PCs are restoring investor and manufacturer confidence and are attracting historic investment.

That said, of course, we must continue this work, and this bill is another step towards that. Each level of government has a role to play to make sure we attract investment as we compete with jurisdictions around the world. The minister has made a clear case as to why Bill 63 is needed. There is no time to waste when it comes to securing major industrial investments that will employ generations—I want to be very clear: This isn't just about what's going to happen in the next five years or 10 years. These are generational transformations from communities that may not necessarily have this type of economic opportunity ever again, and that's why it is so critical to make sure that we are expeditious with this bill. I know that's been in a few of the comments that have come up earlier.

1700

But I'll be very clear: If we don't have a mega-site shovel-ready, this opportunity could go to another province; more likely, it could go to the States.

I just want to say that Ontario is, of course, in fierce competition with other jurisdictions when companies consider making large investments like this, in manufacturing, in industrial operations, including multi-billion dollar transformational projects.

Ontario is currently in contention, as I briefly mentioned, for several manufacturing investments that require large sites with very specific sets of requirements. A critical factor for securing new investment or expansion opportunities is having a suitable place to go, an industrial site where timing and associated costs are readily known and streamlined to make project timelines.

With close to 40 US jurisdictions offering some type of certified or mega-site program, it has become an expectation among potential investors that sites are shovel-ready for development.

Unfortunately, there is a critical shortage of these types of opportunities here in the province. Without immediate action, we risk losing the opportunity to compete for and win these transformative investments to other jurisdictions that have an inventory of fully serviced industrial parks that, again, are shovel-ready.

With a general shortage of quality industrial land, Ontario has to show that we're not just open for business; we have to show that we're ready for business, with investment-ready sites. Bill 63 continues in the spirit of the work that we have done across our first and second mandate already, and that is ensuring our province is competitive, not just in Canada but on a global scale. As I mentioned earlier, if we were our own country we would be—what was it?—the 19th-largest GDP output, just our lovely little province here in Ontario. We're ensuring that Ontario is open for businesses and jobs, and ready to welcome the next generation of innovative manufacturing and investment right here.

Ontario is a big province, but I can say that St. Thomas is not that far from my home in Kitchener–Conestoga. The proposed legislation, if passed, will bolster Ontario's competitiveness by establishing, as we discussed here, a new mega-site in St. Thomas. This initiative builds on our on-

going efforts to attract large-scale advanced manufacturing investments that have the potential to create hundreds, if not thousands, of jobs—in this case, in southwestern Ontario. This will have a spillover benefit to many communities in the region.

I just want to talk a little bit about how, as a representative from Waterloo region, I know how important large-scale manufacturing and investments are to the community. For example, my colleague from Kitchener South–Hespeler will know this name well: ATS automation and tooling systems, an industry-leading automation solutions provider that is based in Cambridge. Not to get too technical on what they do, but essentially, to give a little bit of background, they make tooling systems. These are automated systems for medical devices, pharmaceuticals, telecommunications, semiconductors, fibre optics, automotive, computers, solar energy and, of course, many, many more.

As of 2018, they have designed and built 23,000—that's pretty staggering—automation systems. ATS employs about 4,200 people worldwide and has 20 facilities, of course, across North America, Asia and Europe. Hundreds of those jobs are based right here in Ontario, in quite a large facility that is located just off Highway 8 and Fountain Street in Waterloo region.

ATS is actually not far from the brand new skilled trades campus of Conestoga College as well, which I want to touch a little bit on shortly, and you'll see how these kind of play in together.

Not only that, but ATS has been in operation since 1978. That's 44 years of providing jobs, innovation, growth and progress in the region of Waterloo and beyond. I think that's so important when we talk about generational opportunities—44 years. My colleague here is from St. Thomas. That's amazing opportunities for the people in and around Elgin–Middlesex–London. These are the type of cornerstone investments that communities, as I've said, are built upon, and all that started right here in Ontario, in my backyard, and that model, of course, can work in St. Thomas. We can see that kind of growth and innovation coming to Ontario, bolstering our job market and economy and benefiting communities and families in and around St. Thomas for generations to come.

Speaker, in 2021, manufacturing accounted for almost 660,000 jobs in Ontario and more than 10% of the province's gross domestic product. Ontario is an ideal destination for advanced manufacturing sectors such as aerospace, medical devices, pharmaceuticals, agri-food, information technology and, of course, the automotive sector.

I want to loop back in quickly and just talk a little more about Conestoga College. I think it's pertinent to the point I'm trying to make. In the early months of 2020—which seems like a lifetime ago, Madam Speaker—I had the pleasure of announcing a whopping \$9.2 million in funding to help create over 6,000 apprenticeship spaces at Conestoga College. This is important to remember, because as we move forward and we have these large-scale investments and these larger manufacturing facilities, we need people in the skilled trades to work those jobs. So it

really makes sense, especially in southwestern Ontario, where we have a lot of available land and, of course, good proximity to highways, roads, rail. These are the kind of areas where these large-scale investments typically are going to be made, so it's great to be able to have people from our communities here be trained locally at home and then go and work in those sectors.

I was actually there not too long ago with the Minister of Finance. We were holding some pre-budget consultations, and we had an opportunity to tour around and actually see some of the students at work and see what they were learning. The minister actually had an opportunity to do a little bit of soldering and welding. It was kind of fun to watch him do, and if he's watching now, Peter, you did a pretty good job, I'm not going to lie. You did a little too much flux and it got a little smoky, but it wasn't too bad. But it was really great to see what those folks are—

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Harris: Yes, not this Peter. I was looking at the camera. It's a different Peter.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: No problem.

Mr. Mike Harris: Hey, if you ever want to come down to Conestoga College, you're more than welcome anytime. We'd love to show you around.

Speaker, I digressed a little bit here. Listen, the careers in the skilled trades are exciting and quite lucrative, and we need more people to understand the opportunities that are out there. I can't imagine that anyone would disagree that we are all better off when labour, business and government work together to meet growing industry needs.

I'm working hard to make sure Waterloo region is ready to meet those needs, and with this legislation, communities like St. Thomas will be ready too. Our government has taken strides to invest in the training of a new generation of skilled workers to fill the jobs of tomorrow. As I was saying, Madam Speaker, we want to ensure that businesses continue to set up shop so that these students will have a place to work in the future. It's clear: Setting the right conditions for significant investment to come to the province is critical and time is of the essence. Economic development involves balancing provincial interests and policy considerations such as supporting a strong economy while effectively managing resources.

A balanced approach to continuing Ontario's development is a key focus of our government. The St. Thomas site which has been put forward by the municipality is uniquely suitable for a major industrial site, some of which is already planned and zoned as employment lands and is adjacent to the existing urban area. The site in St. Thomas is considered a highly attractive mega-site. In fact, it has been identified as one of the few potential future mega-sites in the province just because of its size, Madam Speaker. Its key features include, of course, a large acreage, proximity to major transit and serviceability for electricity, gas, water and waste water. When selecting a site, a wide range of factors are considered, including, of course, key attributes needed such as access to major transportation networks and services.

This site is located along the municipal boundary between the city of St. Thomas and the municipality of Central Elgin, a lower-tier municipality within Elgin county. So what does that mean, Madam Speaker? This is kind of the crux as to why we're here this afternoon debating this. As the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing noted, that means the permitting and approvals process gets a little bit complicated. It would involve three municipalities: Elgin county, the municipality of Central Elgin and, of course, the city of St. Thomas. Long story short, Madam Speaker, it's a lot of extra red tape.

1710

The premise of this bill is simple and makes common sense: Changing the municipal boundary so that the whole site is within the jurisdiction of the city of St. Thomas would make the site improvements and construction faster and more efficient. Investors, of course, would still need necessary approvals and permits like site preparation, infrastructure upgrades, planning approvals, building permits and fire protection enhancements; they would simply only need to do this once, instead of three times with each different municipality.

When we talk about common sense, I have to assume sometimes the opposition might be a little bit upset, but it does seem like they're buying into this, and I do appreciate the fact that they have said that they are ready to support this bill. Fortunately, our government was sent to this House by the people of the province to get things done. We will not allow Ontario to miss out on massive investments that will provide jobs to communities for generations.

Imagine the region of Waterloo if the ATS plant was never built 44 years ago, during a PC government. Imagine the town of Oakville if the Ford plant was never built—Madam Speaker, get this—under a PC government. Imagine if the city of Oshawa didn't have the General Motors plant. Colleagues, when was it built? Under a PC government. These are exactly the types of community-building investments Ontario can—

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Nobody said it.

Mr. Mike Harris: It's because they're all sleeping. It's Thursday afternoon.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It's so sad. I was looking forward to it.

Mr. Mike Harris: Do you want to try it again? When were these projects built, colleagues?

Interjections.

Mr. Mike Harris: Under a PC government. Thank you very much. Here we go. Well, they certainly weren't built under a Bob Rae government, that's for sure, because I'm pretty sure Bob Rae had to ask people to take a holiday because he couldn't afford to pay people. That's unfortunate.

But listen, as we get a little refocused here—we've only got a minute and 10 seconds left—I really just want to say how great a project like what potentially could be coming to St. Thomas and southwestern Ontario—what it means. We've got a large auto manufacturer, Toyota, in Waterloo region that provides tens of thousands of jobs to folks not

just from Waterloo region but all across southwestern Ontario. It's phenomenal to see potential investments coming into the community. There's a Magna facility, I believe, in St. Thomas as well, which provides many, many jobs to the community. It's just fantastic to see Ontario really back on the right path.

We lost 15,000 manufacturing jobs under the Liberals in Waterloo region, and it really is too bad. A lot of those jobs went to the US, because they were just more competitive. So getting our energy market under control has been huge. I want to thank the Minister of Energy for all the work that he has done; of course, our Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, who has done a fantastic job of bringing billions of dollars of investment into this province; and of course the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, for really taking the initiative to understand what needs to be done.

I'm very proud to stand here and support this bill, Madam Speaker. Thankfully, I think we're done for the day.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): It's now time for questions. I recognize the member for Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Why, thank you, Speaker. I appreciate that.

My colleague from Hamilton Mountain, in putting a question to the previous speaker, asked if there will be fulsome consultation and committee hearings in the St. Thomas area as part of the process of reviewing this bill before third reading. She didn't get an answer. Can you give us one?

Mr. Mike Harris: I think we've been pretty clear: We need to be able to move this bill through the process as quickly as we can, but that doesn't mean that there won't be consultation that's going to happen along the way. I don't want to presume to know exactly what that's going to look like, but I suspect that we'll have more to come as this bill works its way through the Legislature, and we'll see what we have in the future.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. John Jordan: Thank you to the member from Kitchener–Conestoga for putting things in perspective, back to looking at our history and the success of this government since 2018 in building this economy.

This bill is just one example of how the government continues implementing its ambitious plan to build Ontario's economy. Can the member elaborate on the other efforts the government is making to build the economy across Ontario?

Mr. Mike Harris: Absolutely. I think we've been very clear. We're making large-scale investments in the automotive sector, especially around electric vehicles, looking at the way that we can help stimulate—for example, new battery plants could be built here, providing fantastic jobs to people across the province, or unlocking the potential of the Ring of Fire, where we can actually have critical minerals that go into a lot of these components in electric vehicles mined here in Ontario, refined here in Ontario and ultimately installed into a vehicle here in Ontario.

There are, quite frankly, too many things to list; we don't really have enough time. I could eat up the whole seven minutes if the opposition wanted to continue down this vein. I doubt they will, but there are so many great things happening here in the province, and I'm very excited to see what the next three years have in store.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Miss Monique Taylor: I will try again. I know my colleague just asked the question about the committee process. The member talked about consultation. That is the whole part of the entire process when we pass legislation through here at Queen's Park, to have the first reading, second reading, committee, third reading, because that allows for the public to be able to come forward to their House and the Ontario Legislature to have their say. There are two communities that are affected by this. Making sure that people have that opportunity to have a say at the committee process is truly important.

I know, as New Democrats, we have already said we're supporting this at second reading. We are still waiting for our briefing, so if the member opposite has any pull over there at the ministry, maybe he can rush our briefing so that we have a full opportunity to hear about the bill also. But can he please tell us whether there will be a committee process for the people of St. Thomas and Elgin-Middlesex?

Mr. Mike Harris: I'm surprised that the member would want me to go and influence the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to try and move something forward in an expeditious manner, because that's where we're trying to head with this bill. We want to make sure that we don't miss out on a fantastic opportunity to have potentially tens of thousands of jobs available in the community of St. Thomas, in Elgin county. We want to make sure that we're doing the right thing for the people of Ontario. That's why they elected us to an even bigger majority government in June, and we'll continue down this path. I thank her very much for the question.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Ms. Jess Dixon: Of course, I come from the same wonderful Waterloo region which benefits so much from a very strong manufacturing sector. St. Thomas, of course, suffered losses with the Sterling and the Ford plants. I wonder if the member could just expand a little bit, particularly based off our experience of being from Waterloo region, about what this could mean for the community of St. Thomas.

Mr. Mike Harris: We've seen when you have large-scale manufacturing come to a community—we'll use Toyota as an example. There are over 10,000 people employed by Toyota proper, and then you have multiple, multiple jobs that are spun off from that in a lot of the component manufacturers. Toyota itself isn't necessarily manufacturing all the pieces that go into their vehicles; they're coming from tier-two and tier-three auto parts suppliers. When you take Waterloo region as a whole, when you look at some of the folks a little bit more spread

out in Woodstock and Guelph, you're talking about hundreds of thousands of jobs that ultimately will be coming from whatever is being looked at, coming to a site that potentially could be up to 1,000 acres.

There's fantastic economic opportunity. These are good-paying jobs that come with fantastic benefits and pensions. I wish the people of St. Thomas the best of luck as we go through this process, because ultimately it's very exciting, especially for a community that has had a little—we'll say maybe some economic uncertainty over the last 10 to 15 years. This is a great opportunity to give them a really big boost and a leg-up as we move forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

1720

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: My question, through you to the member across, is really around process. I think what I've seen so far is that we've got —maybe I should start off with what I haven't seen. There has been no disclosure of a business case. We haven't seen any land use planning rationale. We haven't seen any third-party review of Newmark's work. We haven't seen any disclosures of environmental attributes or, perhaps, impacts.

I'm interested in knowing how will the local community actually understand what it is that is before us as a vote, when all that information is missing from the House today, and whether or not you'll commit to actually bringing the committee in terms of a travelling committee, similar to the finance committee, where the local communities can be convened to come out to actually give you your feedback as required locally, but at the same time you can speak to them directly and present the case that you're trying to present to us, albeit lacking information.

Mr. Mike Harris: Listen, Madam Speaker, one thing I did mention as we were going through some of the remarks here this afternoon is, really, this is just getting a site ready for what is to come. There's still the permitting process. There's still environmental assessment. There's still consultation. There's still all of those boxes that need to be checked before said manufacturing facility would be able to open its doors.

Again, I don't want to presume, but all of these things still need to be done. So I think it's not unfair to say that we're a little bit early in that process, but, ultimately, there is a lot of work still behind the scenes, and after just when you look at zoning and bringing this chunk of land into St. Thomas's boundaries rather than having it sit with the county, this is really the first step at kicking things off. There's a lot that needs to be done after this, and I, again, look forward to seeing what the results will be. Hopefully we're able to attract this company here to the province to make sure that we're able to provide good jobs for the people of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you to the member for the in-depth presentation. Can the member explain how this legislation, if passed, will attract investment to Ontario that would have gone other places, to the south or other regions?

Mr. Mike Harris: Absolutely. And thank you to the member for Scarborough—Agincourt. I think he brings up a very important question, because we have seen this happen time and time and time again in the province, where we have seen jurisdictions like Kentucky, Tennessee, Indiana, Ohio—even Quebec, colleagues, even here in Canada. We have seen businesses, organizations that want to have a footprint in North America, want to retool, want to re-invest—and there have been some fantastic incentives, there have been large-enough acreages, there has just been the right mix of services and people to work the jobs in those communities, and we have lost out time and time again.

We won't do that anymore, Madam Speaker. We want to be ready; we want to make sure that we have land available. We want to make sure—as I talked about with Conestoga College—that we have people who are trained as millwrights, plumbers, tool and die manufacturers—people ready to go into those good-paying jobs so that we're able to attract that investment here to the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate?

Mr. Clark has moved second reading of Bill 63, An Act respecting the adjustment of the boundary between the City of St. Thomas and the Municipality of Central Elgin.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?
Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): To the government, then: Is this going to be ordered for third reading or is this going to committee?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): The decision is that I'm ordering it for third reading.

Interjection: What?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further business?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Orders of the day?

YOUR HEALTH ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023

CONCERNANT VOTRE SANTÉ

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 22, 2023, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 60, An Act to amend and enact various Acts with respect to the health system / Projet de loi 60, Loi visant à modifier et à édicter diverses lois en ce qui concerne le système de santé.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): We left off on questions and responses on the speech by the member for Richmond Hill and the member for Mississauga—Malton.

I recognize the member for Hastings–Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Ric Bresee: Going back to the debate, I appreciate the fact that this is a return to a prior speech. With that, I would ask that the member would provide us with a refresher. Can the member tell us how this Your Health plan will expand access for Ontarians?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I'm sorry, I'll have to ask the member to repeat what he said. I was interrupted.

Mr. Ric Bresee: Thank you again, Madam Speaker—
Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I don't want to hear further comments. I've ruled; let's move on. I'd like to hear the member repeat what he said. If I hear further comments, we will—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I do not want to hear more comments. I made a ruling; it will stand. Would the member please continue?

Mr. Ric Bresee: Thank you again, Madam Speaker. Given that this is bringing us back to the previous debate and the speech that was made yesterday, can this member please tell us how the Your Health plan will expand access to health care for Ontarians?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Mississauga–Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to my colleague from Hastings–Lennox and Addington for that important question. Time and again, when we talk about Ontarians and about their health, it is very clear: Health and well-being—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Excuse me. I would withdraw that comment.

MPP Jill Andrew: Which one, “playing politics”?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I'm warning the member.

MPP Jill Andrew: Withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Please stand.

MPP Jill Andrew: Withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I apologize. Please continue.

Mr. Deepak Anand: It will take a second to recollect, Madam Speaker, I apologize.

Madam Speaker, what I was talking about—this government believes that the health and well-being of Ontarians is a top priority. When it comes to our health, the status quo is no longer acceptable. In my remarks, I talked about the wait time for specialist appointments of 8.8 weeks; CT scans, 5.5 weeks; MRIs, 11.5 weeks; and the list goes on.

1730

That is why our government is taking steps to eliminate surgical backlogs and reduce wait times for publicly funded surgeries and procedures. The plan will add 14,000 more OHIP-insured cataract surgeries every year; expand

community-based clinics to perform more surgeries, MRIs, CT imaging; and introduce legislation to expand surgeries for hip and knee—clinic-based—by 2024.

Madam Speaker, we want to make sure that Ontarians have health care when they need it, paid by their OHIP card.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. Aris Babikian: Can the honourable member tell this House what our government is doing to protect Ontarians from extra billing?

Mr. Deepak Anand: I want to say thank you to my colleague from Scarborough–Agincourt for that important question, because Ontarians want to know the same. They want to know that we are expanding oversight and patient protection when it comes to their health.

Integrated community health services centres will now have to post any uninsured charges before—online and in person. Every community surgical and diagnostic centre must have a process for receiving and responding to patient complaints. Patients cannot be denied access to treatment if they do not purchase uninsured services.

I want to assure Ontarians that your government is here to provide you with service when you need it.

Ontarians will continue to pay for health care with their OHIP card and never with their credit card.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Questions?

Mr. Billy Pang: The Surgical Recovery Strategy continues to support hospitals to increase scheduled surgeries and procedures as well as appropriate diagnostic imaging services, with a focus on the areas with the greatest reduction in services due to the pandemic.

Can the member tell this House more about what the government is doing to expand surgeries and procedures in hospitals?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thanks again to my colleague for that wonderful question. I know he is doing an incredible job for his residents—a big round of applause.

Madam Speaker, we firmly believe that in order to increase the capacity for a strong and resilient health care system, we have to invest. That is why the government is investing \$300 million in 2023 as part of the province's Surgical Recovery Strategy, bringing the total investment to roughly \$880 million since the start of the pandemic. This will increase surgeries across the province and support additional hours of MRI and CT diagnostic imaging scans. The surgical procedures delivered in the community will be non-urgent, low-risk and minimally invasive, and in addition to shortening the wait times, this will allow hospitals to focus their efforts and resources on more complex and high-risk surgeries.

We want to make sure there is service available for Ontarians, and we want to make sure it is available when they need it.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Questions?

Mr. John Jordan: Can the member tell this House what our government is doing to expand our health human resources and to ensure health care workers are not moving out of our hospitals?

Interjection: Great question.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Great question, as said by the PA for the Minister of Health—a great, incredible person who's doing an incredible job.

I want to say thank you to our front-line workers and I want to say thank you to our nurses for doing an incredible job and supporting us during the pandemic.

You hit it right, talking about the health care workers. Human resources: Our government has the largest health care recruiting and training initiative in the province of Ontario. We want to make sure that there are the nurses available. Building on 20,000 new nurses registered to work in the province last year, our government is investing in a range of initiatives to track, train and retain more nurses and get them into the system sooner. We are going to make sure there are investments made so that we have nurses in the health care sector to support—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate? I recognize the member for—

Ms. Jessica Bell: I think it's questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): No, it's further debate. Further debate?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Questions are over. Further debate?

Ms. Jessica Bell: So I am speaking to Bill 60, which is the Integrated Community Health Services Centres Act. We received the bill on Tuesday. The bill was introduced, and it is an extremely concerning bill.

The reason why it is an extremely concerning bill is because it moves forward with a plan to expand the delivery of for-profit surgery in Ontario when we know that for-profit surgery will not address the health care shortage, the staffing shortage that we have in our hospitals. It will not reduce the surgery wait-lists that we have. It will not improve the quality of care that young people, children have, that seniors have, that adults have.

What it will do is it will make it easier for investors and companies in Canada and in the United States to profit from Ontarians, because we have seen time and time again when independent, for-profit facilities set up shop in the United States and in Canada and in Ontario that there is additional billing that takes place. We see this with Shouldice. We see this with other for-profit delivery centres. When an individual walks in with the goal of getting their necessary surgery—maybe it's cataracts; maybe it's a hernia—they walk out with the surgery, which will be OHIP-covered, but then with a bill that needs to be paid by someone, because there are always extra costs.

There are additional stays. In the case of Shouldice, you stay three days. That needs to be paid for. It's paid for by an insurer, and it's also paid for by the individual. And when we're talking about insurance, ultimately, it is taxpayers who pay for that too, because employers pay, and it comes out of workers' money as well. So there are additional costs, and it's Ontarians who pay.

The bill is significant. It is not a small bill. And when I read the summary of the bill, the biggest thing I noticed

was that it really opens the door for many decisions to be made about our health care sector through regulation by the Minister of Health directly, and it really loosens the kind of regulations and oversight that people have when they walk into a for-profit delivery to receive care. I am concerned about the quality of the health care outcomes, concerned about the patient safety that someone will receive when they walk into these for-profit facilities, given that the oversight will be less than what you get when you go into a hospital to get that same kind of care.

The reason why this bill is particularly concerning to me is that I have had the opportunity to live in two countries that have used a two-tier system of health care and a for-profit model of health care. When I was a teenager in Australia, we had a Conservative government that decided to move forward with a two-tier system of health care. You could continue to stay in the public health care system, or you could choose to move in to a for-profit model, where you paid extra insurance and you could have access to for-profit hospitals. What I found over time is that the costs that individuals incurred when they went to the family doctor, when they went to a for-profit facility, increased over time. I actually took a look at what the health care system is like in Australia and in Victoria, which is where I grew up, just recently, a few days ago, after this bill was introduced, I noticed that the majority of family doctors in Victoria now charge extra just to have an individual come in and use their services—the majority of them do.

1740

The reason why I bring this up as an example is because what makes me very nervous about this bill is that it opens up the door for more for-profit delivery of surgeries, and then that could open up the door for more for-profit delivery of other services that we currently access with our OHIP card. That's extremely concerning.

I've also seen the situation where you go full throttle into a privatized, for-profit delivery system for health care, in the United States. I lived there for many years. It was shocking to me to see the kind of health outcomes and the quality of care that you get. If you work for an employer and you lose your job, your health care is tied to your employer and that's it; you've got no health care. If you do not have access to insurance, which many people in Ontario do not have, then your ability to access health care, to access surgeries, to access a family doctor is limited.

My fear when I see this system, this plan to move into a two-tier model where those who can pay can go to the front of the queue, move to a wait-list that is shorter and pay extra to get access to some medical facilities—that means that everyone else who doesn't have access to insurance has to wait longer because they have to rely on the public health care system, on public hospitals, on the ever-growing wait-list. They have to wait even longer for that, and I'm very concerned about what that means for equity and fairness.

People who are doing okay, maybe this system will work for them. But for everyone else, they're going to

struggle: young people, kids who rely on their parents, seniors on fixed incomes, people with health challenges—

Interjection.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Yes, people with health challenges, people with chronic medical conditions, who are already spending a lot of money in our health care system right now, who pay extra for fees, who pay extra for medication—this will lead to additional fees.

Yesterday, we organized a rally. We organized it outside Toronto General. We organized it with health care workers, with nurses, with personal support workers, with residents who are very concerned about what this bill could mean for the state of medicare. I had the privilege of hearing the MPP for Nickel Belt, France Gélinas, come to speak. She knows the health care system in Ontario extremely well, and she expressed deep concern with what this bill could mean to medicare, what this could mean to our OHIP system in Ontario. And she reminded the crowd and she reminded us that the NDP and Canada—now, Canada—is a party and a country that has universal public health care. Tommy Douglas, in Saskatchewan, and ultimately, federally, brought universal public health care into Canada. It is fundamental to who we are as a party and it is fundamental to who we are as Canadians. It is very concerning to see this government make a decision to undo some of these protections that provide a basic standard of health care to everyone. You're undermining that, and I'm very concerned about what this could mean for the future.

I also heard the minister speak and our leader speak about the safety net, the patient safety protections that are not even written yet. They don't exist yet. I'm very concerned about that, because when people walk into a for-profit facility, they're putting their life, they're putting their health in the hands of individuals, and they need some kind of protections to ensure that they get good-quality health care. We get calls from people who are concerned about family doctors and the care that they receive. We get calls about the care that people get in public hospitals. They want recourse, and there are processes in place for these people to get recourse under the public health care system. I am very concerned about what is going to happen in situations where those kinds of recourses don't exist. I don't see that here, and I'm very concerned about that.

I am also concerned because we have seen the impact of for-profit health care delivery already in Ontario. We have seen that in our long-term-care-home sector, where under Mike Harris, the former Premier, we moved to a system of having for-profit delivery of home care and especially of long-term-care-home services. What we have seen with COVID during the pandemic—and before and after—is that the quality of care you get in a for-profit long-term-care home is not as good as the quality of care that you get in a non-profit long-term-care home and in a public long-term-care home. The statistics were very clear. The Ontario Health Coalition did a lot of tracking of this data, and they showed it very clearly: You were more likely to get sick, you were more likely to get COVID, you were more likely to have staffing shortages, you were

more likely to die if you were living in a long-term-care home. That is extremely concerning.

We have for-profit long-term-care homes in our riding, and it has been shocking to me to see situations where there has been just one personal support worker on a floor, when I have read reports and I have seen a resident die because there weren't enough people overseeing them eating dinner, so they choked on their own food and died. And there was no real recourse for that—no one lost their licence, no one was fired. What I fear is that what has happened and what continues to happen in the for-profit long-term-care-home sector could be the future in a for-profit private delivery of surgeries model that this government is looking at bringing into Ontario. Because it will be many of the same players.

When a company goes into Ontario with the goal of making a profit of 15%, 20% a year, they need to make that profit somewhere, and my fear is that they are going to make that profit from people who are sick, people who don't have a lot of money but who are desperate and who will pay anything to get better. They will be charged extra fees, maybe for an extra day where they stay, maybe for extra medication that they didn't even ask for, maybe for all these extra services they didn't know about, and they'll walk out with a bill that they wouldn't have had to pay if they had that same surgery done in a hospital. That is very concerning to me.

I also fear that what is also going to be cut is patient safety and also the wages that health care workers are going to be paid, especially cleaners, personal support workers, human resources staff, support staff, finance staff, nurses. I'm very concerned about what this will mean for them too, because that is not what they need right now.

What also deeply frustrates me about this bill is that we know that this is going to do nothing to address the health care crisis we have right now in Ontario. For-profit delivery of surgeries and establishing for-profit clinics are not going to do anything to address the staffing shortages that we are experiencing in hospitals all across Ontario. It is not going to do anything to address the closing of emergency rooms—the shuttering of emergency rooms in towns and cities all across Ontario. I have never seen anything like that ever in Ontario, but it's happening under this government. There's nothing about bringing in for-profit surgery delivery that is going to address those crises that we have.

What I was hoping to see, and what we are calling on this government to do, is to bring in a better plan to address the health care system that we have in our universal public health care system, which means increasing staffing in hospitals. It means increasing access to a family doctor. There are many people in Ontario who don't have access to a family doctor. There are many people in Ontario who don't have access to a family doctor. They'll call all the family doctors in the area, and they cannot get a family doctor, and they can't even get on a wait-list. They'll say, "Sorry. Our wait-list is full. Call back in six months, and

we might have a spot for you on our wait-list.” There’s nothing in this bill that’s going to address that.

1750

There’s nothing in this bill that’s going to be focusing on actually increasing the wages of personal support workers, of registered nurses, of RPNs—the people who are leaving our health care system in droves because they can’t take it anymore, because they’re not getting vacation time, they’re not getting overtime. They’re working with patient ratios that are far too high for them to deliver the quality of care that they know they need to deliver at. They’re stressed out. They’re burnt out. They’re leaving. Bringing in for-profit surgery delivery is not going to be doing anything to address that issue, which means that our public health care system is going to continue to suffer. It means that our wait-list for surgeries is going to continue to grow. It means people are going to continue to get sick and die preventable deaths. And I’m very, very concerned about that.

What I am asking this government to do is to go back to the drawing board. This bill is a terrible bill. There’s nothing in this bill that makes sense. Bringing in for-profit surgery delivery makes zero sense. What we are asking this government to do is to start afresh and press the reset button, and to reconnect to what Canadians want, which is a universal public health care system. That means, stop spending taxpayer money taking Bill 124 to the appeal court—that’s crazy. It means committing to health care workers, which means doing more than just clapping and thanking them, but actually giving them a pay rise. It means investing in personal support workers—to treat the profession of a personal support worker not as a disposable job, but as a career where they get full-time hours, they get benefits, they get a pension; where they can commit to the career and be the personal support worker they want to be, and to be rewarded in return.

These are the kinds of things that non-profits in my riding, the hospitals in my riding, the long-term-care homes in my riding are asking for, and I’m not seeing this in this bill. This bill is not going to benefit a lot of people, and it’s going to hurt a whole lot of people, and I’m deeply concerned about it.

Please go back to the drawing board and start again.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Questions?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member opposite for her comments on Bill 60.

I heard her say that these clinics that we’re opening up, which aren’t necessarily for-profit—that’s not in the bill; these are just clinics to provide services, and there can be any number of different ways of organizing them—aren’t going to do anything to help with staffing shortages or ERs.

I have a quote from the OMA president, Dr. Rose Zacharias: “I do see this model”—in the bill—“as a way to possibly preserve and even retain staff when you think about dedicated ambulatory clinics and offloading the hospital ORs, where those same surgeries are at risk of being cancelled or postponed because the hospital OR has to deal with anything and everything that comes in. The

idea, then, is that staff follow the patient, and so it may be a good outcome.” That’s what Rose Zacharias, the president of the OMA, is saying.

Can you just tell me why you wouldn’t agree with the president of the OMA on this?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Today, 90% of independent health facilities in Ontario are for-profit, so all the trends indicate that these facilities are going to be for-profit as well.

When we’re looking at for-profit clinics, it means that a 15%-to-20% profit margin needs to be made on the backs of Ontarians and needs to be made on the backs of the government.

There is a better way to deliver public health care, and that’s through a universal public health care system.

The Ontario Nurses’ Association has also been extremely clear that this is not a way to address the staffing shortages we are facing in our health care system—in our hospitals, in particular. It’s really the personal support workers, the RPNs, the RNs—that’s where we’re seeing the greatest shortages. And they have been very, very clear that the best way to address our health care shortages is to increase nurses’ wages, to increase health care workers’ wages, and to repeal Bill 124 and not appeal it in court.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

MPP Jill Andrew: Back to the member from University–Rosedale, who helped organize a protest, a rally, a call for action by over 60,000 or so workers—health care workers, nurses, health-allied professionals—who are members of the Ontario Nurses’ Association: I was over at Sunnybrook with them this afternoon, and what I heard is that they needed better wages, they needed better care, and they also said that they needed better staffing, none of which is in this bill.

So I’m wondering if the member from University–Rosedale can express to me how it is possible that the government puts forth a bill that they claim is for health care—health care is nothing without the staff, without the health care front-line workers. How can they put forth a bill like this, when it completely contradicts what we’ve heard from thousands of nurses, PSWs, patients and community allies in our ridings?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you for raising that issue. Across Ontario today, nurses are outside hospitals picketing, because they are deeply concerned about how they are being treated by this government. Their issues are about patient-staff ratios, about staff shortages, about not being able to take vacation time, about their quality of life and how much they’re paid. They have been very, very clear about what is needed to improve the quality of care in our hospitals today, and it has nothing to do with for-profit delivery of surgeries, and it has everything to do with improving working conditions of health care workers and increasing funding to hospitals. This bill is antithetical to everything Canadians care about, especially universal public health care.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: We've been hearing from Ontarians across the province that they want access to health care closer to home. Just yesterday, I had constituents calling my constituency office, asking how they can get these cataract surgeries faster. They're sick of waiting. This is a great opportunity. Will the member stand with us and vote for this bill, so my constituents and others can get their cataract surgeries faster and closer to home?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member opposite. There is a very sensible way to increase access to medically necessary surgeries; the Financial Accountability Officer has been very clear about that. The Ontario government needs to come up with a clear funding plan to increase operating room capacity and increase the delivery of surgeries. The BC NDP government has done exactly that, and it's time for the Ontario government to do that as well.

What I am concerned about is that when we move forward with a two-tier system for surgery delivery, people who can choose the fast lane are usually of wealthier means, or they're just desperate to get what they need. They will walk out with a credit card bill that they will need to pay back when there is a better solution, which is to invest in our public universal health care system and have cataracts delivered using our public health care system.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. Chris Glover: I was very interested in the member's comments about the experience of Australia, with the privatization of health care there. The reason I'm actually here is because in the early 1990s, the former Conservative government's Minister of Education promised to create a crisis in our education system in order to privatize it.

This government has created a crisis in our health care system by underfunding it, by not spending what is in the budget on health care, by capping wages with Bill 124. What they're doing now is they're saying, "Oh, well, the solution is we're going to give people choice. We're not going to fix the public health care system. We're going to continue to create the crisis."

Today, I was speaking with nurses. They feel like they are victims. They feel like the patients are victims of this government's ideological crusade to privatize public health care. Would you agree with those nurses?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you for the question from the member from Spadina-Fort York. What we are seeing in Ontario today is a health care system which is being deliberately underfunded and it is causing a great deal of stress and worry for many Ontarians. People who want to go to the emergency room and finding that it is closed, or a parent having a sick child who has to wait months longer than is medically necessary for them to get access to the surgery that they need, which is happening right here in SickKids in my riding.

1800

It is deeply concerning to read Financial Accountability Officer reports, which show that—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I apologize to the member, but we've run out of time.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Point of order? I recognize the member for Mississauga-Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Madam Speaker, I just want to correct my record. While I was replying to the member from—

Mr. John Jordan: Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston.

Mr. Deepak Anand: —Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston, I was supposed to say, "Building on the 12,000 new nurses." Apparently, I probably said, "Building on 20,000 new nurses," so I just want to correct that.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

PROTECTION FROM COERCED DEBTS INCURRED IN RELATION TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023 SUR LA PROTECTION CONTRE LES DETTES CONTRACTÉES SOUS LA CONTRAINTE DANS UN CONTEXTE DE TRAITE DE PERSONNES

Madame Collard moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 41, An Act to amend the Consumer Reporting Act and the Prevention of and Remedies for Human Trafficking Act, 2017 with respect to certain debts incurred in relation to human trafficking / Projet de loi 41, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les renseignements concernant le consommateur et la Loi de 2017 sur la prévention de la traite de personnes et les recours en la matière à l'égard de certaines dettes contractées dans un contexte de traite de personnes.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 100, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I have to say that it's with a great deal of anticipation that I stand today to debate second reading of Bill 41, a co-sponsored private members' bill that would, if passed, help address the problem of debts forced onto survivors of human trafficking. It's been a long journey to get where we are today, so let me tell you a little bit about how I came to work on this proposed legislation.

It was around two years ago that Richard Dunwoody, CEO of Project Recover, first reached out to me, and he's here in the gallery today. The Project Recover initiative supports survivors of human trafficking and advocates on their behalf with creditors. Since 2019, the program has helped remove \$2.5 million in coerced and fraudulent debt, so they know what they are talking about when it comes to coerced debts related to human trafficking.

When he reached out to me, Richard was seeking assistance to convince the government to intervene legislatively to help survivors of human trafficking address the financial fraud and debt they face post-exploitation. He set up a meeting for us with a survivor from my riding and, of course, I decided I wanted to help. Since then, I've heard many more stories from survivors struggling with debts and I've been talking to members of the other parties, as well.

In January 2022, the United States adopted the Debt Bondage Relief Act, "to prohibit consumer reporting agencies from furnishing a consumer report containing any adverse item of information about a consumer if such consumer is a victim of trafficking, and for other purposes." That legislation passed unanimously in the United States. So I had the bill drafted modelled on this bill that I initially tabled in this House in March 2022, before the election.

During the election, when door-knocking, I was surprised that people would mention to me Bill 99 and express their support. This was obviously an important issue to many, many people. Upon my return to Queen's Park, I pledged to revive the bill and move it forward. Since then, we've seen this legislation gain the support of members and I was able to table Bill 41 as a co-sponsored bill by all parties.

With the prospect of second reading of the bill, several stakeholders have come forward in support, including the two credit bureaus. We can all agree that this is an important issue that must be addressed. No survivors of human trafficking should be inhibited by fraudulent or coerced debts incurred because of their trafficker.

Today, we can take one important step closer to really addressing this issue. We all agree that human trafficking is a despicable crime. Unfortunately, it is tragically common in Ontario, with 95% of trafficked persons being women, teenagers and marginalized groups like Indigenous people. These people are often manipulated or violently forced into engaging in debts for the benefit of their traffickers or to pay for the costs associated with trafficking. Imagine that. If and when they manage to leave this vicious circle of trafficking, they are faced with debts that prevent them from building a new life. In addition to the challenge of paying off these debts, survivors are often denied loans on the basis of bad credit derived from the period in which they were trafficked. It's time to do the right thing and remove this burden from survivors. This bill is proposing just that.

Le projet de loi 41 interdira le recouvrement de dettes forcées liées à la traite des personnes et empêchera la publication de ces renseignements dans les rapports sur les consommateurs. Cela contribuera à libérer les survivants du fardeau du remboursement de leurs dettes frauduleuses et leur permettra d'obtenir le crédit dont ils ont besoin pour avancer vers un avenir meilleur. Le travail de Project Recover témoigne de l'importance de telles mesures et, ensemble, nous pouvons faire un pas en avant pour que cela devienne une réalité.

Now, don't get me wrong; Bill 41 is not perfect. I have met with a number of different stakeholders from the financial sector who have all proposed small modifications to the bill and clarifications on different aspects. But those same stakeholders also stood beside me and the other co-sponsors of this bill this afternoon at a press conference to show their support for the bill.

The changes that are proposed in Bill 41 are important changes that will have a real impact on the lives of survivors of human trafficking. It does deserve to go through the committee process so that we can hear the perspective of survivors, of Ontarians, of Ontario businesses, and have a robust discussion about the practical impact of these changes and iron out the wrinkles that are identified. That is an essential part of the legislative process, and we must work together to do that hard work. What we cannot do is punt the ball down the road once again, revictimizing survivors and leaving them stuck in debt. Together, we can make a difference in the lives of survivors, and I urge you to work with me and the other co-sponsors of this bill to ensure the version of Bill 41 that receives royal assent is the best version possible.

Bill 41 is also one part of the solution to this issue, and I encourage the government to take a holistic approach when addressing human trafficking. We need education programs and community awareness to prevent trafficking. We need enforcement to crack down on it, and we need measures to assist those who have been trafficked.

This is not a partisan issue. I've already talked to other members in this Legislature who are agreeing with this approach and are willing to work with me on this. I look forward to that next step.

Erasing the debts of human trafficking survivors is something we can all agree is beneficial. That is why I'm so proud to have co-sponsors from every political party in this assembly. To the members for Spadina-Fort York, Guelph and Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, thank you for your co-sponsorship. I recognize that you may have done work on this issue prior to my coming to Queen's Park—that's how old the issue is—but your help, moving forward, will remain essential. I am glad to have earned your support and friendship throughout this journey, and I thank you for the work you have done in promoting this issue and legislation.

I would also like to give thanks to Richard Dunwoody of Project Recover. While this initiative has moved to Victims Services Toronto, under the leadership of Carly Kalish—who is also here in the gallery—to increase the help capacity, Richard has been a fierce advocate. This is not an understatement. He would relentlessly bring example after example of unjust financial hardships on survivors. He has made a real difference in many of their lives, and he needs to be commended for that.

1810

Tonight, I urge all members that are here to support this common-sense legislation—as Richard would say, "It's only common sense"—and give survivors of human trafficking the chance of a fresh start.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate?

Ms. Jess Dixon: The sexual exploitation of trafficked victims is happening daily in Ontario, with a devastating ripple effect on their lives, as well as their families and communities. Everyone has the right to a life free from exploitation, fear, and violence. The crime of human trafficking—the recruitment, harbouring, and ultimately the control of a person's movements via force, physical or psychological coercion, or deception—puts that right at risk, and causes real and serious harm to its victims.

Survivors of human trafficking have very important things to say, and our government has been listening. With survivor input, along with information gathered from Indigenous communities and organizations, law enforcement, and front-line service providers, we have developed the anti-human trafficking strategy. That strategy is backed by an investment of \$307 million over five years, as well as trail-blazing legislation containing requirements that are the first of their kind in Canada.

Let's talk a little bit more about the work being done in addition to this bill on human trafficking. Per the anti-human trafficking strategy, we've taken action across government, focusing on four key areas: first, raising awareness; second, protecting victims and intervening early; third, supporting survivors; and fourth, holding offenders accountable. But as we can all agree here, across sides, we are far from finished.

Government will continue to work and collaborate with all community members, as well as all jurisdictions, to make sure that our approach is multi-faceted and effective. More preventive measures, more protection, more support for survivors, especially children, and finally, accountability—an approach that holds human traffickers responsible for their reprehensible acts.

Last year, our government invested \$18.5 million over three years in two specialized intervention teams in Durham region and Toronto to protect children and youth from sex trafficking. This year, a third CARE Unit is planned—CARE being an acronym for Children at Risk of Exploitation. These new CARE Units pair child protection workers and front-line police officers, with several goals in mind:

- identifying and locating children and youth who are victims of sex trafficking;
- connecting victims and families to services; and
- investigating offenders and holding them accountable.

The Combating Human Trafficking Act was a key part of the response to the societal evil that is human trafficking. That act laid the foundation for a survivor-centred, comprehensive and collaborative approach that aims to help protect the most vulnerable, support survivors and hold offenders accountable so we can end human trafficking in Ontario.

That act contained several initiatives. For example, we now require Ontario's government to maintain an anti-human trafficking strategy. We allow the people caring for

a child victim of human trafficking to apply for a restraining order. We allow CPS workers and peace officers to temporarily relocate 16- and 17-year-olds, so they have the chance to voluntarily access protective measures and supportive resources. This is a protection that was only offered previously to children under the age of 16. We've also invested in training for educators, so they can intervene and flag concerns if needed.

To protect children in care, our government amended the Child, Youth and Family Services Act to clarify the role of children's aid societies, adding new grounds of protection to allow them to intervene in situations where a child is a victim of sex trafficking or at risk of being trafficked. Penalties have also been increased for traffickers who—for the purpose of child sex trafficking—interfere with or harbour children who are subject to an order of supervision or care by a children's aid society.

We're investing in support. Earlier this month, the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services announced an investment of \$6.5 million. Those funds will go to helping survivors of human trafficking access the support and services they need to stay safe and to rebuild their lives. We're funding front-line agencies in rural and remote communities with the goal of strengthening culturally responsive supports for Indigenous women and reducing the barriers faced by survivors of violence and human trafficking, for example, by providing transportation to and from counselling and legal appointments.

Yesterday was Human Trafficking Awareness Day, a day acknowledged and clearly held important by all members from all sides of this House. Awareness—that word is important. I've already highlighted some of the progress that has been made, but for that progress to continue, we have to stay aware. Human trafficking is a crime that thrives in the absence of attention. To combat it, we must stay vigilant, stay innovative and listen to our survivors.

Bill 41 is a part of that continued progress, and a clear part of that commitment to awareness. It addresses a real problem: coerced debt. Survivors of human trafficking are victimized in several different ways. One of these is financial. Traffickers will use fraudulent means or coercion to obtain loans in the name of their victims, leaving that victim responsible for the debt, with little ability to pay and a plummeting credit score. These debts can become crippling, and the dream of building a new life goes increasingly out of reach. To address this, Bill 41 proposes to amend the Consumer Reporting Act to prohibit the maintenance of unfavourable information regarding a consumer who has incurred debt due to their victimization by human trafficking. It also amends the Prevention of and Remedies for Human Trafficking Act to address this concept of coerced debt. As proposed, the bill would prohibit the collection of coerced debts and remove coerced debts from consideration when deciding whether to provide services to a debtor. It also proposes a tribunal to make determinations on these debts.

As a crown attorney, I personally witnessed the many and complex harms done to victims of human trafficking.

I witnessed the dissolution of their lives and the difficulty that they had in rebuilding again. I can say I am incredibly appreciative of this bill being brought. It is very gratifying to see all parties united in such an important and common goal. Our government has certainly spent years working to end human trafficking in Ontario, but I am very proud to stand today to support this bill and to support the continuance of this incredibly important work.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate?

Mr. Chris Glover: In the four and a half years that I've been in this House, I've come to realize just how powerful this House is. The legislation that we pass here has the power to kill people, it has the power to save people and it has the power to transform lives. This is one of the pieces of legislation that can actually save people and transform lives. So I'm so glad that it's here. I'm glad that it's got all parties' support. I want to thank the MPP for—uh-oh. Ottawa West—Nepean?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Ottawa—Vanier.

Mr. Chris Glover: Ottawa—Vanier—sorry—for bringing it forward, and for my colleagues in the Green and Conservative parties for supporting it.

I first became aware of human trafficking when Richard Dunwoody talked to me. He was volunteering in shelters in the community, and he came across many young women who were in shelters because, as well as the sexual exploitation that they had experienced, there had also been financial exploitation. Traffickers will walk their victims into a bank and take out a credit card in their name. They will apply for OSAP loans in their name. They will even buy cars and get those cars insured in their name without their knowledge sometimes. So when they finally are free, when they escape, they are left with these fraudulent debts, with these coerced debts. The collection agencies, the credit agencies were harassing them. They were sending collection agencies after them.

So Richard started a program called Project Recover to try to remove those fraudulent and coerced debts, and it's been incredibly successful. So far, there's been 603 cases resolved involving \$3.45 million of coerced and fraudulent debts. I really think that Project Recover deserves a round of applause for the work that they've done, because it has been absolutely transformational for so many people. It prevents survivors from being revictimized by the financial exploitation after they've escaped.

1820

The problem is—Richard and Project Recover have done some incredible work with credit agencies, and there are many, many credit agencies who, once they find out that this was a coerced debt that involved human trafficking, are more than willing to remove the debt from that person's name, from that person's credit report. But there are some bad actors out there as well. There is a utility company that will not address the coerced debt of one of the survivors. They have told the survivor to go to the police and file a fraud complaint. The debt involved is \$115.

There is another online credit payday lender. They have a loan in this survivor's name at 49.95% interest, and they are demanding payment on it. It's not only the payment for the fraudulent debt; they also have imposed severe penalties. So it's not just the original loan that the trafficker took in that person's name; they also want reimbursement for these penalties. They have filed the claim saying that the survivor has been “unjustly enriched.” This online payday company that is charging 49.95% interest on a fraudulent, coerced debt is saying that the survivor has been unjustly enriched.

It's because of cases like this that we need this legislation. We need this legislation because this piece of legislation creates a category called “coerced debts,” and it makes it so that the credit agencies cannot report coerced debts on credit reports, and they have to remove those coerced debts from the survivors' names. It's a huge step forward. And it's a huge step forward for these survivors in order to help them to rebuild their lives.

There have been a number—before, there was one other thing I wanted to talk about. This was something that when I first started to find out about human trafficking, I was wondering, “Why don't they just escape?” There was one story that really told me why they don't escape, and it was a survivor. A John, a man who was paying for her, said that he would help her to escape. He told her to meet him at a particular address at a particular time, and then they would work on an escape plan for her. When she got to that address at that time, her trafficker was there. Her trafficker was there because the guy who was pretending to help her escape was in cahoots with the trafficker. They beat her badly and they tattooed her. I won't say what they tattooed her with, but that's how brutal the victimization of people who are being trafficked can be. It's why every step—this bill to help remove the financial exploitation is a step in the right direction.

But any step that our government can take—and I speak broadly—that everybody in this House can take to bring an end to human trafficking must be done, because this is one of the most horrendous and heinous crimes that is happening in Ontario, and it's happening in Ontario every day. The average age of the first exploitation is 14. The average period of exploitation is three and a half years. There was a report that came out from victim services today, and they said that 29% of the traffickers are acquaintances or family members of the survivors. So even if the survivor escapes, they often can't get the support that they need from their family. It's not just a matter of helping them get out; they actually need real supports to rebuild their lives.

I want to talk a little bit about some of that rebuilding that has been done through Project Recover and through another group called the Concord Adex Survivors Fund. There's a survivor I met named J, and she just completed—her fraudulent debts were removed. She was able to go to college. She just graduated from a college program with a 4.0 grade point average.

There is another survivor I met, Q. Her coerced debts were also removed, and she now runs a successful catering business.

Through this survivors' fund, there are 78 survivors who have gone to college or university, so there's an opportunity for the survivors to rebuild their lives, and this bill that has been brought forward is a step in that direction.

The final thing that I want to point out is just that there's an incredible irony in the way that our society treats the traffickers and the way that we treat the survivors, because the survivors are often stuck with these fraudulent and coerced debts. The trafficker, even if he—and it's almost always a he—is charged and serves a sentence, can come out and open a bank account. These survivors often, while they're strapped with these coerced debts, cannot open a bank account, cannot get a credit card, cannot get an apartment, because they've got a bad credit rating. So that's why they get stuck in shelters. There are often restitution orders that are given by courts, but they are not reported to the credit agencies. The trafficker can go on with their life, but the survivor often can't. That's why we need to provide this financial support to survivors, but we also need to provide other supports so that they can get on with their lives, so that the success stories that have been achieved so far are not the exception; they become the rule so that people who are able to escape and who are survivors of human trafficking are able to get on with their lives.

Again, I want to thank the member from Ottawa–Vanier, the member from Guelph and the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock for co-sponsoring this bill with me. It's a real honour to be working with you, and this is a bill that can actually transform and save lives.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate?

Mr. Stephen Blais: I'm proud to stand tonight in support of my colleague from Ottawa–Vanier and the others in this House with Bill 41, Protection from Coerced Debts Incurred in relation to Human Trafficking Act. I'd like to thank the member from Ottawa–Vanier for championing this important legislation and opening my eyes to the implications of human trafficking. In fairness, I didn't realize that these financial impacts were a part of this equation at all, Madam Speaker. Survivors of human trafficking encounter significant barriers, and they often suffer in silence because they have no other support systems around them. Victims obviously suffer psychologically, physically, emotionally. And, as was news to me and, I would imagine, many of our neighbours and constituents, they suffer financially.

The member from Vanier shared a tragic story with me about a victim named Kelly, who later escaped and went on to found something called Courage for Freedom. Kelly not only suffered the traumatic experience of human trafficking, but her abuser racked up enormous amounts of debt in her name. As a result, Kelly's credit score was negatively impacted, basically destroyed. When she finally escaped the situation she found herself in, she struggled to get her life back in order, because she had no credit. As we've heard, we know that a good credit score is essential to renting an apartment, let alone thinking about getting a loan for school or buying a house or buying

a car and all the other things that a good credit score will allow you to move on with in your life. Although she escaped the physical act of human trafficking, she wasn't able to truly escape the anguish that it had caused her, because the financial harm would not allow her to go on and rebuild the rest of her life.

This legislation would have tangible benefits and would have tangibly improved Kelly's life and so many other survivors'—those who are denied loans, denied access to apartments, end up in shelters and continue their traumatization. If passed, Bill 41 would ensure that survivors of human trafficking aren't financially discriminated against and would lessen the barriers to getting their lives back on track.

1830

We all know that Bill 41 is only the first step, and the work can't stop there. In addition to these measures, we need to all work together to prevent human trafficking from happening in the first place. We need to add even further measures to provide protections for the physical, mental and psychological trauma that victims of human trafficking deal with.

That's why I'm very proud to stand in support of this bill tonight, and my colleague from Ottawa–Vanier. I know this is a non-partisan issue, and I look forward to what I hope to be the unanimous support in the Legislature a couple of minutes from now.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's an honour to rise in support of Bill 41. I'm proud to be a co-sponsor of this bill—the second bill in Ontario's history to be supported by four political parties in this House. I want to thank the member from Ottawa–Vanier for taking the lead in bringing this forward.

If this bill passes, we'll have an opportunity to make an immediate improvement in the lives of survivors of human trafficking. If it passes, it will enable and open financial opportunities for survivors. If passed, it will provide opportunities for them to get a car loan, to get a school loan, to rent an apartment, to buy a house, and to be able to move on with their lives. It will put an end to creditors hassling them and triggering additional trauma over debts that survivors are not responsible for—coerced, fraudulent debts.

Speaker, I had an opportunity to meet with a survivor last week, and she said to me, “Mike, it's not only the financial aspects of this bill, but it's also the incessant phone calls from creditors collecting debt. Imagine what it was like for me when I was being trafficked and my phone controlled me. If you can eliminate that from our lives, eliminate the triggering, eliminate the revictimization I feel every time a creditor calls me”—that's what's at stake with this bill. That is why I will be supporting it. And that's why I want to encourage everyone this House to not only vote for it today but to ensure it makes it through committee and passes third reading and becomes law in this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: It is a pleasure to rise in the House today to speak on the topic of human trafficking and how we can all collectively work together to fight against it.

I'm very happy that the MPP from Ottawa–Vanier has driven Bill 41, the Protection from Coerced Debts Incurred in relation to Human Trafficking Act, and gathered other colleagues to support this bill, because this is non-partisan.

As many of you know, I've worked on this file for many years. I am so pleased that the new members who have come here have listened to survivors, listened to the communities, listened to the great people who are joining us in the fight against human trafficking.

Many times it's still thought that it's international people coming over and being trafficked here, and it's not; over 93% are Canadian victims. And it's not only in our cities, but it's in our rural communities—and the increase in human trafficking in our rural communities is rising.

I will often tell the story of Lindsay, in my riding. Once victim services and the police became aware and educated, within eight months, in a small community of 20,000 people, they were able to rescue 30 victims, in small-town Ontario. So I just want to make sure that that story is out there—and aware that this crime is everywhere.

And the youngest age, as stated, is probably much lower than 14 or 13 right now. These are our children who are being bought and sold, and this has to stop.

We also need to realize that the perpetrators, the traffickers, are very advanced. You've heard the many stories about the debts that are incurred and how survivors, when they try to rebuild their lives, are often very inhibited by the debts that are incurred and the traffickers who have used their names and their credit cards and their credit scoring. They just can't rebuild, and it's easy to stay trapped. They want to get out, and they all need our help.

Richard Dunwoody has been an amazing person to do this for many years, and sends us many stories that are very true and crush our hearts to hear of how victims cannot get out of debt and how he has personally helped. The banking groups that are here today, from Equifax, TransUnion and the support of the Canadian Bankers Association, have come together to recognize that we all have to work together collectively.

Carly Kalish, who is here today from Victim Services Toronto, whom I've had the pleasure of working with for over 10 years on these files and who has now taken over Project Recover from Richard—who will not be far away; I can guarantee that that will happen—is always helping out. They have taken over, and they will be the main group that helps these survivors navigate through this debt that they cannot escape on their own. People like that are to be highlighted and commended, so I thank you all. I thank all those who have already shown a commitment to end this horrific crime in our communities for their time and their dedication; all the victim service groups and the many that are in our communities who have worked many years on that.

I know there was an example given—I only have a minute left, and it's hard to get through all this—of a young girl, Megan, who was able to purchase a new car once she was given the ability to contact, I believe, Richard. She was able to get out from her debts, purchase a new car, get car insurance, rent a small basement apartment and get a part-time job. She said that Project Recover literally saved her life. She couldn't see a way out, and Project Recover gave her that way out.

We all want to see the fact that there is a legal framework, which is in this Bill 41, that will prohibit the collection of debts incurred while the victims were being trafficked. The bill has many components. This government has many ministries working on this file. The Attorney General is part of this file. The minister of consumer protection and reporting is part of this file. But much work has been done in education, to build it into the curriculum, to teach the teachers and the front-line people who may be in contact with these vulnerable victims and potential victims.

I want to thank everybody on the government side who has been in support. We know that it's changing, and we all need to be knowing that and working together. And I thank the MPP from Ottawa–Vanier for leading this today.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I just wanted to also lend my voice in support to this bill. I want to thank all the co-sponsors who have brought it forward, and especially the advocates who have been championing the issue for a number of years.

Having come from Toronto city council, I can tell you that we have grappled with this issue at the municipal level without a lot of the responsibility or necessary accountability tools, but I'm really glad that this is also being dealt with here. One of the experiences that I had with city council was actually speaking to a Toronto police officer, and the fact that they were identifying human-trafficked individuals and criminal activity that was taking place in wide proliferation in short-term rentals—Airbnbs and those types of accommodations.

Maybe some of you may have seen that there was an article in the newspaper last night, that even at Bay and Wellesley, just steps from Queen's Park, we had a 15-year-old girl who was rescued by the police from being trafficked. Her trafficker was a 19-year-old individual, so these individuals are actually younger and younger, as the member across has noted. But also, the challenges that we see are such that they're very, very difficult to track, because those short-term rentals are now burner homes, as opposed to burner phones.

When we talk about taking a whole-of-government approach to an issue that we all deeply care about—and evidently, all of us care about this issue in the House—then let's do that. Let's address violence against women. Let's make sure that we can actually put in the resources and the time and energy to work collaboratively with all orders of government, including our municipal partners, to make sure that this issue is addressed with the same type

of velocity, strength and passion as those who are on the opposing side would put to the test. Without those adequate resources, I don't think we can actually get to it.

I want to just mention that what I feel is very important is that not only do we need to take care of the victims and the survivors—those are absolutely critical—but we also need to take a look at the behaviour of the johns and the traffickers. What is bringing them to that particular life? It is a particular life that most of us would find rather heinous, but it is real. So when we do this work, let's do this work sincerely, from the heart, with full, sustainable solutions, because that's how we are going end human trafficking. Not just with respect to sex trafficking, but labour traffic, and that's also a very big issue in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate? I recognize the member for Ottawa–Vanier for her two-minute response.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I'm concluding with my response at this point. Of course, I want to thank all the co-sponsors for speaking up, and the member from Kitchener South–Hespeler, the member from Orléans and the member for Toronto Centre for expressing their support as well—so important.

My kids are teenagers, so obviously, I was very motivated to get to work on this issue. Also, I have learned so much through the course of getting to work on this issue and to get to where we are today that I'm even more

fuelled, actually, to continue to work. And I know that after today, there remains a lot of work that needs to be done, and I'm totally dedicated, motivated to take that on.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll rest it at this part.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Madame Collard has moved second reading of Bill 41, An Act to amend the Consumer Reporting Act and the Prevention of and Remedies for Human Trafficking Act, 2017 with respect to certain debts incurred in relation to human trafficking. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 100(h), the bill is referred to the Committee of the Whole House—

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I would like the bill to be referred to the justice policy committee, please.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Is the majority in favour of this bill being referred to the standing committee on justice? Agreed. The bill is referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy. Congratulations.

All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, this House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. on Monday, February 27, 2023.

The House adjourned at 1842.

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Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
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Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
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